

An Introduction to CVSP

- ❖ **General Education:** antidote to, complimentary to specialization
- ❖ **Cultural Studies:** civilization studies
- ❖ **“Great Books”, “classics”:** works that have endured the test of time and the variety of cultural evolution; texts that continue to impact human lives: **living** texts (not archaeological curiosity)
- ❖ A **window** into a broad variety of human experience; a **dialogue** with humans of the past as well as of the present
- ❖ **Humanities:** philosophical anthropology; a study of the human being in **four** fundamental contexts or environments:
 - The human **as such** (human nature)
 - The human in the **socio-economic-political** context
 - The human in relation to **Nature**
 - The human in relation to **the Divine**
- ❖ The “big” picture: **“meta”:** life-long task giving shape, **meaning** to our everyday routine and detail: **existential** process

The Core Program: 201-204; 205-206; 207-208

A journey through time and space: Gilgamesh to Edward Sa'id, Stephen Hawking, N. Mahfouz, T. Salih...

❖ Ancient and Classical Epochs (201/205A)

- **Gilgamesh:** the quest for ultimate, **existential** wisdom; humanization through **empathy**
- **Odysseus:** proto-scientific exploration; the shrewd mind
- **Herodotus:** context for Greek supremacy over Persian empire
- **Oedipus / Antigone:** political responsibility ; the pursuit of truth / duty regardless of the personal price to be paid: the **tragic hero**
- **Thucydides/Pericles:** Power, Might/Right, rationalist history
- **Socrates:** the hero as philosopher; **the unexamined life is not worth living**; readiness to die for one's principles
- **Plato:** the philosopher as political leader and reformer
- **Aristotle:** the philosopher-scientist extending scientific inquiry into all fields of human endeavor; the **rationalist “heaven”**
- **Rome and “globalization”:** individual “peace of mind” in a multi-cultured empire:
 - **Epicureanism:** comfort and pleasure
 - **Stoicism:** duty and courage
- **Poetry and philosophy:** two media of truth

❖ **The World of Monotheism (202/205B)**

Prophets, saints, mystics, philosophers

- **Focus-shift** from **Nature to History**, from fixed system to the dynamics of inter-personal relationships
- **Faith**, love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, loyalty, gratitude, commitment, empathy, solidarity, concern, service
- **Reason** important, but the primacy of the **Will**
- The relationship between **reason** and **revelation, philosophy** and **faith, mystical experience**
- **Varieties of “faith”**: uninformed belief, legalism, vibrant way of life and experience, mystical experience and/or philosophy as necessary to “decode” religion
- **“Crossing over”** into the **“modern”** epoch: Machiavelli, Montaigne, Luther, Shakespeare
 - Individualism, free thinking, separation of politics from morality, the individual as measure of politics and religion

❖ **Modernity and The Enlightenment (203/206A)**

New approaches to knowledge, morality, political systems

- Scientific, Technological, Industrial revolutions
- Progress, perfectibility of the human race
- Great faith in Reason; suspicion of tradition
- Individualism replaces community-focus
- New political systems: capitalism, socialism, communism; security and/or freedom
- Romanticism as reaction to over-rationalization and quantification
- Relationship between science and morality
- Limits of scientific experimentation (Frankenstein)

❖ **Contemporary Studies (204/206B)**

Formative influences on our world today

- Evolutionary theory
- Nietzschean radical critique
- Astro-physics: relativity theory and quantum mechanics
- Philosophy of Science
- Depth-psychology
- The Absurd
- Human Rights: gender studies
- Orientalism and “post-colonial” literature
- Arab identity

Skills and Competencies (refer to syllabus for your course)

Two main creative skills:

- Empathy
- Critical evaluation

Clash or concert of civilizations?

FROM PLATO TO AUGUSTINE VIA PLOTINUS AND ABRAHAM

- Thinkers in monotheistic societies : interaction of three main visions :
“*Abrahamic*” monotheism , “*Homeric*” Graeco-Roman , and *Mysticism* .

AUGUSTINE : *Abrahamic and Homeric*

A. *The Divine and the Cosmos:*

1. dualism *vs* monism : created *vs* eternal : transcendent *vs* immanent.
2. **God** (faithful love, mercy, compassion) *vs* **ultimate structural principle** (moira, **Idea of the Good, the ONE**, thought , world-reason, atoms and the void...) .
3. cosmological, **impersonal** principle : **necessity** (automatic operation): **detachment** *vs* **free**, spontaneous action, **personal** concern : commitment, **involvement** (**covenant**, revelation, prophets, history...).
4. **primacy** of the **personal** over the merely **structural** :
Divine Law vs Nomos : two types of **prophets**- remind man of **covenant-responsibility vs** reveal the **hidden truth** (Teiresias) .

B. *Man (the Human Race):*

1. **in the image and likeness of God: family**-relationship: unique representative to rule over creation on behalf of God *vs* shared rationality (structural, **impersonal** relationship).
2. human dignity **intrinsic** (relation to God) *vs* special (**elite**) qualities (power, beauty, intelligence...).
3. no **fixed** nature: possibility of **radical change in character** through **grace** and **repentance : conversion** (or the opposite).

C. *Society: (polis, cosmopolis, church, umma, social contract, classless society...)*

1. **brothers: beyond** mutual need and complementarity of natures.
2. **communion**: full human fellowship, solidarity, mutual care; **organic vs** merely **functional** relationship.

D. Knowledge: beyond abstract , **theoretical** definition (natures) to **existential** concrete, personal-historical **encounter**.

E. Virtue: LOVE God, neighbour, self **beyond** Know Thyself, Balance is Best ; FAITH, HOPE, LOVE **beyond** Justice, Wisdom, Courage, Self-Mastery .

F. Vice : SIN : betrayal of covenant-partner **beyond** HUBRIS: breaching the Order of the Cosmos .

G. Evil : conscious , personal , radical ---**avoidable** *vs* blindness, ignorance, immaturity---**inevitable** .

H. Love : **agape (caritas) different from eros (amor)** and other meanings...