

Contemporary Civilization
Professor Shamus Khan
Two Semester Course

The Core Curriculum is the cornerstone of a Columbia education. Central to the intellectual mission of the Core is the goal of providing all Columbia students, regardless of their major or concentration, with wide-ranging perspectives on significant ideas and achievements in literature, philosophy, history, music, art, and science.

The central purpose of “Contemporary Civilization” or “CC” is to introduce students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities—political, social, moral, and religious—that human beings construct for themselves and the values that inform and define such communities; the course is intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens. Founded in 1919 as a course on War and Peace Issues, Contemporary Civilization has evolved continuously, while remaining a constant and essential element of the Columbia College curriculum. The course asks students to read closely texts in various traditions of argument, with a focus, though not an exclusive one, on European and American traditions developed from biblical and classical sources. The course also asks students to construct arguments of their own, both in speech and in writing, about some of the explicit and implicit issues these texts raise.

Both the form and the content of the course contribute to the achievement of its aims. The discussion format is intended to respond in a palpable way to the existence in these traditions of different and often conflicting points of view; to embody the possibility of reasoned discourse among people who hold disparate convictions; and to help students sharpen their own skills of thought and argument about matters of current personal and civic concern through participating in and extending the debates of the past. The Contemporary Civilization syllabus is designed to introduce students to a set of ideas and arguments that have played a formative role in the political and cultural history of our time, to alert them to ideas that have not held an influential role in that history, and to acquaint them with some exemplars of critical thinking about alternative cultures, institutions, and practices.

Because Introduction to contemporary civilization is a one-year course, readings are necessarily selective. While these readings change from time to time, the factors that lead to adoption of a text always include historical influence, the presentation of ideas of enduring importance, and the demonstrated ability of a text to provoke productive discussion. Among the readings currently required in the course are the Bible, the Qur’an, and works by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Machiavelli, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Smith, Rousseau, Kant, Burke, Tocqueville, Mill, Hegel, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, DuBois, Freud, and Woolf.

Course Requirements

There are three kinds of course requirements: (1) short papers, (2) a longer paper, and (3) examinations. Throughout the semester (about once a week) you will have short papers due. These should be approximately 500-750 words (two to three double-spaced pages). There

are 12 such papers due; you may drop your lowest grade on any one of these papers. Your longer paper is due early in the semester (October 2). It should be approximately 2000-2500 words (8-10 pages). A full description of my expectations for these papers is provided below. I WILL NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS. Your examinations will be a midterm on Thursday, November 1 and a final on Friday December 14. In these examinations I expect not simply summaries of readings; like your long paper you must make an argument.

Short Papers

Shorts papers should identify and outline the core argument or central viewpoint of each reading. In several instances there will be several arguments (viewpoints) running through readings; in these cases you can simply identify/outline one of them.

These papers are not simply reading summaries. Instead I expect that in each paper you provide concrete textual analysis that shows both an engagement with and detailed reading of the text.

My aim in assigning so many short papers is fourfold:

1. To provide you with a regular opportunity to engage in identifying arguments, doing textual analysis, and writing. Such consistent work will aid you in the development of these skills
2. To offer you continued opportunities for improvement throughout the semester
3. To make preparations for the examinations easier
4. To help you develop the skills required for the longer papers I expect you to write in the second half of this course

Long Paper

There are two main differences between the longer paper and the short papers: (1) the longer paper compares texts (Plato and Aristotle) and (2) you are expected to make an argument in the longer paper. I will provide a detailed assignment of the longer paper on the second class.

Grade Distribution:

Midterm: 23%

Final: 24%

Short Papers: 33% (3% each)

Long Paper: 20%

Academic Integrity

(Adapted from Columbia University policy): The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgment of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities will fail this course and should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

Monday, September 14

Republic, "Introduction", Books I & II

Wednesday, September 16

Republic, Books III-V

Monday, September 21

Republic, Books VI & VII

Wednesday, September 23

Republic, Books VIII & IX

Monday September 28

Nicomachean Ethics, Books I, II, III: 1-9

Wednesday September 30

Nicomachean Ethics, Books IV, VII: 1-8, VIII, X

Monday, October 5

Politics, Books I, III, and VII

Wednesday, October 7

Hebrew Bible:
Exodus, entire

Monday, October 12

Hebrew Bible:
Ecclesiastes
Isaiah (1-39)

Wednesday, October 14

Christian Bible:
Gospel of Matthew
Romans
Galatians
1 Corinthians (Chpt 13)

Monday, October 19

Augustine, City of God, Book I, Book VIII: 4-11, Book XII

Wednesday, October 21

Augustine, City of God, Book XIV, Book XXII: 23-4, 29-30

Monday, October 26

The Qur'an
Introduction, pp. 1-13
Suras 1-4

Wednesday, October 28

Suras 6, 8, 9, 12, 17, 26, 39, 56, 63, 68, 112, 114

Wednesday, November 4

MIDTERM

Monday, November 9

Medieval Mysticism/rationalism:
Al-Ghazali, The Rescuer from Error
Aquinas, Selected Writings (pp. 3-7, 14-29, 30-38, 46-53)

Wednesday, November 11

Machiavelli, The Prince

Monday, November 16

Machiavelli, The Discourses pp. 93-138, 153-164, 190-99, 250-261, 385-397, 526-8.

Wednesday, November 18

The Protestant Reformation: Hillerbrand Anthology
Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian Man"
Luther, "On Government Authority"
Calvin, "Institutes"

Monday, November 23

Descartes, Discourse on Method
Galileo, Letter to the Grand Duchess

Monday, November 30

Locke Second Treatise
Letter on Toleration

Wednesday, December 2

Leviathan, Chapters 1, 6, 11, 13-15, 17-21

Monday, December 7

Leviathan, Chapters 22, 26, 29-30, 32-3, 44

SPRING

Tuesday, Jan 20

First Day of Classes – Welcome back, orientation to the semester

Monday, Jan 25

Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”

Wednesday, January 27

Rousseau, Social Contract (all)

Monday, February 1

Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality (all)

Wednesday, February 3

Smith, Wealth of Nations
Intro and Plan
Book I [chs. 1-4, 7-8]
Book II [Intro, ch. 3]
Book IV [ch. 2 and pp. 663-675]

Monday, February 8

Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Chapter 1-8 & 12

Wednesday February 10

Kant, Groundwork
Preface, Section I & II

Monday, February 15

Rights and Revolutions I:
• Declaration of Independence
• Bill of Rights
• Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen

Wednesday, February 17

No Class

Monday, February 22

Rights and Revolutions II:

- Federalist Papers 1-2, 9-10, 23, 47
- Robespierre "On the Moral and Political Principles of Domestic Policy"
- Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"
- Sieyès, "*What is the Third Estate?*"

Wednesday February 24

Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, pp. 3-91

Monday, March 1

Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Women (all)

Wednesday, March 3

Tocqueville, Democracy in America

Vol. I: Introduction, Part 1 [chs.3, 4], Part 2 [ch. 1, 5, 6, 7]

Vol. 2: Part 1 [chs. 1, 2, 5, 8], Part 2 [chs. 1, 2, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17], Part 4 [chs. 5-8]

Monday, March 8

Tocqueville, Democracy in America, and review

Wednesday, March 10

MIDTERM

Monday, March 22

Hegel, Introduction to the Philosophy of History (all)

Wednesday, March 24

Mill, On Liberty (all)

Monday, March 29

Marx, from the Marx-Engels Reader

"Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (pp. 66-125)

"Wage Labor and Capital"(pp. 203-217)

Monday, April 5

Marx, from the Marx-Engels Reader

"The German Ideology" (pp. 146-200)

"Communist Manifesto" (pp. 469-500.)

Wednesday, April 7

Darwin

- Origin of Species (Chpts 3, 4, 6, 14: pp.132-77; 211-22; 379-98)
- Descent of Man (Chpts 2&3: 508-33)

Monday, April 12

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals

Essay 1&2

Wednesday, April 14

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals
Essay 3

Monday, April 19

Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, chs. 1-6, 9, 11, 14

Wednesday, April 21

Freud, Civilization and its discontents (all)

Monday, April 26

Woolf, Three Guineas (all)

Wednesday, April 28

Foucault, Discipline and Punish, pp. 3-69

Monday, May 3

Review