

GBK 407.001
“The Age of Ambivalence”
Mercer University
Fall 2014

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Office Hours: M 11:00-12:00
TR 9:30-11:30

GRV 112
TR 8:00-9:15

Introduction: This is the last in the chronological sequence of GBK courses, bringing us into the twentieth century. Although it presents us with the chronological period closest to our own, it will still require an effort of the imagination to put ourselves in that era as we read. In many ways the changes that occurred in the last hundred and fifty years challenge or revise much of what was considered “great.” However, the questions about human suffering and human longing have not changed. A sustained effort to engage the ideas will help us more clearly understand our current cultural crises and dilemmas.

Course Objectives

1. Read critically and reflectively.
2. Contribute to thoughtful discussion with others in a seminar format.
3. Ask probing questions with the text as a focus.
4. Identify major issues important to the writers of the texts studied.
5. Analyze critically the positions presented in the texts.
6. Write with clarity, insight, and style.
7. Learn about the late 19th and 20th centuries from *within*—imagining oneself as a citizen by *living* with texts from these eras.
8. Acquire a better understanding of some foundational texts of Western Culture.

Texts

Camus, *The Stranger*

Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* http://www.online-literature.com/conrad/heart_of_darkness/

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/treatise/dubois/dubois_01.htm

Einstein

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Mendel, “Experiments . . .” <http://www.mendelweb.org/Mendel.html>

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Tolstoy, *Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Weber, *Protestant Work Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*

Yeats, *The Tower*

Course Requirements

Since you have already had classes in the Great Books Program, you will probably already have heard most of the following before. But just to get the ground rules straight from the outset, please note the following policies that will govern this course.

Class Attendance I expect you to attend all classes. Your participation in classroom discussions is the single most important requirement of the course. That presupposes that you arrive in class with the

assigned material read carefully and critically—by that I mean having prepared in writing your reflection on the text, including the most important questions that it raises. While there is no direct attendance policy, you will have zeroes entered for discussion grades for days you are absent.

Leading Class Discussion: Students will be responsible for leading class discussion three times during the course of the semester. A sign-up sheet will circulate on the first day of class. You will be graded on your ability to devise an interesting and relevant opening question, to direct conversation in meaningful ways, and to keep the discussion focused. No one will be allowed to present twice in the same week. Also, no one is allowed to present twice on the same text. If there are “open days” and you wish to replace an earlier grade, you may present for a fourth time. These assignments will follow the same grade numbering as Discussion.

On the day that you lead class discussion you must hand in a hard copy of at least three questions you plan to ask the class. Under each question you pose, list relevant passages from the text that you believe will help the class work through the question. Finally, for each question, explain the reasons why you think the question is “good” Great Book question. What issues are you trying to explore with that question? What themes does it highlight? In what ways will it help us focus our reading? In what ways will it help us clarify our thinking?

Discussions: Every class period your participation is being evaluated. Note that I understand that some people are hesitant to communicate in a large group and I will make arrangements during class to make it easier for those students. Please note that just because a student speaks in class she does not receive the highest marks. As a colleague often says, not every comment is equal in insight. Here are some guidelines for discussion. Make an effort to engage your classmates in critical dialogue. Pay attention to what your neighbors say, respond with appropriate criticism, and be willing to receive the same type of criticism. A comment that causes your neighbors to think further about a topic or idea will earn high marks. If the conversation heightens so that everyone becomes engaged in the discussion, then the question posed and the responses given show critical thinking on the fly and will result in the class receiving high marks. If I have to ask the questions and lead the entire time, the class will receive low marks. The scale for Discussion grading is 6-10. Arrival in class gives you a six (6). Listening quietly but looking distracted earns you a seven (7). Listening quietly and looking interested gives you a seven-point-five (7.5). Listening and taking notes gives you an eight (8). Listening and making notes, with an occasional good comment earns you an eight-point-five (8.5). Listening and taking notes, with several good comments means you receive a nine (9). Listening well and commenting in such a way that alters the class discussion in a significant, positive way earns you appreciation from the professor and a nine-point-five (9.5). Ten (10) is at the discretion of the professor and considered rare. Doing homework for another class, engaging in text messaging, or completely absent will result in a zero (0). I will drop the four lowest discussion grades.

Essays: You will write two 5-6 page formal essays. These essays should be careful analyses of required readings and/or comparisons of assigned readings. They should express your own original interpretations rather than presenting the standard critical interpretations, such as a research paper would do. Each paper should include either a clearly stated thesis, which is subsequently defended, or a well-posed question that guides the development of the paper. You will need to use quotations from the text to document your claims, but rarely should you quote more than a sentence or two at a time. Themes such as heroism, martyrdom, meaninglessness, integrity, careerism, and relationships may be highlighted. All written work must be typed, double-spaced, using 1-inch margins, and 12 pt. NewTimes Roman font. Papers are due at **3 p.m.** on the assignment date in the schedule. **You will submit all essays via attachment to e-mail.** Late papers will be penalized 10 points for each 24 hour period after they are due; more than five days late results in a 0, no exceptions. Your essays will be evaluated on the basis of content, organization,

style, and mechanics. While there is a subjective component to essay grading, I use a color highlight system for grading essays electronically. Green means that the sentence is well written or I think the point is well made. Yellow means there is a problem with a portion of the sentence or the entire sentence. Examples of yellow highlighting include lack of a clear thesis (early in the semester), awkward sentence structure or wording, comma usage (early in the semester), or noun/pronoun agreement. Red means there is an error in the sentence. Examples of red highlighting include typographical errors, comma splices, subject/verb agreement, and incomplete sentences. As a way to gauge your grade as you scan the essay would be, green is good, every yellow means something is wrong but does not interrupt the flow of the essay, and every red means there is a major error in the essay. Sometimes I can be forgiving if the mistakes do not distract from the overall point of the essay; however, if I have to stop to fix mistakes, the essay has problems that no “content” argument can overcome.

Students bear sole responsibility for ensuring that papers or assignments submitted electronically to a professor are received in a timely manner and in the electronic format(s) specified by the professor. Students are therefore obliged to have their e-mail client issue a receipt verifying that the document has been received. Students are also strongly advised to retain a copy of the dated submission on a separate disk. Faculty members are encouraged, but not required, to acknowledge receipt of the assignment.

FINAL PAPER. Your final examination is an essay. The final paper gives students an opportunity to write an eight- to ten-page essay that encompasses their assimilation of the readings and discussions of the semester and expresses the kinds of conclusions about this era that have emerged. The paper will be due at the time announced for our final exam.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING & EVALUATION:

Discussion	20%
Lead Discussion	15%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	20%
Final Paper	25%

If at any point you have not performed up to your expectations, please come see me.

Scale: 100-90 **A**; 89-87 **B+**; 86-80 **B**; 79-77 **C+**; 76-70 **C**; 69-60 **D**; 59 and below **F**

What will I have to do to get a good grade? (Borrowed and revised from Colin Harris, CCPS)

Mercer’s grading system is set up to reflect certain levels of involvement and performance. The C and C+ range of grades reflects the performance one would expect of someone in college. It means the course requirements have been met in a satisfactory way. The B and B+ grades recognize an above average level of involvement and performance in the course. This means that the student has more than met the minimum standards for the course and has shown some initiative in taking charge of her or his learning own learning experience. The A grade represents a level of seriousness and excellence in involvement and performance that is the best students can produce.

In a course such as this one, it is more difficult to measure the quality of performance than it would be in a more concrete subject area. What I can do is tell you some things I have noticed about students whose work in this course has been above average and superior. I hope these observations will be helpful to you in thinking about your own involvement.

1. Above average and excellent students attend and participate alertly in class sessions. An occasional absence is necessary; however, there is a clear difference between necessary and causal absence. Alert participation means serious involvement in our study, not necessarily just talking in class. The fact that some persons are less vocal than other does

not mean that their participation is less. It may be more. Students who participate in group learning and are concerned not only for their own learning process but also for what they can contribute to their fellow learners seem to be those who do the best work. I would like for you to call or email me before an absence, if you can, or as soon as possible afterward so that we can stay caught up with the work we are doing together. On a rather sour note, more than two absences could be cause for failure in this class.

2. Above average and excellent students tend to spend six to eight hours outside of class preparing for and reflecting upon each class section. Many, of course, “get by” with less; but that is often the difference between adequate and excellent.
3. These students tend to be “active” rather than “passive” learners. This means that they engage the subject matter as partners in dialogue rather than merely as receptacles of information. The active learner asks questions of the subject and takes initiative in pursuing related lines of inquiry.
4. Above average and excellent students seem to be persons who are willing to change and grow in their understanding. They have what might be called “critical flexibility,” which means that they do not remain rigidly fixed to particular patterns of thinking, nor do they change just because they encounter something new. Rather, they constantly test their thinking according to the truth they discover. They are more concerned to grow in understanding than they are to prove certain ideas right or wrong.

Statement on Disabilities

“Students requiring accommodations for a disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting or as soon as possible. The instructor will refer you to the ACCESS and Accommodation Office to document your disability, determine eligibility for accommodations under the ADA/Section 504 and to request a Faculty Accommodation Form. Disability accommodations or status will not be indicated on academic transcripts. In order to receive accommodations in a class, students with sensory, learning, psychological, physical or medical disabilities must provide their instructor with a Faculty Accommodation Form to sign. Students must return the signed form to the ACCESS Coordinator. A new form must be requested each semester. Students with a history of a disability, perceived as having a disability or with a current disability who do not wish to use academic accommodations are also strongly encouraged to register with the ACCESS and Accommodation Office and request a Faculty Accommodation Form each semester. For further information, please contact Carole Burrowbridge, Director and ADA/504 Coordinator, at 301-2778 or visit the ACCESS and Accommodation Office website at <http://www.mercer.edu/disabilityservices>” * (07/13)

HONOR CODE

All of the members of this class will conduct themselves according to the guidelines of the Mercer Honor System as outlined in the Lair. Specifically within the context of essays, the thoughts and/or words of other people must be fully acknowledged with appropriate notes. Plagiarism, even inadvertent plagiarism, is a serious offense. If you any questions about proper citation of sources, talk to the instructor before submitting a paper. Your own work for another course may not be submitted for a grade in this course.

CELLULAR PHONE AND PAGER USE

Out of courtesy for all those participating in the learning experience, all cell phones and pagers must be turned **off** before entering any classroom, lab, or formal academic or performance event. If this becomes a problem, the teacher reserves the right to remove the phone and/or the student from the class.

Schedule of Assignments (I reserve to make changes to this schedule.)		
Date	Reading	Writing
Aug. 19 Aug. 21	Introduction <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (Bks. I & II)	
Aug. 26 Aug. 28	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (III & IV) <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (V & VI)	
Sept. 2 Sept. 4	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (VII & VIII) <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (IX & X)	
Sept. 9 Sept. 11	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (XI) <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> (XII & Epilogue)	
Sept. 16 Sept. 18 Sept. 19	Thomas Cole's "View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm" ("The Oxbow") <i>Twilight of the Idols</i> (Foreword-"The Four Great Errors")	Essay 1
Sept. 23 Sept. 25	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i> ("Improvers" - "The Hammer Speaks") "Experiments in Plant Hybridization" (1865), Gregor Mendel, Sections 1-11	
Sept. 30 Oct. 2	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> (Pts 1, 2, & 3) Fall Break	
Oct. 7 Oct. 9	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> (con't) <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (1-28)	
Oct. 14 Oct. 16	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (28-36; 67-105) <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (105-122; 203-217)	
Oct. 21 Oct. 23	"The Death of Ivan Ilych"(Ch 1-4) "The Death of Ivan Ilych" (Ch 5-12)	
Oct. 28 Oct. 30	<i>Souls</i> , "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," "Of the Wings of Atalanta" & "Of the Training of Black Men" <i>Souls</i> , "Of the Faith of the Fathers," "Of the Passing of the First-Born," "Of the Coming of John," & "The Sorrow Songs"	
Nov. 4 Nov. 6 Nov. 7	<i>Verklarte Nacht (Transfigured Night)</i> , opus 4 (1899) <i>The Tower</i> ("Sailing to Byzantium," "The Tower," "Meditations in Time of Civil War")	Essay 2
Nov. 11 Nov. 13	<i>Tower</i> ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," "The Wheel," "Youth and Age," "The New Faces," "A Prayer for My Son," "Leda and the Swan,") Einstein	
Nov. 18 Nov. 22	<i>Civilization and its Discontents</i> (Ch's 1-4) <i>Civilization and its Discontents</i> (Ch's 5-8)	
Nov. 25 Nov. 27	NO CLASS Thanksgiving	
Dec. 2 Dec. 4	<i>The Stranger</i> (Part 1) <i>The Stranger</i> (Part 2)	
Dec. 11	Final (2-5p.m.)	Essay 4

