HISTORY 4402F
Homer to St. Augustine: Classic Texts and Debates in Western Culture
Fall 2026

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This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Bright space for a final version.

Course Description
Homer's *Odyssey*, Aristotle's *Ethics*, the Hebrew Bible, and St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which influenced both the ages in which they were composed and subsequent Western thought, depict distinctive and often conflicting ideals for the individual and society. The class examines these ideals and the larger debates they embody and reflect.

Prerequisite(s):
1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above.

Course Syllabus
We examine two sets of paired texts in which the second text can be read as - in part - a response to the first text. The first pair is Homer's *Odyssey* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The second half of the course pairs selections from the Hebrew Bible and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. To help us interpret each text and to provide historical context, secondary sources are also assigned. Near the end of the class we compare the approaches and teachings of the texts from both halves of the course.

The Odyssey depicts a social order based on Greece of the tenth and ninth centuries BC. The poem recounts one man's efforts to return to his island home after he had helped lead a large-scale pirate expedition. Deadly storms, hunger, violence in many forms, and captivity, block his path. Through a combination of deceit, piety, self-discipline, awareness of others' characters, capacity to learn and to make wise choices, and his passion to return home, he triumphs over adversity. The poem contains many seemingly life-like sketches of gods and men and - somewhat less frequently - women. The characters depicted are drawn from a range of social positions, from slaves to warriors. Homer's characters include the admirable and the despicable, the foolish and the wise. We discuss both the poem and a classic analysis of the relationships and values found in it and Homer's second poem, *The Iliad*, Moses Finley's *The World of Odysseus*.

The fourth century BC Greek philosopher Aristotle formulated an ideal of human conduct that was both more philosophical and more ethical, more universal, than that of

Homer. We examine Aristotle's understanding of what constitutes human excellence, and his analysis of the forms taken by friendships. To the extent friendship can be found in Homer, it has a very different foundation and character. The enduring influence of Aristotle's work is suggested by the fact that in medieval Europe Aristotle was considered an authority second only to the Bible.

In the second half of the class we examine key chapters of the Hebrew Bible and compare their depiction of the human condition and human possibilities with those found in Homer and Aristotle. We focus in particular on the opening stories of Genesis and related stories that can be read as a kind of internal dialogue with the opening stories. We then read selections from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, a fourth and fifth century Christian bishop whose writings reflected the influence of Greek and Roman authors, contemporary religious and ideological debates, and the dire contemporary circumstances of the Roman Empire. Augustine proposed his own interpretations of the opening chapters of the Hebrew Bible. St. Augustine's work has been deeply influential in the history of Christianity.

This course will be discussion based. Students should be prepared to participate actively in analyzing the assigned texts.

As this summary suggests, the larger aim of the course is to introduce students to, or deepen their understanding of, conversations in Western culture that have endured over many centuries and from which it is still possible to learn.

Learning Outcomes:

Students who take this course will be able to explain the meanings of the assigned texts, place them in their historical context, and explain their relationships to each other.

Methods of Evaluation:

Weekly response papers on assigned readings, to be completed in class. All classes will have at least one such written assignment. If there are two response papers in a single class, the average of the two marks will determine the response paper grade for that class. In calculating the grade for this part of the course, the lowest mark for the term for one class will not be counted. The in-class written assignments may be made up after the class takes place only on the basis of a request for an accommodation submitted through the Student Absence Portal. Students who know they must miss a class in advance may see the instructor to write the response paper before the class without seeking a request for an accommodation. The questions posed in response papers assigned before or after the class may differ from the questions posed in the class.:

25 points

Participation in class discussions. In calling on students, the instructor will give priority to students who have not commented previously in a class, or in recent classes. Quality, not quantity, is the key: 35 points

Two seven to ten page essays, on set questions based on readings assigned for the course (or different questions approved in advance by the instructor). There will be one required essay based on the Homer assignment, due in the Assignments section of the course OWL website by 9:00 pm on Monday, October 19th, and one comparative essay based in part St. Augustine's *Confessions*, due in the Assignments section of the course OWL website by 9:00 pm on Monday, November 30th. See below for further instructions.

All essays must cite to the assigned sources, using the footnote form prescribed by the Chicago Manual of Style. You may refer to books or articles other than the assigned sources, but citation to an anonymous source, like AI or Wikipedia, is not acceptable. Essays submitted without accurate footnotes based primarily on the assigned sources, with citations to one or two pages from each source, not entire chapters or large page ranges, will receive failing grades.

Please note that the page length given above is a suggestion. The instructor is happy to read longer essays.

20 points for each essay

Essay questions:

First essay, due in the Assignments section of the course OWL website by 9:00 pm on Monday, October 19th. Please select one of the following two questions:

1. Moses Finley writes, on page 113 of *The World of Odysseus*, that "Homer reflected the views and values of the aristocracy, from the opening line of the *Iliad* to the final sentence of the *Odyssey*." Is it possible to read the *Odyssey* as subversive of at least some of what appear to have been common "views and values of the aristocracy" in the society depicted in the poem? Consider especially Homer's depiction of the actions and characters of slaves and women. To what extent does he depict them as demonstrating depth of feeling, wisdom, and – perhaps less frequently - even heroism, sometimes in greater measure than those whose power is much greater?

2. The *Odyssey* can be read as an education, for the hero of the poem, for Telemachus, and also, vicariously, for the poem's audiences. Assuming one can read the poem in this way, what is it that Odysseus, Telemachus, and the audiences of the poem need to learn about the qualities men and women should have, according to Homer?

Second essay, due in the Assignments section of the course OWL website by 9:00 pm on Monday, November 30th. Please answer the following question:

The *Odyssey* contains a sketch of one ideal of the Greek hero, while Augustine's *Confessions* is a portrait, a self-portrait, of a Christian sensibility, at least circa 400 AD. What are the principal differences and - if one can find them - similarities between the two character sketches?

Course Materials (to be purchased at the Western bookstore or on-line):

St. Augustine, *The Confessions* (New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Roger Crisp (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, 2014).

M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002).

Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007).

There are links to the other assigned texts noted in the syllabus on the course OWL website. Prices of the assigned books in the Western Bookstore can be found at HIS 4402F Custom Link

Absences and Late Assignments:

The lowest of the participation and response paper grades will be dropped when calculating the grade for the semester. This means that each student may miss one class and one response paper without a penalty. All other absences from class will be excused only on the basis of an accommodation request from the student's Academic Advising Office. Tardiness in the submission of essays will also be excused – that is, no late penalties will be imposed - only on the basis of an accommodation request from the student's Academic Advising Office.

Please upload your essay, with the paragraph comparing your essay to a response produced by AI, to the Assignments section of the course Owl Brightspace website, found within the Assessments section, by 9:00 pm on the due dates. This is the designated deadline for submission. However, pursuant to Western policies encouraging lenience in the imposition of penalties for lateness, essay submissions will not incur a late penalty until 12:05 am (five minutes after midnight) on the day after the essay is due. This will provide a margin for technical and other last-minute difficulties.

Essays that are late will be penalized one point per day, including weekends, on a hundred point scale, starting at 12:05 am on the day following the date the essays are due. For the purpose of determining the starting time of the late penalty, submission takes place when the essay is recorded as received in the Assignments section of the course OWL website. **No essays may be submitted after Wednesday, December 9th, without the approval of the student's Academic Advising Office.**

Course Schedule and Readings:

Wednesday, September 9

Introduction.

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 1-2.

Questions to be considered in this class:

With respect to the first hundred lines of the text:

1. What qualities of Odysseus are highlighted in the first ten lines of the poem? Note that the word Lattimore translates as "many ways" is polytropos. Poly means many, tropos means a turn, way, manner, style. What might this mean?

2. Why does Odysseus succeed in returning home while his men do not, according to this capsule sketch?

3. What do we learn about Odysseus from his refusal to remain with Calypso? What does the Calypso story, as sketched here, tell us about the meaning of the life or soul (the Greek word is psyche) that Odysseus has struggled to save? (Lattimore translation, line 5: "struggling for his own life"). See lines 13-15, 48-59.

4. What purposes are served by the recounting of the story of Agamemnon and Aigisthos, starting at line 30? In what ways is Aigisthos like Odysseus' men?

5. What are the chief characteristics of the gods displayed in this opening section? How do they act, and what emotions do they display?

6. What role do the gods play in human affairs, based on this opening section of the Odyssey? To what extent do they determine human conduct and the consequences of human actions? How much freedom of action do humans retain? Consider the capsule sketches of the roles played by the gods in the stories of the deaths of Odysseus' men and of Aigisthos, as well as in Odysseus' own story, as sketched in the first hundred lines. What actions of Odysseus might explain the suffering he must endure?

7. Why might those who inhabited the society or societies the poem describes think themselves able to understand the emotions and actions of anthropomorphic figures (the gods) who can exercise so much power over mankind?

With respect to the remainder of book one, please consider the following questions:

8. What comparisons can one draw between the actions of the suitors in Odysseus' palace, as they are depicted in this book, and the actions of Odysseus' men and of Aigisthos?

9. How does Athena's account of Odysseus further elucidate his qualities? (Book 1, lines 200-208; 255-268)

10. What are Telemachus' qualities? What has he learned from Athena's visit? (Book 1, lines 270-445, especially 320-23)

With respect to book 2, please consider the following questions:

11. How does the story of the council of the people of Ithaca in book 2 advance the plot of the story? What changes as a result of this council? What more do we learn about the chief characters, including Telemachus and the suitors Antinous, Eurymachus, and Leocritus?

12. What role do the gods play in books 1 (starting with the Telemachus section of book 1) and 2? What exactly do they do?

September 16

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 3-6.

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 5-45 (chapters 1-2).

Book 3

1. What role do the gods play in human affairs, according to Nestor? Is it the same or different from the role described in the earlier descriptions of the role of the gods, found in books one and two?

Book 4

3. Menelaos lives like a god, but is unhappy. Why? (see lines 90-112)

4. What are Helen's chief qualities? (see lines 120-47, 217-289) How is Helen like Kalypso?

5. What do we learn about the characteristics of Odysseus from Nestor and Menelaos? (see book 3, lines 120-64; and, again, book 4, lines 217-89)

6. Why might Menelaos have had to struggle with Proteus to learn how to escape the island of Pharos? (see lines 365-490)

7. Menelaos wants to know what Proteus' "mind knows." (493) What does Menelaos learn from Proteus' stories?

8. What do we learn about the suitors from their reaction to the news that Telemachus did successfully journey to Pylos, despite their efforts to prevent him from doing so?

9. In what ways is Athene's visit to Penelope in her sleep at the end of book 4 similar to Athene's first visit to Telemachus in book 1?

Book 5

10. What do we learn about Odysseus from this first encounter with him on the island of Kalypso? (lines 150-260)

11. How does Odysseus respond to the storm that strikes his raft after he has left Kalypso's island? What do we learn about Odysseus from this part of the story, the first time we see first hand how Odysseus responds to a crisis? What role do the gods play in determining Odysseus' fate, and to what extent is his fate in his own hands?

Book 6

12. Why is Nausikaa not afraid of Odysseus? To what extent does her response reflect characteristics of Phaiakian society, and to what extent her own position within it, and her own personality and aspirations?

September 23

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 7-11.

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 46-108 (chapters 3-4)

Books 7 and 8

How do the Phaiakians treat strangers? What examples are there of this fairly consistent approach, and how can one explain it? (see Book 7, lines 30-35, 153-167; Book 8, lines 160-165)

More generally, what are the distinctive characteristics of the Phaiakians and how can one explain them? (see 6: 270-273; 7:108-132) At what do they excel? (8:100-105; 8:246-250) What are their principal defects?

What are the chief characteristics of Alkinoos?

Why might Arete, the wife of Alkinoos, be the dominant person in the royal household, as both Nausikaa and Athena tell Odysseus and as Arete's conduct also demonstrates? (6: 310-315; 7:65-57; 7:335-340; 11:335-353) What aspects of Phaiakian society (or of her husband), or her own biography, might this reflect?

How does Odysseus describe himself in response to the challenge from Euryalos? See especially 8:215.

Why does Demodokos sing of the story of Aphrodite and Ares? What role does this story play in the poem, since it clearly is meant as a contrast with the story of Agamemnon and Agisthos? Do the Greek gods feel shame or anger in the same way as humans? Why or why not?

Why, at 8:522, does Odysseus cry? This passage is a key moment in the poem. Contrast Odysseus' response to the telling of the story of the Trojan War with the responses of Nestor (Book 3, 103-30) and Menelaus (Book 4, 90-100). What does each individual mourn? Can one explain why the response of Odysseus is so different? Why does Odysseus ask Demodokos to sing of the story of the Trojan horse in particular, knowing – presumably – of the pain it will cause him?

Books 9 and 10

What do the "adventures" of Odysseus and his men in Book 9 suggest about Odysseus' own shortcomings, and those of his men, at the start of his journey home from Troy? Consider the story of the sack of the city of the Kikonians, the encounter with the Lotus Eaters, and the story of the Cyclops. What is it that Odysseus and his men must learn before they are permitted to arrive home?

What do the stories of the Aeolian winds and the encounter with the Laistrygonians teach? Are men capable of using well the power of the gods, in this case over the wind?

How is it that Circe turns Odysseus' men into pigs? (10:236)

Why does the plant Hermes gives Odysseus protect him against Circe's magic? (10:302-306) What might be the significance of the fact that this plant is "black at the root but with a milky flower"? Circe tells Odysseus at 8:324 that "there is a mind in you that no magic will work on." What does this mean?

Book 11

Why do Odysseus and his men fill a pit in Hades with various offerings, including the blood of sacrificed animals?

What instructions does Teiresias give Odysseus? Why does Odysseus have to journey to Hades to hear this message? Why might it be important for the living, and especially, perhaps, Odysseus, to understand the nature of death? What are the dead spirits like, in this account?

What might the encounter with his mother have taught Odysseus?

Why does Odysseus hear first the stories of famous (and sometimes infamous) women? Why might Arete have decided to consider Odysseus her own guest only mid-way through his account of the visit to Hades, at line 11:336?

What do we learn about Agamemnon from his encounter with Odysseus? (11:397-465)

What do we, and Odysseus, learn from Odysseus' encounter with Achilles? (11:465-540)

September 30 - National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - classes do not meet

October 7

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 12-17

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 109-46 (chapter 5)

*A.W.H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece. From Homer to the end of the Fifth Century* (New York: Norton, 1972), 10-21.

Book 12

1. Why does Odysseus choose to listen to the Sirens? What is it that they promise him?

2. Why does Odysseus choose to risk Skylla rather than Charybdis? Why does he fail to follow Circe's advice about not fighting Skylla?

Book 13

3. What does the conclusion that Alkinoos draws from the punishment imposed on Poseidon on the Phaiakians suggest about him? (13: 180-184) Is it sensible?

4. Why did Odysseus invent the particular story that he told Athena after his return to Ithaka? (13:256-287) Is there anything in this tale that has any resemblance to the truth, or, at least, the story he told the Phaiakians?

5. Why does Athena praise Odysseus, not despite, but because, of his ability to deceive? (13:330-339)

Book 14

6. How does Eumaios greet Odysseus? (14:30-83; 14:121-148) What does he recall of his master?

7. How does Eumaios characterize the expedition to Troy? (14: 83-88)

8. Again Odysseus weaves a tale of his past. (14:192-359) In what respects does this story resemble the one he told the Phaiakians, and what is different? How does he characterize himself as a young man? To what extent does he appear critical of his past behavior?

9. In what ways is Eumaios like Odysseus? (14:391)

10. How does Odysseus persuade Eumaois to give him an extra mantle for the night?

Book 15

11. Why is it that Telemachos helps Theoklymenos, even though Theoklymenos has admitted to killing a man, and not given any explanation that would suggest the killing was justified? (15: 220-281)

12. What does Odysseus learn from Eumaios about his father and his mother, and what larger lessons for Odysseus might this description suggest? (15: 353-360)

13. What does Eumaios' description of his upbringing suggest about his relationship to Odysseus' parents and, hence, to Odysseus?

14. What might Odysseus, and the reader, learn from Eumaios' story of his own life? (15: 390-484)

Book 16

Line 15: How does Eumaios treat Telemachus, and Telemachus Eumaios? Compare Eumaois' greeting of Telemachus at line 24 with Penelope's greeting at 17:41.

Lines 194-215: What do we learn about Odysseus and Telemachus from their reunion, and from the fact that Odysseus had apparently not intended to reveal himself to Telemachus until Athene suggested that he do so? (167)

Lines 363-393: How does Antinoos justify his plan to kill Telemachus?

Lines 400-405: What does Amphinomos' response suggest about his character, his personality?

At lines 425-430 we learn that Antinoos' father had himself been a fugitive, and that Odysseus had rescued him. Antinoos is therefore under as strong an obligation to Odysseus as someone could have in this world of war and piracy.

Book 17

How does Odysseus' encounter with Melanthios advance the plot of the story? (17:210-260)

What do we learn about Odysseus from the encounter with Argos? (290-327)

The story line of the remainder of books seventeen and eighteen is essentially the disruption of the household by the beggar. By what steps does Odysseus come to dominate the household? Consider Antinoos' treatment of him and Odysseus' response (17:396-494); Odysseus' response to Penelope's request to see him (17:560-587); the fight between Odysseus and Iros (18:1-116); Odysseus' warning to Amphinomos (18:124-157); the responses of the suitors (18:213-215) and Odysseus's reaction to Penelope's appearance (18:281-284); Odysseus' response to Melantho when she insults him (18:338-339); and then Odysseus' exchange with Eurymachos (18:356-404).

Week of October 12th: Fall Reading Week - no classes

October 21: First essay to be submitted by 9:00 pm on Monday, October 19

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 18-24

A great deal of the dramatic tension, especially in the last books of the *Odyssey*, involves Penelope. How should we interpret her motives and her actions? In particular, does she know or suspect that the beggar is Odysseus? If so, how does she respond to this possibility?

Here is a summary of some of the key passages. The poem discussed Penelope briefly, at the end of book one, when Telemachus tells her that she should not stop Phemios from singing of Troy, that she must learn to suffer hearing of it. (346) She returns to her bedroom and weeps for Odysseus. (363) Late in book four she attacks the suitors in a discussion with her loyal servant Medon (lines 680-695), and then is overcome with grief when she learns of the suitors' plans to kill Telemachus. (705-740) Also in book four Athene appears in a dream as Penelope's sister, who urges her to "take courage, let not your heart be altogether frightened." (825) In book eleven Odysseus' mother tells him that Penelope is waiting for him "all too much with enduring heart," (183), but in book sixteen, at line 73, Telemachus tells Odysseus – whom he has not yet recognized - that "my mother's heart is divided in her, and ponders two ways." (73) But this might tell us more about Telemachus than about Penelope. We meet Penelope again directly in book seventeen, when, starting at line 100, she questions Telemachus about what he learned from his journey to see Nestor and Menelaus – this is when she learns that Menelaus was told that Odysseus had been constrained by Kalypso (17:143) - and also hears Theoclymenus' claim that Odysseus was in fact back in Ithaca (lines 17:152-162). Since she can overhear at least some of what is happening in the hall, she asks Eumaios to invite the beggar to come talk with her, an invitation to which Odysseus responds by saying that he will accept it later, after the suitors had left. (17: 500-580) Penelope then ventures into the hall, 18:160-290, and proclaims her willingness finally to marry, and asks that each suitor bring her gifts. (18:278) But, the poet tells us, "her own mind had other intentions." (18:283) In book nineteen she finally speaks with Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, and asks his advice about whether she should marry, as Odysseus had told her to do when he left for Troy, once Telemachus had become a man (this story is told in the previous chapter,18:270), or whether she should instead wait for Odysseus (19:156-164). It is in book nineteen that Penelope recounts to the beggar a dream in which an eagle kills twenty geese, and she "cried out sorrowing for my geese killed by the eagle." (543) Are the geese suitors, as often thought, or the twenty years in which she has lived without Odysseus? Penelope then mentions to the beggar her plan of ordering a contest with Odysseus' bow. (19:570-582) The beggar approves the plan. (583)

Book 18

Lines 18:322-324: How is Melantho like Antinoos?

Book 19

Contrast how Penelope tests the beggar's story about meeting Odysseus with how Telemachus had tested his father when Odysseus announces who he was, in book sixteen. (19:215-250)

What is the meaning of the story about how Odysseus was named and scarred by a boar? (19:395-465) What does Odysseus' response reveal about him? (19:485-490)

Book 20

1. What do we learn from the first 120 lines of book 20 about the states of mind, the worries and sorrows and hopes, of Odysseus and Penelope?

2. What are the qualities of Philoitios, who is introduced to us between lines 185 and 237?

3. Lines 345-385: What is the purpose of the warning from Theoklymenos?

Book 21

Lines 13-42: What is the point of the story about the origins of Odysseus' bow? How does it fit the role that the bow plays in this story?

Book 22

Lines 205-237, 256, 273, 297: What role does Athene play in the slaughter of the suitors?

Book 23

1. Lines 10-230, especially 210-230: Why does Penelope refuse for so long to acknowledge Odysseus? Of what exactly is she afraid? What might her actions reveal about the position of women in the society described by the poem? (here one might reflect on what Odysseus learns of the fate of women during his visit to Hades) In what respects are the qualities Penelope displays in this section of the poem similar to those of Odysseus?

2. Lines 356-358: Since Odysseus apparently plans to steal sheep from others to replenish his herds, is it really the case that his years of exile have taught him to live in a more peaceful fashion?

Book 24

1. Lines 120-190: What parts of the story does Amphimedon leave out when he explains to Agamemnon why he and the other suitors arrived en masse in Hades?

2. Lines 232-326: Why does Odysseus test Laertes? What might the poet wished to accomplish by crafting the reunion this way, instead of having Odysseus reveal himself immediately? How is this reconciliation different from Odysseus' reconciliation with Telemachus? (compare Book 16: 167-171)

October 28

*Jonathan Barnes, "Aristotle," in R.M. Hare, Jonathan Barnes, and Henry Chadwick, *Founders of Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 89-96, 164-74.

*Arthur W.H. Adkins, *From the Many to the One. A Study of Personality and Views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values, and Beliefs (*London: Constable, 1970), 181-95, 197-212.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3-36.

The title of Aristotle's Ethics is easy to misunderstand, because the English word "Ethics" does not capture the meaning of the Greek word "Ethika," which focuses more on character. The principal subject of the lectures is more accurately described as "how to behave." Aristotle argues that: 1) humans – or at least some, especially well-situated humans of Aristotle's day, the full citizens of a city like Athens – have the freedom to choose how to live, and must choose among a range of possible values, objectives; 2) most people choose poorly, the large majority seeking some form of pleasure, while many others pursue honor, public acclaim, both of which, but especially the former, Aristotle considers unworthy of human beings and not able to produce the condition of eudaimonia, or flourishing, which he (and also some contemporary common opinion) considered the worthiest end of human life; 3) it is possible logically to order the different kinds of goals for human conduct – some are clearly subordinate ends or skills that help achieve larger, more significant objectives, and in these instances it is the more important objectives that should be kept in mind; and 4) achieving human excellence requires the activity of the "soul" in accordance with excellence, meaning: a) use of the rational principal, the ability to reflect (intellectual excellence); and b) the habituation of what one might call impulses so that they are directed to achieve the goals of excellence.

Furthermore (5), Aristotle argues that one can interpret human excellence as a matter of continuously deciding between a range of choices regarding our behavior, choices that require careful consideration of circumstances. But the model of the "mean" between extremes which he proposes in practice is alone inadequate to guide behavior, something that Aristotle himself appears to recognize.

Book One:

In the first two subsections of the first book of the Ethics, on pages 3-5 of the assigned text, Aristotle makes more precise the meaning of what is good (agathos) for men (and in Aristotle's usage the term is not generic - he does seem to focus on the male of the species, although in fact his categories are universal): he distinguishes activities and the ends at which the actions aim, if these exist; ends that are subordinate, which exist to achieve or help create something else, and those that exist for themselves; and the good for the individual versus the good for an entire community.

Do you agree that "in cases where there are ends additional to the actions, the products are by their nature better than the activities." (1094a5) Is it the case, for example, that a high level of skill in playing a musical instrument is less good that the result of playing an instrument, wonderful music? Is the skill of a carpenter a lesser good than the furniture or houses the carpenter makes? To what extent might Aristotle's perception reflect what one might call an aristocratic view of the world, in which the work of the craftsman (or woman) is subordinated to the needs of the consumer?

Why is the science of politics the “master science”? (1094a29)

At 1095a3 Aristotle suggests that the young are not suited to studying the subject of the good for the community (polis). Why?

Note that both Homer and Aristotle begin by drawing sharp contrasts between those who act on the basis of feelings, who are child-like, and those who demonstrate the capacity for “self-restraint.” (1095a9) In what ways are their depictions of the consequences of each set of dispositions and states of mind similar or different?

How does Aristotle critique the Homeric emphasis on honor (timé)? (1095b23-29)?

What is problematic about the pursuit of virtue, for Aristotle? (1095a30-1096a3)

In Chapter 6, 1096a13 through 1097a13, Aristotle takes issue with a competing definition of the good, proposed by his contemporary Plato. Plato suggested that there was an abstract ideal of “good” that could explain all the forms it took. Aristotle prefers to distinguish (1096b23). Since what people understand by the term good is in fact quite different, one should not attempt to amalgamate the different understandings - one simply will confuse the issue.

How is the nature of Aristotle’s definition of “flourishing” affected by his claim that “man is by nature a social (politikon) being,” that humans cannot flourish as solitary and independent (autarkes), but only in a community with ‘parents, children, wife and friends, and fellow-citizens”? (1097b10) In what respects does Aristotle’s claim reflect values taught in the *Odyssey*, and in what respects does his meaning appear to be different?

Artistotle identifies eudaimonia, which Jonathan Barnes translates as flourishing, successful, rather than happy as the goal of existence (Barnes, 169-70). At 1098a18 Aristotle defines “the good (agathos) for man,” the way to achieve eudaimonia, as “an activity of the soul in accordance with excellence (arête).” Explaining exactly what this might mean is the purpose of the remainder of Aristotle’s lectures.

To what extent does Aristotle’s definition of flourishing as “activity of the soul in accordance with arête” similar to or different from the Homeric conception of flourishing?

Why does Aristotle add, at the end of this subsection, that one must consider an entire life, and not merely “a brief span of time,” in determining what constitutes “flourishing”? (1098a20)

Is there a tension between Aristotle’s suggestion that the good for the individual is eudaimonia and his claim that the good of the community, which he does not further define here, is higher than the good for the individual?

How does Aristotle’s claim that the function of man is a kind of activity be squared with his claim in the opening lines of the work that “where there are ends distinct from the actions, the results (of activity) are by nature superior to the activities” (see 1098a18)?

Why, at 1098b30-1099a5, does Aristotle claim that the exercise of excellence [arête] is superior to the possession of excellence? "As at the Olympic Games, it is not the most attractive and the strongest who are crowned, but those who compete . . . ."

What "external goods" or conditions are necessary for flourishing? (1098a31-1098b4, 1100a5, 1100a20-30)

1100b35 Aristotle writes that "no man who is truly flourishing can become miserable, because he will never do things that are hateful and mean." What does this claim suggest about Aristotle's understanding of the meaning of "flourishing," or, perhaps, his limited imagination about the forms of human suffering?

Why does Aristotle end this book with a discussion of the different parts of the soul? What is the connection between this discussion and the earlier part of the book?

Book Two

Why does habituation play such a central role in Aristotle's explanation of the creation of moral excellence? (1103a14-1104b24) How does this part of Aristotle's argument relate to the discussion of the different parts of the soul at the end of the previous book?

Explain Aristotle's theory of the mean as the basis for determining the meaning of excellence. (1104a12-27; 1106a5-1108b10) What is convincing and what less convincing about this theory of virtue?

How is the theory of the mean related to Aristotle's argument that with respect to the achievement of moral arête, humans must exercise reason? (1104b33)

What are the most important similarities between Aristotle's interpretation of the meaning of agathos and arête and the meanings found in Homer? Consider the role played by choice on the part of the individual in the achievement of arete; the extent to which the desire for honor (timé) is accepted as a proper motivating force; and the role of a conception of the human as fundamentally embedded in a larger community. What are Aristotle and Homer's attitudes regarding the place in life of pain and pleasure? Would Homer have found Aristotle's idea of the mean as ideal at all persuasive?

At page 174 of the assigned selection of his discussion of Aristotle, Jonathan Barnes suggests that in Aristotle "the reader may detect the infant voice of totalitarianism." Barnes writes further that "lovers of liberty would prefer to assign a negative function to the State." Based on the assigned selection from the Ethics, which is, admittedly, only a small part of the larger work, do you agree with Barnes' assessment?

November 4 (this week only class will conducted via Zoom)

*Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 141-72, 174-80

Aristotle on Friendship:

The basic teaching seems pretty straight forward: the most satisfying and enduring friendships are those that are based on befriending another "for what the person is, and not for any incidental quality." (1156b12) Other bases for friendship, including utility and pleasure, tend to be temporary, and hence the friendships they create are also unlikely to last. But around this foundation Aristotle examines a great many related, practical questions, such as: Can there be friendships between people who have unequal levels of wealth, power, and/or virtue? What is the proper nature of "friendship" between spouses and parents and children? How do these differ from other friendships? Why do friendships end? How many friends should one have? The assigned books cover a lot of ground.

Book 8:

Aristotle begins this book with the statement: "no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other goods." Is this statement true of Odysseus?

What are some of the common conventional views of friendship, according to Aristotle? (1155a1-1155b17) Why does Aristotle here also reject claim that there is a single ideal of friendship that encompasses all types, as he did with respect to the idea of what is good for humans? (1155b15)

What are the categories into which Aristotle divides friendships? (1156a6-1156b33)

Why is it necessary for people to "[eat] . . . salt together" to be friends of the highest type, according to Aristotle? (1156b27)

Why can people who are bad (kakoi – wretched, degraded) not be true friends? (1157a20).

The different kinds of friendship characteristic of different subgroups in society: Aristotle breaks society into the old and the young, tradesmen and the well-to-do, and "people in high office" or superiors generally. (1158a3-1158b12)

How can friendships exist between people who are unequal? (1158b13-1159a14)

Can friendship exist if the gap between individuals is enormous, as between gods and men, or royalty and other citizens?

Why is befriending more important than being befriended? (1159a28)

To what extent do Aristotle's formulations appear to justify and track existing hierarchies, and to what extent do they call them into question? See his discussion of friendship between husbands and wives (1160b34-1161a1, 1161a23-26) and between masters and slaves (1161a33-1161b11).

What is the basis for friendship - Aristotle uses the same term - within the family? (1161b12-1162a35)

Causes for the end of friendships: What are they? (1162a34-1163b30)

Book 9

What are the grounds for dissolving a friendship based on virtue (arête)? (1165b1-35)

Why does Aristotle appear to believe that the relationship of a mother to a child is in some respects the highest form of friendship? (1166a5-10, 1168a25-29)

Why does Aristotle write that the good man "has nothing to regret"? (1166a25-30) What might be problematic about such a claim? Why is the bad person "not to be disposed in a friendly way even to himself"? (1166b27)

Is it the case that "benefactors love [are friends of] their beneficiaries more than the beneficiaries love them"? (1167b17) What is Aristotle's argument?

Why are friends necessary for flourishing? Why is self-sufficiency not a wise goal? (1169b5-1170b20)

How many friends should one have? (1170b20-1171a20)

Do we need friends more in prosperity or adversity? (1171a22-1171b28)

What are the most important similarities and differences between the Homeric notion of "guest-friendship" and the conception of friendship depicted in Aristotle? To the extent that there are differences, what do they imply about the nature of the society described in each work?

November 11

*Genesis 1-3

*Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7-11, 29-47.

*Leo Strauss, "On the Interpretation of Genesis," from Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity. Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought,* ed. by Kenneth Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 361-371, 375-376, 382-87.

We will be examining the first three chapters of Genesis. There is probably as much commentary written about these few pages as on any texts ever written, perhaps more. One could spend years analyzing what the various interpretations might tell us about the experiences, points of view, and assumptions of various kinds of the interpreters. But we do not have this much time. I suggest that for the moment we approach the assigned text as a kind of puzzle that we are seeking to understand.

I have assigned excerpts from Leo Strauss' discussion of these texts because he adopts this approach. Strauss' specialty was political philosophy; he had taught and written about Plato and Aristotle, as well as modern philosophers like Machiavelli and Hobbes. He approached the biblical text with as few assumptions as possible. We need not accept any of his claims, but his interpretations can provide a starting point for discussion.

Students curious regarding the secondary literature on this subject may wish to look at Phyllis Bird's article on Genesis 1.27, "'Male and Female He Created Them,' Genesis 1:27b in the

Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *Harvard Theological Review* 74:2 (1981):129-159. This article, which I am not assigning and which I do not plan to discuss in class, gives those who are interested a sense of the density of the discussions of these texts.

Here are a few questions to consider.

1. The Brettler introduction to the Hebrew Bible suggests that there are at least two different ways of reading the first line of the text. What are they? How would linking the meaning of the first line of chapter one to the first half of verse four in chapter two influence one's interpretation? What is the significance of the choices regarding the meaning of the first line for one's interpretation of this chapter, and more generally for the nature of the being referred to as Elohim (henceforth, "G")?

2. Both Brettler and Strauss argue that one can divide this story of beginnings into two parallel sets of three days each. What is parallel about these accounts?

3. Strauss argues that one principal action that takes place in the chapter is distinction, separation; light is distinguished from darkness, land from water, etc. He suggests that the order in which different parts of the larger world are distinguished and named is based on the principal of motion, the degree of independent motion each being is perceived to have. What is the argument? Does it seem reasonable?

4. The culmination of this process of separating, distinguishing and naming is found in lines 26-28. What might it mean, given what we know from this chapter about G, that man is "created (from the root barah) in his image"? That is quite an extraordinary assertion, almost impious. What are the qualities of G that might also be found in man?

5. Why might the chapter assert that "man" was created (again, barah) male and female? What is implied by this assertion?

6. What might it mean that man is to "subdue and have dominion over" the earth, including both plants and animals? What limits on this dominion are suggested by verse 29?

7. Why might it be that both animals and human beings are blessed? (verses 22 and 28)

8. Why might G describe what he made at various points as "good," and at the very end of creation, as "very good"? What is good and very good about it?

9. Why is there a day of ceasing work (the Sabbath) after the six days of creation, and why is it blessed? What's the point?

Questions relating to the second creation story:

The second account of man's beginnings in Genesis has more the character of a fairy tale, albeit one that appears not to end very happily. What exactly is the story supposed to explain or to teach? In what sense is learning the difference between good and evil bad? Why does there seem to be such a close connection between learning the difference between good and evil and awareness of sexual difference? Why are men and women punished, as it seems, to suffer pains

that are an inherent part of the adult condition? In what respects are the lessons of this story similar to or opposed to those of the first account of genesis? What is the point of starting an entire text of this kind with two very contradictory stories, ones that (arguably) focus on different aspects of the human condition?

A further note: On page 45 of Brettler's book he suggests that line 2:17 of the second Genesis story should be translated as "you shall become mortal." That is a fair interpretation of what the words mean, but the literal meaning is the translation; our author is a little too enthusiastic in his views. The same applies to his statement regarding line 2:9, about the meaning of "good and evil" in this story. The claim that "the words good and evil have no moral connotation here" is an interpretation, but it is not the only possible interpretation.

We noted, following the interpretations discussed in Brettler and Strauss, a range differences between the accounts found in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3. These included: the depiction of G; the form taken by G's actions and the relationship between the humans distinguished (or characterized) or created and G; in the questions each story seemed designed to answer; and in the nature of human beings.

Two possible interpretations of the Garden of Eden story were discussed: in the first Adam and Eve are considered to be full adults who sin by disobeying G's commandment not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad and for this reason are punished, together with all their progeny, by expulsion from the Garden of Eden and also the infliction of pain in different aspects of their lives. This version has a miraculous character; humans are understood to be initially immortal, and one aspect of their punishment is loss of this immortality. This is the version of the story that is found in numerous medieval and early modern sources, such as Milton's poem Paradise Lost.

An alternative reading makes the story more of an allegory, in which G's engagement is not to be taken literally. It as a myth about the passage from childhood to adulthood; at puberty children acquire a new awareness of their gendered nature and at the same time become far more responsible for both base and noble actions. In this interpretation the "death" that is ordained as punishment for eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad is awareness of death, not actual death. We noted that one difficulty with this interpretation is that one then has to explain why the passage to adulthood is seen as a product of an individual decision, and the circumstances of adulthood a punishment, instead of a natural and unavoidable part of human experience. Here the allegorical interpretation stresses how the passage to adulthood is experienced – think Peter Pan. To the extent one treats the whole story as a kind of parable about growing up, however, the less it provides a satisfactory answer to the question; why must people suffer?, and also the related question, how is human suffering compatible with a world that is ordered by a moral principle and that has humanity at its center?

November 18

*Genesis, 6-9:17.

*Jonah 1-4.

Judy Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible. How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (*2009), 1-13, 21-25.

Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 61-72, 88-90.

Noah and Jonah stories, with Klitsner's commentary:

On what grounds do Klitsner and other commenters criticize Noah? Why does G promise never to destroy mankind in the future?

How does Klitsner explain Jonah's response to G's command to travel to Nineveh?

What are the principal virtues of the sailors on the vessel that carries Jonah, of the people of Nineveh, and of G, as portrayed in this story?

Why is Jonah angry at the end of the story?

Why does Klitsner consider this story a "subversive sequel" of the Noah story? What is subversive about it?

November 25

Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (2000, 2nd ed.), 35-45, 131-75.

The Confessions of St. Augustine

Please note that *The Confessions* has books, chapters (designated by Roman Numerals) and subchapters (designated by Arabic numbers). What is confusing is that these sets of numbers run concurrently, even though there are more subchapters in each book than chapters. All of the assigned reading is to chapters.

Book One, chapters vii, xvi, xix

Book Two, chapters i-iv

Book Four, chapters i, ii, iv, vii

Book Five, chapters ix, x, xiii, xiv

Book Six, chapters iii, iv, v, vii, viii, xii-xv

Book Eight, chapters vi, vii, xii

Book Ten, chapters iii, iv, xxxi-xxxix

Questions relating to the assigned chapters from Peter Brown's biography of Augustine:

According to Brown, what role does habit (consuetudo) play in Augustine's explanation of the existence of evil? (pp. 141-3)

In what ways did this focus on habit reflect a larger change in Augustine's perspective over the period from his conversion to Christianity (in 386) and the writing of the Confessions (397)? (pp. 144-46)

What role does Augustine's understanding of the role of delight play in his understanding of freedom of the will? (148-9)

Why does Augustine's understanding of the human psyche make it so necessary for him to explore his own past? (149)

Why does Brown claim that by the end of the 390s Augustine had come to share many of the characteristics of the Europeans Romantics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries? (150)

How do Augustine's *Confessions* differ from the typical Christian autobiography of the previous three centuries, according to Brown? How did these differences reflect the establishment of the Church as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the course of the 4th century? (152-57, 159)

Brown claims that Augustine was always attempting "to bring together the 'God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,' and the God of the philosophers." What does Brown mean by this claim? (168)

What role does the confession play in Augustine's understanding of spiritual growth? What does Augustine find troubling about what Brown terms "the massive autonomy of Plotinus"? (170)

December 2, Second essay to be submitted by 9:00 pm on Monday, November 30th

The Confessions of St. Augustine

Book Twelve, chapters vii, xxiv, xxvii, xxviii, xxx, xxxi

Book Thirteen, chapters xxii, xxiii, xxviii

December 9

Open

Additional Statements

Communication policies: I am happy to speak with students after class, or during my weekly office hours. If these times are not convenient, I am happy to arrange alternative times to meet.

I am in my office most days of the week. Please write me at enathans@uwo.ca to schedule a time to talk. I am also happy to talk by phone or via Zoom.

Classroom behavior: Please turn off cell phones and refrain from using any recording devices during the class. Please remove earbuds during the class.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI): The use of AI to help with writing assignments is discouraged. Experience with essays that appear to be written with the help of AI suggests that often students must look in assigned sources for evidence that would support the very general claims made by AI. This effort is often unsuccessful, with the result that footnotes do not support the claims made in the text. The result is then a failing grade on the essay. In this class all essays must cite to the assigned sources, using the editions used in the course. Citation to an anonymous source, like AI or Wikipedia, is not acceptable.

Essays submitted without accurate footnotes based on the assigned sources will receive failing grades.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at:
https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.