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, reality, truth, good and evil? How do we determine what is true and real? 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** (Please use the texts provided in the FIU Bookstore. We need to use the same versions and translations for easy page reference and citation) (It is not necessary to read the editors’ and translators’ introductions)

- *Aeschylus, The Oresteia*, New Translation by Ted Hughes
- Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, abridged by Philip Appleman
- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, Norton Pb
- Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, Ballantine Pb
- Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, Anchor Pb

Selected Handouts Provided in Class

**Class Schedule**

- **8/29** Introduction to the course and to each other; Read and discuss Origin Myths from Around the World (handout)
- **9/5** Read and discuss *Gilgamesh*
- **9/12** Cultural / Artistic Representations of Origins
- **9/19** Read and discuss *Oresteia*
- **9/26** Film: “Oedipus Rex”; Paper #1 due
- **10/3** Read and discuss *The Communist Manifesto*, pp.49-76, 89-91
- **10/10** Biscayne Bay Campus as Text
- **10/17** Read and discuss *Origin of Species*
- **10/24** Film: “1001”
- **10/31** Read and discuss *Civilization and Its Discontents*; Paper #2 Due
11/7  Film: “The Return of Martin Guerre”
11/14  Read and discuss Cosmos, ch. 1,2,10,11,13
11/21  Film: “Close Encounters of the Third Kind”
11/28  Read and discuss Oryx and Crake; Paper #3 Due
12/5  Poetry Presentations and Wrap Up- Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?

(Syllabus is subject to change as the semester progresses)

**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 only 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 – 10% 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 – Due 9/26 - Discussion of some unifying idea that ties together reading from Gilgamesh, The Oresteia, and handouts on creation stories. Start with an original thesis, demonstrate the likelihood and possibilities of your thesis with evidence from the assigned reading. Conclude. This is not a research paper. It is an analytical essay based on assigned reading. You do not need to consult any other sources. If you do, however, be sure to cite the source. When referring to or quoting from assigned texts it is sufficient to indicate the page number in parentheses, e.g. Gilgamesh (24).

3. Second Paper – 20% of grade – 5 pages - Discussion of some unifying idea that ties together The Communist Manifesto, Origin of Species, and Civilization and its Discontents. Start with an original thesis, demonstrate the likelihood and possibilities of your thesis with evidence from the assigned reading. Conclude. This is not a research paper. It is an analytical essay based on assigned reading. You do not need to consult any
other sources. If you do, however, be sure to cite the source. When referring to or quoting from assigned texts it is sufficient to indicate the page number in parentheses, e.g. Gilgmesh (24).

4. Third Paper – 20% 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. This is a creative assignment limited only by the story so far. Your final chapter should make sense given what has come before. You are completing Atwood’s novel; you are not starting from scratch. The difference between a good conclusion and a not so good one is the extent to which your conclusion seems integrated in style, plot, character, and conceptual concerns with Atwood’s novel. She left it open, asking her readers (I think deliberately) to supply an ending. There are many possibilities; yours should be a thoughtful one.

5. In-Class Essay on Cosmos – 20% of grade

6. 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 7, Freshman Honors Night at the Wolfsonian

Monday, October 1, Honors College Convocation, 1:00-4:00PM at UP

Monday, October 30, Fall Honors Lecture, 12:30 at MARC Pavilion, UP

Other Interesting Events

Miami Book Fair