

An Introduction to CVSP

- ❖ **General Education:** antidote to, complementary to specialization
- ❖ **Cultural Studies – Civilization Sequence – 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 (intelligent hedonism):** 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 (love)**
- The relationship between **'reason and revelation'**, **'philosophy and faith'**, **'mystical experience and faith'**
- **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 more fully**
- **New political systems**: capitalism, socialism, communism ; **security and / or freedom ; reactions to excessive individualism**
- 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 : "critical thinking"

- **Empathy**
- **Personal Evaluation**

Clash or concert of civilizations?