

Honors Seminar 102
Spring 2006
1:00 - 2:15 TTh – SMBHC 106

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and by appointment

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Course Description

As your year-long journey continues, we will once again ask fundamental questions that may or may not have satisfactory answers. Last term we explored who we are and what or who defines us. We sought to better understand the nature of personal identity, and the societal forces that influence it. This semester we will search for universal connections, linking the forces of religion, nature, and science to our daily lives. We will continue to refine our analytical and expressive abilities, which in some cases will require placing aside preconceived notions and opening ourselves to new possibilities. We will continue a journey that has no end, and that instead leads us to focus on our place among each other and the cosmos.

Course Requirements and Grade

Journal writing/informal essays	10%
Semi-formal essays (6 at 2 pages each)	20%
Formal essays (3 at 7 pages each)	40%
Participation	15%
Examination/group project	15%

Honors 102 aims to develop critical thinking and mature writing skills. To these ends, the course is writing-intensive, requiring a significant amount of semi-formal (12 pages) and formal (20) essay work. In addition, we will be engaging in regular informal journal writing as a means of stimulating thought and discussion on our readings and whatever else we may find.

Honors College Academic Regulations

Academic integrity is essential to all the values upon which the university is founded. Honors students must therefore embody academic honesty in all aspects of their work. A student with a documented case of plagiarism or academic cheating in an honors course will receive the grade of F for the course and will be dismissed from the Honors College.

Usually taught in seminar style with no more than sixteen students, honors courses are reading, writing and discussion intensive. Student participation is therefore essential. SMBHC maintains an attendance policy for all honors courses, both required and departmental.

Texts

The Honors faculty have selected four common texts for Honors 102. These texts are available (or at least should be depending on the current level of incompetence) at the campus bookstore. The four common texts are:

Albert Camus, *The Fall*
Edwin Abbott, *Flatland*
Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*
C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

Our class will read several additional major works, with the following being available at Square Books on the Oxford Square:

Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*
Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen*
Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*
Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *The Sirens of Titan*
James Dickey, *Deliverance*
Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders*

This one is “on the house” and should be available shortly:
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

In addition, we will read several selections compiled in a course packet available for purchase at Sir Speedy. All readings are, of course, required to be completed prior to the start of class.

Course Calendar

Introduction: What We Believe

“Toward no crime have men shown themselves so cold-bloodedly cruel as in punishing differences in belief.” James R. Lowell

“With most men, the unbelief in one thing springs from blind belief in another.”
Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

Tuesday, Jan. 17 Introduction

Thursday, Jan. 19 What I Believe

Religion and Science: General Frameworks

“Fortunately science, like the nature to which it belongs, is neither limited by time nor by space. It belongs to the world, and is of no country and no age. The more we know the more we feel our ignorance; the more we feel how much remains unknown; and in philosophy, the sentiment of the Macedonian hero can never apply, - there are always new worlds to conquer.”

Sir Humphry Davy.

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.” Albert Einstein

Tuesday, Jan. 24 Richard Feynman, “The Relation of Science and Religion”
Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Ch 12
Carl Sagan, “Can We Know the Universe?”

Origins I

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.....”

“In the beginning there was nothing. God said ‘let there be light’ and there was light. There was still nothing, but you could see it a whole lot better.” Ellen DeGeneres

Thursday, Jan. 26 Genesis
Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*
Psalms, 19
The Debate Over Intelligent Design – A First Look

Running with the Devil

“The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.” Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 1911

“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The devil tempts all other men, but idle men tempt the devil.” Turkish proverb

“The Devil made me do it.” Multiple authors.

Tuesday, Jan. 31 C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

Thursday, Feb. 2 Albert Camus, *The Fall*

Tuesday, Feb. 7 Albert Camus, *The Fall*

Seeking Answers in Faith

“Beth could not reason upon or explain the faith that gave her courage and patience to give up life, and cheerfully wait for death. Like a confiding child, she asked no questions, but left everything to God and nature, Father and Mother of us all, feeling sure that they, and they only, could teach and strengthen heart and spirit for this life and the life to come.”

Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*.

“Disillusion comes only to the illusioned. One cannot be disillusioned of what one never put faith in.” Dorothy Thompson

“A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and thoughts will determine our lives and our character. Therefore it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thursday, Feb. 9 Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People”
Larry Brown, “A Roadside Resurrection”

Spiritual Journeys

“Personal answers to ultimate questions. That is what we seek.” Alexander Eliot

*“Yet the Lord pleads with you still: Ask what the good road is,
The godly paths you used to walk in, in the days of long ago.
Travel there, and you will find rest for your souls.”* Jeremiah 6:16

“We don’t receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey than no one can take us or spare us.” Proust

Tuesday, Feb. 14 Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Thursday, Feb. 16 Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

Tuesday, Feb. 21 Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders*

Thursday, Feb. 23 Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders*

Science and Reason: Science and Pseudo-Science – A Candle in the Dark

“We are all tattooed in our cradles with the beliefs of our tribe; the record may seem superficial, but it is indelible. You cannot educate a man wholly out of superstitious fears which were implanted in his imagination, no matter how utterly his reason may reject them.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. 1841-1935

"It is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring." Carl Sagan

"Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition." Adam Smith
Tuesday, Feb. 28 Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, Chapters 1, 2, 14
Carl Sagan, "What's Really Going On?"
Richard Dawkins, "Good and Bad Reasons for Believing"
Stephen Jay Gould, "Sex, Drugs, Disasters, and the Extinction of Dinosaurs"

Thursday, March 2 No class: instructor attending Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics

Origins II

"Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for purpose." Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, p. 1

"After sleeping through a hundred million centuries we have finally opened our eyes on a sumptuous planet, sparkling with color, bountiful with life. Within decades we must close our eyes again. Isn't it a noble, an enlightened way of spending our brief time in the sun, to understand the universe and how we came to wake up in it? This is how I answer when I am asked – as I am surprisingly often – why I bother to get up in the mornings." Richard Dawkins

"All the ills from which America suffers can be traced back to the teaching of William Jennings Bryan"

"While the rest of the species is descended from apes, redheads are descended from cats."
Mark Twain

Tuesday, March 7 An Introduction to Evolutionary Biology
Stephen Jay Gould, "Evolution as Fact and Theory"
The Scientific Study of Origins: Some Questions and Answers about Evolution and Creationism

Reconciling Science and Religion?

"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." Albert Einstein

"All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree." Albert Einstein

"It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it." Albert Einstein

"Since religion intrinsically rejects empirical methods, there should never be any attempt to reconcile scientific theories with religion. An infinitely old universe, always evolving may not be

compatible with the Book of Genesis. However, religions such as Buddhism get along without having any explicit creation mythology and are in no way contradicted by a universe without a beginning or end. Creatio ex nihilo, even as religious doctrine, only dates to around AD 200. The key is not to confuse myth and empirical results, or religion and science." H. Alfven

Thursday, March 9 Richard Dawkins, "Is Science a Religion"
Jonathan Barlow, "A Reformed Response to Richard Dawkins' 'Is Science a Religion'"
H. Allen Orr, "Gould on God"

March 13 - 17 Spring Break

Science, Morality, and Ethics

"Whenever science makes a discovery, the devil grabs it while the angels are debating the best way to use it." Alan Valentine

"How is one to live a moral and compassionate existence when one is fully aware of the blood, the horror inherent in life, when one finds darkness not only in one's culture but within oneself? If there is a stage at which an individual life becomes truly adult, it must be when one grasps the irony in its unfolding and accepts responsibility for a life lived in the midst of such paradox. One must live in the middle of contradiction, because if all contradiction were eliminated at once life would collapse. There are simply no answers to some of the great pressing questions. You continue to live them out, making your life a worthy expression of leaning into the light."

Barry Lopez

"Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not simply good, be good for something." Henry David Thoreau

"Let me give you the definition of ethics: it is good to maintain life and to further life. It is bad to damage and destroy life. And this ethic, profound and universal, has the significance of a religion. It is religion" Albert Schweitzer

Tuesday, March 21 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Thursday, March 23 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Tuesday, March 28 Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen*
Thursday, March 30 Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen*

Religion, Science, and Spirituality in the Modern World

"The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are." Joseph Campbell

"All earthly delights are sweeter in expectation than in enjoyment; all spiritual pleasures more in fruition than expectation." Francois FeNelon

“The most spiritual human beings, assuming they are the most courageous, also experience by far the most painful tragedies: but it is precisely for this reason that they honor life, because it brings against them its most formidable weapons.” Friedrich Nietzsche

Tuesday, April 4 Movie: Being There
Thursday, April 6 Movie: Being There

Tuesday, April 11 Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*
Thursday, April 13 Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*

Man and Nature

“What we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be power exercised by some men over other men with nature as its instrument.” C.S. Lewis

“Nature is not only all that is visible to the eye – it also includes the inner pictures of the mind.” Edward Munch

“Gentlemen.....look around you at the gifts of God, the clear sky, the pure air, the tender grass, the birds; nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, only we, are godless and foolish, and we don’t understand that life is a paradise, for we have only to understand that and it will at once be fulfilled in all its beauty, we shall embrace each other and weep.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

“Human nature is potentially aggressive and destructive and potentially orderly and constructive.” Margaret Mead

Tuesday, April 18 Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace* (selected essays)

Thursday, April 20 James Dickey, *Deliverance*
Tuesday, April 25 James Dickey, *Deliverance*

Thursday, April 27 Pam Houston, “A Blizzard Under Blue Sky”
Rick Bass, “Mississippi”
Rick Bass, “In Ruth’s Country”
Rick Bass, “Redfish”

Final Thoughts: Our Place in the Universe

“We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the universe. That makes us something very special.” Stephen Hawking

“The sun, with all the planets revolving around it, and depending on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as though it had nothing else in the Universe to do.” Galileo Galilei

“The celestial order and beauty of the universe compel us to admit that there is excellent and eternal Being, who deserves the respect and homage of men.” Anonymous

“The surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is that it has never tried to contact us.” Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip

Tuesday, May 2 Edwin Abbott, *Flatland*
 Brian Greene, “The Time We Thought We Knew”

Thursday, May 4 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *The Sirens of Titan*