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 identity, 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, chapters 1-11, King James Version of the Bible (available on the web at http://etext.lib.virginia.edu)
Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*
Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
Selected Handouts on Scientific Theory, Evolution, and some Poetry

**Class Schedule**

8/31 Introduction to the course; Get to know a little about each other; Origins of What?
9/7 Read and discuss Genesis and other creation stories
9/14 Read and discuss *The Oresteia*
9/21 Film: “The Return of Martin Guerre”
9/28 Read and discuss Carl Sagan handout on origins of the universe, Guest Lecture by Prof. Pete Markowitz, FIU Physics Department
10/5 Read and discuss Carl Sagan handout on evolution; Paper #1 Due
10/12 Read and discuss *The Communist Manifesto*
10/19 Read and discuss *Civilization and its Discontents*
10/26 Read Campbell McGrath poems handout; Guest Lecture by Professor Campbell McGrath, FIU Creative Writing program
11/2 Read and discuss *Metamorphosis*; Paper #2 Due
11/9  Read Denise Duhamel poems handout; Guest Lecture by Professor Denise Duhamel, FIU Creative Writing program
11/16  Biscayne Bay Campus as Text
11/23  Read and discuss *Oryx and Crake*; Paper #3 Due
12/30  Poetry Presentations
12/7   Poetry Presentations and Wrap Up

(Syllabus is subject to change as the semester progresses; guest lectures are tentative.)

**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 (I will note, however, if they are shallow or give no evidence of having done the reading); 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 on cosmology and evolution.


4. Third Paper – 25% of grade – 5 pages – What happens after the final page of *Oryx and Crake*? Write a final chapter that takes the story to a conclusion.

5. Oral Presentation – 10% - 10 minute presentation to the class. Students will choose a poem to present to the class that addresses one of the themes of the course. You may read or recite from memory; in either case you should present it well and explain how it
relates to the themes of the course. The poem could be chosen from the great body of world poetic literature or it could be an original work that you have written. Your poetic presentation could be supplemented with art or music. In any case it should connect to themes of the course.

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-.

**Honors Fall Semester Events – Important Dates**

Friday, September 9 – Wolfsonian Reception for Honors College Freshmen  
Monday, September 26 – Honors College Convocation  
Thursday, November 10 – Honors College Fall Excellence Lecture