

DAY ONE

Junior Comps 2017
Wesleyan University
College of Letters

Focus: COL 241 ANTIQUITY, Fall 2015
(Fitzpatrick and Irani)

Part One: Write an 1800-word essay on ONE of the following topics.

I. Argument and Philosophy

In the *Apology* Socrates recounts to the Athenian jury his attempt, in the wake of a Delphic revelation, to find fellow citizens wiser than he is. He tests politicians, poets, and technicians for their wisdom and discovers that they know less than they think do about what it means to lead a choice-worthy life. He also notices that this is not a discovery that his disabused interlocutors relish; Socrates has been winning arguments but losing friends. Many of his new enemies now sit in judgment of him, as he tries to explain, with his life hanging in the balance, why he values above all else a philosophical life.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates insists that it is better to lose an argument than to persuade others and perhaps oneself of an untruth. Here are his words, addressed to Gorgias, a well-known teacher of rhetoric (458a, p. 802):

For my part, I'd be pleased to continue questioning you if you're the same kind of man I am; otherwise I would drop it. And what kind of man am I? One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say anything untrue, and who would be pleased to refute anyone who says anything untrue; one who, however, wouldn't be any less pleased to be refuted than to refute. For I count being refuted a greater good, insofar as it is a greater good for oneself to be delivered from the worst thing there is than to deliver someone else from it.

Using the *Apology* and the *Gorgias* as your primary textual resources, reflect on what the proper place of argument is in the life of the philosopher. How does Socrates avoid (if he does) confusing love of victory with desire for the truth? Why might it be important to avoid such confusion?

II. Original Darkness

In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, the evangelist writes of the Word that creates all things and of the light that resists being overcome by the darkness (John 1:5: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.") Reflect on the nature of the darkness here. Does it bear affinity with any or all of the following: the

antics of Eden in *The Book of Baruch*, the pandemonium released by Pandora in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the rebelliousness of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*?

III. The Spectacle of Grief

In book IV of Vergil's *Aeneid* we meet up with a devastated Dido. She tells her sister Anna to deliver these words to Aeneas, a last desperate plea for a lifeline of sanity (IV.424-434, p. 82):

Go, sister, kneel to my proud enemy.
I was no Greek at Aulis when they swore
To smash his race. I sent no fleet to Troy,
Nor made his father's ghost and ashes homeless.
How can he block his ears against my words?
Where is he running? As a last sad love gift,
He ought to wait for winds that make it easy.
I do not plead the marriage he betrayed.
Let the man go be king in charming Latium.
I just want time, a pause to heal my mind
And teach myself to mourn in my defeat.

When Aeneas hears of Dido's plea, he sheds empty tears (*lacrimae inanes*) and remains steadfast about leaving (IV.448-450, p. 83):

In his noble heart he suffered,
But tears did nothing. He resolve endured.

Dido will go mad and take her own life. Vergil writes, IV.696, p. 90: "There was no fate or justice in her death."

Use the case of Dido to reflect on whether there is a wise way to enter into another person's grief.

As you reflect, enter into conversation both with Augustine, who in his *Confessions* (4.13.21, pp. 15-16) sharply rebukes himself for having entered into the spectacle of Dido's grief, and with Marcus Aurelius, who seems generally mistrustful of matching grief with grief. See especially book 5, section 36, of the *Meditations*:

Don't let the impression of other people's grief carry you away indiscriminately. Help them, yes, as best you can and as the case deserves, even if their grief is for the loss of something indifferent: but do not imagine their loss as any real harm—that is the wrong way of thinking.

IV Inherited Glory

In his fragmentary essay “Homer’s Contest,” Nietzsche suggests that the root of Plato’s antagonism to Homer lay in an “overwhelming craving to assume the place of the overthrown poet and to inherit his glory.” Regardless of what one thinks of Nietzsche’s specific claim here, this question of the glory owed to a poet or writer features explicitly or implicitly in many of the works you have read. Drawing on at least three authors, show how the question of the author’s fame does, or does not, inform and structure their work.

Part Two: Select one among the following passages and write a critical interpretation of it of approximately 1,800 words. Make reference to at least two other texts in your response.

I. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.81-83:

Darius was the third to speak. ‘I support,’ he said, ‘all Megabyzus’ remarks about the masses but I do not agree with what he said of oligarchy. Take the three forms of government we are considering – democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy – and suppose each of them to be the best of its kind; I maintain that the third is greatly preferable to the other two. One ruler: it is impossible to improve upon that – provided he is the best. His judgement will be in keeping with his character; his control of the people will be beyond reproach; his measures against enemies and traitors will be kept secret more easily than under other forms of government. In an oligarchy, the fact that a number of men are competing for distinction in the public service cannot but lead to violent personal feuds; each of them wants to get to the top, and to see his own proposals carried; so they quarrel. Personal quarrels lead to civil wars, and then to bloodshed; and from that state of affairs the only way out is a return to monarchy – a clear proof that monarchy is best. Again, in a democracy, malpractices are bound to occur; in this case, however, corrupt dealings in government services lead not to private feuds, but to close personal associations, the men responsible for them putting their heads together and mutually supporting one another. And so it goes on, until somebody or other comes forward as the people’s champion and breaks up the cliques which are out for their own interests. This wins him the admiration of the mob, and as a result he soon finds himself entrusted with absolute power – all of which is another proof that the best form of government is monarchy. To sum up: where did we get our freedom from, and who gave it us? Is it the result of democracy, or of oligarchy, or of monarchy? We were set free by one man, and therefore I propose that we should preserve that form of government, and, further, that we should refrain from changing ancient ways, which have served us well in the past. To do so would not profit us.’ These were the three views set out in the three speeches, and [83] the four men who had not spoken voted for the last. Otanes (who had urged equality before the law), finding the decision against him, then made another speech.

II. The Gospel According to John, 10:1-19:

1 "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." 19 Again the Jews were divided because of these words

III. Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.13-39

They reached the house of gold in Hecate's woods.
 Daedalus, in the story, fled King Minos,
 Venturing to the sky on speedy wings
 By a new route, he swam into the cold North
 And hung at last above the heights at Cumae.
 This land first took him in. He offered Phoebus
 His wings – like oars – and built him a vast temple,
 With Androgeos' death carved on the door, and Athens
 Paying – how pitiful! – her yearly fine:
 Seven sons' lives. The urn is there, the lots drawn.
 Beside this scene, Crete looms above the sea:
 The brutal passion for the bull; Pasiphae,
 His mate by stealth; their human-bovine offspring,
 The Minotaur, memorial of depraved lust;
 And the hopeless, wearying maze beneath the palace.
 But pitying the deep love of the princess,
 Daedalus solved his own entrapping riddle,

With a thread to guide the lost. You, Icarus,
 But for your father's grief, would play a large role
 In that great artwork. Twice his hands failed, trying
 To show your fall in gold. Now, with Achates
 Gone in, the Trojans would have scanned each image;
 But he came quickly back, with Glaucus' daughter,
 Deiphobe, Phoebus and Diana's priestess,
 Who told the king, "This is no time for gawking.
 Come, offer seven calves out of a fresh herd,
 And seven ewes as well, correctly chosen."

IV. Plato, *Apology* 20-21:

You know Chaerephon. He was my friend from youth, and the friend of most of you, as he shared your exile and your return. You surely know the kind of man he was, how impulsive in any course of action. He went to Delphi at one time and ventured to ask the oracle — as I say, gentlemen, do not create a disturbance — he asked if any man was wiser than I, and the Pythian replied that no one was wiser. Chaerephon is dead, but his brother will testify to you about this.

Consider that I tell you this because I would inform you about the origin of the slander. When I heard of this reply I asked myself: "Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so." For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this; I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: "This man is wiser than I, but you said I was." Then, when I examined this man — there is no need for me to tell you his name, he was one of our public men — my experience was something like this: I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not. I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but that he was not. As a result he came to dislike me, and so did many of the bystanders. So I withdrew and thought to myself: "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know."

DAY TWO (Wetzel's Questions)

Junior Comps 2017
Wesleyan University
College of Letters

Focus COL 243 MIDDLE AGES, Fall 2016
(Leservot and Torgerson)

Part One: Write an 1800-word essay on ONE of the following topics.

I. The Quality of Martyrdom

Here is an excerpt from Urban II's exhortation at the Council of Clermont, as reported by Guibert of Nogent:

If in olden times the Maccabees attained to the highest praise of piety because they fought for the ceremonies and the Temple, it is also justly granted you, Christian soldiers, to defend the liberty of your country by armed endeavor. If you, likewise, consider that the abode of the holy apostles and any other saints should be striven for with such effort, why do you refuse to rescue the Cross, the Blood, the Tomb? Why do you refuse to visit them, to spend the price of your lives in rescuing them? You have thus far waged unjust wars, at one time and another; you have brandished mad weapons to your mutual destruction, for no other reason than covetousness and pride, as a result of which you have deserved eternal death and sure damnation. We now hold out to you wars which contain the glorious reward of martyrdom, which will retain that title of praise now and forever.

Reflect on this passage within the broader context of the exhortation in its various versions and within Fulcher of Chartres's chronicle of the first crusade. What is Urban II's ideal of martyrdom? What is (as far as you can tell from the historical sources) the reality? Is the ideal that Urban espouses consistent with the martyrdom that is glorified in the early church document, *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*?

II. Manifesting an Unseen Order

At the start of chapter 4 of his *Rule*, Benedict invokes the great love commandment, to be found in all three synoptic gospels: "Love the Lord God with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Ponder: if love of God requires everything of the human lover (whole heart, whole soul, whole strength), what room does such a totalizing love leave for love of neighbor

or self? Describe Benedict's attempt to order a space for human love that is both God-oriented and neighborly (or at least fraternal), and then compare Benedict's efforts with Bernard of Clairvaux's arguably more radical type of resolution. See, for example, from Sermon 2 of Bernard's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, the passage that concludes section III.6:

If the mediator is to be acceptable to both parties, equally dependable in the eyes of both, then let him who is God's Son become man, let him become the Son of Man, and fill me with assurance by the kiss of his mouth. When I come to recognize that he is truly mine, then I shall feel secure in welcoming the Son of God as mediator. Not even a shadow of mistrust can then exist, for after all he is my brother, and my own flesh. It is impossible that I should be spurned by him who is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh.

Which sensibility—Benedict's or Bernard's—is in your judgment more in keeping with Augustine's confessional self-rendering?

III. The Anatomy of Love

Compare Dante's love for Beatrice in *Purgatorio*, cantos XXXI and XXXIII, with the knight's love of his neighbor's wife in *Laüstic*, one of Marie de France's lays, and give some thought to how Thomas Aquinas might have drawn the distinction between these two loves. Is there a difference in your mind between the secularization of love and love's corruption, and does that difference apply here?

Part Two: Select one among the following passages and write a critical interpretation of it of approximately 1,800 words. Make reference to at least two other texts in your response.

I. Augustine, *Confessions* 10.27.38

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.

II. Dante, *Inferno* Canto 1:1-10

Midway on our life's journey, I found myself
 In dark woods, the right road lost. To tell
 About those woods is hard—so tangled and rough

And savage that thinking of it now, I feel
 The old fear stirring: death is hardly more bitter.
 And yet, to treat the good I found there as well

I'll tell what I saw, though how I came to enter
 I cannot well say, being so full of sleep
 Whatever moment it was I began to blunder

Off the true path.

III. Qur'an Sura 98

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy
 Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters were not about
 to change their ways until they were sent clear evidence, a messenger from God,
 reading out purified scrolls, containing true scriptures. [Yet] those who were given
 the Scripture became divided only after they were sent [such] clear evidence though
 all they were ordered to do was worship God alone, sincerely devoting their religion
 to Him as people of true faith, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, for
 that is the true religion. Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the
 idolaters will have the Fire of Hell, there to remain. They are the worst of people.
 Those who believe and do good deeds are the best of people. Their reward with their
 Lord is everlasting Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay forever.
 God is well pleased with them and they with Him. All this is for those who stand in
 awe of their Lord.

IV: *Alexander Romance* 1.1

In our opinion, Alexander the king of the Macedonians was the best and most noble
 of men, for he did everything in his own way, finding that his foresight always worked
 in harness with his virtues. When he made war against a people, the time he spent in
 his campaigns was not sufficient for those who wished to research the affairs of the
 cities. We are going now to speak of the deeds of Alexander, of the virtues of his body
 and his spirit, of his good fortune in action and his bravery; and we will begin with his
 family and his paternity. Many say that he was the son of King Philip, but they are
 deceivers. This is untrue: he was not Philip's son, but the wisest of the Egyptians say
 that he was the son of Nectanebo, after the latter had fallen from his royal state.

DAY THREE (Wetzel's questions)

Junior Comps 2017
 Wesleyan University
 College of Letters

Focus: COL 244 Early Modern, Spring 2017
 (Ponce-Hegenauer and García)

Part One: Write an 1800-word essay on ONE of the following topics.

I. The Great Revolution

In her “very concise history of western metaphysics,” the prologue to her revised Tanner Lecturers, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, 1996), Harvard philosopher Christine Korsgaard speaks of a modern revolution of perspective, whereby the ancient confidence in the fundamental unity of the real and the ideal has come to be decisively overthrown by a modern emphasis on the materiality of nature and the need to impose values. Here is Korsgaard, speaking for us moderns:

We are no longer at all puzzled about why the world, being good, is not yet good. Because for us, the world is no longer first and foremost form. It is *matter*. This is what I mean what I say there has been a revolution, and that the world has been turned inside out. The real is no longer the good. For us, reality is something *hard*, something which resists reason and value, something which is recalcitrant to form.

Using two or three paradigm figures from your early modern syllabus, either lend support to Korsgaard’s contention or suggest some grounds for doubt. If it is true that we moderns find ourselves having to impose values on a world that lacks inherent worth (“form”), is our condition one of liberation and species-maturity, or are we more like delusional knight-errants tilting at windmills?

II. Comparative Demonology

In the first meditation of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes fully radicalizes his doubt by attending to this supposition:

I will suppose that, not God, who is perfectly good and the source of truth, but some evil spirit, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me. I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all external things are no different from the illusions of our dreams, and that they are traps he has laid for my credulity; I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, and no senses, but yet as falsely believing that I have all these; I will obstinately cling to these thoughts, and in this way, if indeed it is not in my power to discover any truth, yet certainly to the best of my ability and determination I will take care not to give my assent to anything else, or to allow this deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, to impose upon me in any way.

In the Qur'an, in the figure of Iblis, we get an alternative picture of a great deceiver (see especially The Cow 2:30-37 and The Heights 7:10-24.) Attend carefully to the contrast between the two deceivers—Qur'anic and Cartesian; resistance to one presumably brings a person into conformity with "the straight path" (see The Opening), while resistance to the other unveils a *res cogitans*, a thinking power, and a new foundation for the sciences. Suppose we were to import Iblis into the first meditation and have the Qur'anic devil play the part there of the Cartesian Satan; would it be impossible to continue with the meditations on first philosophy, or could the meditations go on, though perhaps to a different end? What does your answer tell you about the role of imagination in first philosophy?

III. Tragedy New and Old

Stanley Cavell, a philosopher and an avid reader of Shakespeare, has subtly explored the notion that Shakespearean tragedy is a drama about disowning knowledge, of professing not to know, despite the mortal consequences, of what cannot simply not be known. Here are his words on *Othello*, taken from the introduction to *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1987):

What specifically for me is at stake epistemologically in the allegory of Othello and Desdemona is my finding that Othello's radical, consuming doubt is not caused by Iago's rumoring. Othello rather seizes upon Iago's suggestions as effects or covers for something the object has itself already revealed, and claimed, despite its most fervent protestations to the contrary. In this way Othello's jealousy itself is an unstable, turned concept. He seeks a possession that is not in opposition to another's claim or desire but one that establishes an absolute or inalienable bonding to himself, to which no claim or desire *could* be opposed, could conceivably count; as if the jealousy is directed to the sheer existence of the other, its separateness from him.

Take Cavell's way into Shakespearean tragedy and, more specially, into *Othello*, as suggestive rather than definitive. Develop your own reading of *Othello*, and then bring what you have come up with to *Oedipus* (also a drama that invites reflection on the disowning of knowledge). Is there an essential difference between the tragic vision of a Shakespeare and that of a Sophocles, and, if so, is it a difference that speaks to a divide between antique and early modern sensibilities?

Part Two: Select one among the following passages and write a critical interpretation of it of approximately 1,800 words. Make reference to at least two other texts in your response.

I. Cervantes, *Don Quixote* Part I Chapter 9

"This is how I happened to find it: One day when I was in the Alcana market in Toledo, a boy came by to sell some notebooks and old papers to a silk merchant; as I am very fond of reading, even torn papers in the streets, I was moved by my natural inclinations to pick up one of the volumes the boy was selling, and I saw that it was written in characters I knew to be Arabic. And since I recognized but could not read it, I looked around to see if some Morisco who knew Castilian, and could read it for me, was in the vicinity, and it was not very difficult to find this sort of interpreter, for even if I had sought a speaker of a better and older language, I would have found him. In short, fortune provided me with one, and when I told him what I wanted and placed the book in his hands, he opened it in the middle, read for a short while, and began to laugh."

II. Machiavelli *The Prince* Section 15

"Many writers have dreamed up republics and principalities such as have never been seen or known in the real world. And attending to them is dangerous, because the gap between how men live and how they ought to live is so wide that any prince who thinks in terms not of how people do behave but of how they ought to behave will destroy his power rather than maintaining it. A man who tries to act virtuously will soon come to grief at the hands of the unscrupulous people surrounding him. Thus, a prince who wants to keep his power must learn how to act immorally, using or not using this skill according to necessity."

III. from Montaigne *On Cannibals*

Now, to return to my subject, I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. *There* is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manners in all things. Those people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild. The former retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural, virtues and properties, which we have debased in the latter in adapting them to gratify our corrupted taste.

IV. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4. 438-474

To whom thus Eve replied. Oh thou for whom
 And from whom I was formed, flesh of thy flesh,
 And without whom am to no end, my guide
 And head, what thou hast said is just and right.
 For we to him indeed all praises owe,
 And daily thanks; I chiefly, who enjoy
 So far the happier lot, enjoying thee

Pre-eminent by so much odds, while thou
Like consort to thyself canst no where find.
That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found myself reposed
Under a shade on flowers, much wondering where
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
Pure as the expanse of Heaven; I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me: I started back,
It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love: There I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me; 'What thou seest,
'What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself;
'With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
'And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
'Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
'Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
'Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear
'Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called
'Mother of human race.' What could I do,
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?