

Spring 2014 Graduate Institute Preceptorial Descriptions

Herodotus' *Histories*

Herodotus' *Histories* concern the invasion of the Greek cities by the Persian Empire. He calls his work a "history," meaning an inquiry and what is learned by inquiring. We will consider the questions his opening paragraph raises – why should we inquire into the past, what actions are worthy of our attention, how do we examine them, what wisdom might they contain?

Text: Please use a translation in which the paragraphs are numbered.

First Assignment: Book I, paragraphs 1-94. (The second assignment, the rest of Book I, begins with "The next task of this account is to learn more about Cyrus, the man who destroyed Croesus' empire" or words to that effect.)

Tutor: Ms. Deborah Axelrod

This preceptorial applies to the Philosophy & Theology, Politics & Society, and History segments.

St. Augustine, *The City of God*

This book, a Christianity-based theology of history, is one of the cornerstones of Western thought, ranking with Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, Aristotle's *Politics*, and the histories of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon. It presents two cities, the earthly (Bks. I-XI) and the heavenly (Bks. XII-XXII), their origins, histories, and destinies. We'll read the whole, 55 pages weekly on average, some readings as short as 35 pages, others as long as 75. Everyone (including the Tutor) will write a one-page summary of each reading (about 300 words, double-spaced, typed, to be handed in); we'll typically read several aloud to begin each meeting.

Text: Any translation of the complete text may be used. The Bookstore will stock the Modern Library ed., trans. Marcus Dods, ISBN 0679783199.

First Assignment: Book XIX (Philosophical Opinions about the Good; Comparison with Christian belief regarding Happiness), sections 1-28, pp. 669-709 in the Dods translation.

Tutor: Mr. William Braithwaite

This preceptorial applies to the Philosophy & Theology, Politics & Society, and History segments.

Plato's *Meno* in Greek

Plato's *Meno* begins abruptly with the question, How is ἀρετή (= virtue or human excellence) acquired? Can it be taught? But Socrates immediately diverts attention to what he considers the prior question, *What is virtue?* – *i.e.* virtue-as-a-whole, as opposed to the particular virtues. This "What is" (= τί ἐστὶ) question is the Socratic question. Socrates' interlocutors are Meno and Anytos, both less than friendly to Socrates. Meno is μένων (= the intransigent one), and Anytos will later bring charges against Socrates. There is also an episode with a boy slave of Meno's, which turns out to have supreme significance. As the dialogue proceeds questions of power and ruling seem at crucial points to occlude questions about virtue and about teaching and learning – which suggests a tension between conversation as a genuinely joint inquiry and conversation as a power struggle. We will also pay close attention to the mimetic aspect of the dialogue – *i.e.* the dramatic exhibition of 1) Meno's refusal to make the attempt to pursue the "What is" of ἀρετή, as well as of 2) the counterexample of the slave-boy's attempt, under Socrates' prodding, to acquire ἀρετή in pursuit of its "whatness." Through this drama we hope to come to see the essential

importance of this ἐπίδειξις, or exhibited example, and its particular relevance to the two intertwined questions: What is ἀρετή? and How is it acquired? We will translate substantial sections of the *Meno*, and may look as well at selected passages in English from other dialogues.

Required Text: Mollin and Williamson, *An Introduction to Ancient Greek* (ISBN-10: 0761808531, ISBN-13: 978-0761808534), which contains the complete Greek text of the *Meno* plus notes, starting on page 309.

First Assignment: a) Read the entire *Meno* in English for the first class, and b) translate the beginning, from 70a1 – 70c3 (around 14 lines).

Tutor: Mr. Jon Lenkowski

This preceptorial applies to the Philosophy & Theology, Politics & Society, and History segments.

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*

Students will read the two classic studies of the culminating event of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution: Burke's *Reflections* (1790) and Tocqueville's *Ancien Régime* (1856). Edmund Burke, one of the founding thinkers of modern conservatism, strongly criticizes the French for breaking violently with their past, scorning tradition, while following the naked prescriptions of reason. He contrasts their experience with that of the English, who, he argues, respected tradition and the patient movements of time that led to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Tocqueville devoted his life to the study of the American and French democratic regimes, in order that their complex lessons of liberty and equality might be learned, in hope and fear. In his book on the old regime, he examines the social, political, and economic causes of the French Revolution and its momentous consequences.

Recommended Texts: Burke, *Reflections*, Yale University Press, ISBN 978-0300099799; Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*, Anchor Books, ISBN 978-0385092609.

First Assignment: Pages 3-42 of Burke's *Reflections*.

Tutor: Mr. Louis Petrich

This preceptorial applies to the Politics & Society and History segments.

Benedict Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*

Benedict Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, published anonymously in 1677, is a sustained examination of issues and claims concerning the authority of sacred scriptures, the knowledge of God, the foundations of political authority and the nature of the best regime. In today's violent world of enduring theological-political conflicts, Spinoza's insights continue to be compelling.

Text: Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Martin Yaffe translation (Focus Philosophical Library) ISBN-10: 1585100854, ISBN-13: 978-1585100859.

First Assignment: Title page and Preface.

Tutor: Ms. Judith Seeger

This preceptorial applies to the Philosophy & Theology and Politics & Society segments.