How did our universe come to be? How did human beings form ideas about themselves and the universe? What does it mean to be conscious beings, members of a species, alive in a vast universe? How do we define meaning, freedom, good and evil? This course focuses on the big questions of philosophy, religion, science and everyday human life. As we discuss the concerns of the course we will begin to discover how to frame questions, how to think both critically and with originality, how to explore together questions which tie us to all of human history.

**Required Reading**

Book of Genesis, King James Version of the Bible  
Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*  
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*  
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*  
George Eliot, *Middlemarch*  
Selected Handouts on Scientific Theory, Evolution, and some Poetry

**Class Schedule**

8/27 Introduction to the course; Get to know a little about each other  
9/3 Read and discuss Genesis  
9/10 Read and discuss *The Oresteia*  
9/17 Read and discuss Carl Sagan handout  
9/24 First paper due  
10/1 Read and discuss *Civilization and its Discontents*  
10/8 Read and discuss handout on evolution  
10/15 Read and discuss *Heart of Darkness*  
10/22 Second paper due  
10/29 Read and discuss *Middlemarch*, Books 1,2,3  
11/5 Read and discuss *Middlemarch*, Books 4,5,6  
11/12 Read and discuss *Middlemarch*, Books 7,8  
11/19 Third paper due; Poetry handouts  
11/26 Oral Presentations based on one of your papers  
12/3 Oral Presentations and Wrap Up
Class Philosophy

This class is very much a collective endeavor. We will discuss together what we read and each student is expected to come prepared and to participate in the discussion. Reading is due on the day assigned and is intended to form the basis of stimulating and thoughtful discussion. Students are responsible not just to themselves but also to all other students in the class. The class can only be successful to the extent that everyone prepares and participates. Different students may have very different reactions to, and interpretations of, what we read. These differences help us to think more clearly and comprehensively.

Assignments – We will discuss these in more detail in class.

1. Reading Journal – 20% of your grade – You will keep a reading journal for each reading assignment. Each journal should be approximately 1 page (longer is OK if you are bursting with ideas) and should be the place where you reflect on what you have read, react to it, ask questions you would like to discuss further or questions about things you do not understand. I will collect the journal entries before each class where a reading assignment is due and return them the following class. These will not be graded, only checked off; they will form a basis for class discussion. It helps to get discussion going when you have written down your responses to the reading in advance.

2. First Paper – 20% of grade – 5 pages - Discussion of some unifying idea that ties together reading from Genesis, The Oresteia, and handouts.


4. Third Paper – 20% of grade – 5 pages – Relate some theme from Middlemarch to some overall theme of the course.

5. Oral Presentation – 20% - 10 minute presentation to the class of one of your papers. You choose which one. You are encouraged to present in an original format.

In grading, I will also take into account your class participation which can raise or lower your grade by one notch, e.g. from B to B+ or B to B-.