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ENG 2009-004: Literature and Human Values: Faith, Survival Progress

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English 2009G-004: Literature and Human Values
Faith, Survival Progress
Fall 2005 / MW 15:00-16:15 / Coleman 3691

2009-004

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Course Description

This class will ask you to engage with a wide variety of texts that address the themes of faith, survival, and/or progress. How do these three topics intersect? Are progress and survival, for example, incompatible terms? Should we have faith in progress, or a more progressive faith? Why is it that we “have” faith, but we don’t “have” progress? We can engage it, “act” it out, but progress is something we are “in.” And what about “survival”? What do we do with *survival*? Are we “in” survival; can we “have” survival? Is survival simply a state of just-good-enough? A case of the well-at-least-we’re-not-dead-yets? Or should we think of survival as the very apex of life, the point at which the species has found equilibrium wherein it, the species, can survive all the unexpected slings and arrows that time can hurl? Whether discussing faith, progress, or survival, we will be thinking about various *systems* that have been posited in the past and more recently in order to address these large issues. You will, therefore, have to consider big questions, cosmic questions, as the words in the titles of the course readings indicate: *civilization, nature, apocalypse, system, mindfulness, origin, universe, paradox*, and, of course, *chicken*.

Texts

Jacobs, Jane. Systems of Survival. New York: Vintage, 1992.
Freud, Sigmund. Civilization and its Discontents. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.
Dark, David. Everyday Apocalypse. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 1992.
Nhat Hanh, Thich. Miracle of Mindfulness. Boston: Beacon, 1987,
Murphy, Nancey and George Ellis. On the Moral Nature of the Universe. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.

Course Reader: available at Copies Express in the Union Building.

Requirements

All assignments and exams must be turned in to pass the course.

Exams: two tests worth 10%, in weeks 7 and 11, and a final exam worth 20% (total of 40%)

Paper on Jacobs: ~ 3-4 pages, due in week 4 (10%)

Class Participation: see below (15%)

One annotation (5%) and a group presentation (10%): see below (15%)

Comparative paper: ~ 4-5 pages, due in week 12 (20%)

Your papers should be stapled and include page numbers. Format: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. They must demonstrate the ability to cite and document sources according to academic standards.

First Paper (0%)

On the Wednesday of Week 1, you will hand in a response to a poem distributed on the first day. Although the assignment will not “count” toward your grade, it will a) indicate, as a first impression, your willingness to think widely and in a non-literal fashion, and b) become part of your “Class Participation” grade (see below).

Jacobs Paper (10%)

Your first graded paper in the course will address an aspect of Jane Jacobs’ *Systems of Survival*. Using Jacobs’ technique and terminology for analyzing ethical questions, you will produce a short paper on a current or recent issue for which Jacobs’ methodology seems suited.

Annotation and Presentation (15%)

By mid-semester, I will require you to hand in a summary of one critical work (i.e., secondary source) on the final book of our course or an explanation of a philosophical term addressed in it. This summary/elucidation should be no longer than a page in length, double-spaced. You must hand in a copy of the summarized article with your assignment. In the classes that follow, I will ask you to give a brief (fifteen-minute) group presentation to the class on the topic of your annotation.

Tests (40%)

The tests will examine your engagement with the class material through identification and short-answer questions. Before the first test, we will run through some example questions to familiarize you with my testing tendencies. The final exam will be cumulative, and will include an essay section.

Comparative Paper (20%)

You will find a point or points of comparison between two of the texts studied, most likely Dark’s *Everyday Apocalypse* and Nhat Hanh’s *Miracle of Mindfulness*, although I will welcome other possibilities of your creation. If, however, you would like to write a paper on a topic of your choosing, you must clear it with me in advance.

Class Participation (15%)

There will be a number of required, yet ungraded assignments throughout the quarter, constituting a portion your class-participation grade. I will expect you to come to class having read the material, and with questions or comments on the readings. Some of the course material may be quite tough slogging: you should pinpoint specific moments of textual density, and query me (“test” me, if you will) about them. I will also provide a virtual forum for post-class discussion, but I am not yet certain whether that will be through email or a class web page. Attendance is not mandatory, but let me add this disclaimer. If you do not attend class without finding an extremely reliable notetaker, you will almost certainly fail the two tests, probably the final exam, and your class-participation grade will suffer immensely. Since the final paper will be much easier to write after we discuss the reader materials, your grade for this assignment will likewise be compromised. You are, however, all adults and should be able to use your own judgment vis-à-vis attendance.

Important disclaimers...

Academic honesty: Students are responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism will likely result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Here is the English Department's statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism – “The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) – has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Conduct

Instructors are responsible for maintaining order and a positive learning environment in the classroom. Students whose behavior is disruptive either to the instructor or to other students may be required to discontinue course activities and to cancel the course registration (or be disenrolled). In addition, students may be subject to disciplinary action.

Grades

Your instructor sets the requirements and grading criteria for specific assignments. Here are general standards for grades:

- A = Achievement that is outstanding and unique
- B = Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet the requirements
- C = Assignment meets the basic requirements in every respect
- D = Assignment meets only some of the requirements and is worthy of credit
- F = Assignment does not substantially meet the basic requirements

Incompletes

Incompletes are not given except in the most extraordinary circumstances (e.g., medical emergency), which a student must be able to document, and only if just a small part of the course remains to be finished. The student and teacher must make a written agreement concerning the condition of the incomplete.

Cell Phones

All those caught not having turned off their cells and/or pagers and/or electronic devices will be subject to relentless mockery, public shaming, and, if necessary, unimaginably medieval tortures.