

Honors 394/Winter 2018

The Disenchantment of the West: From Shakespeare to the Coen Brothers

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Office Hours: M/W right after class
Thursday, 5-6
or by appointment
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Course Website: <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwhelan/Disenchantment%20Site/index.html>

READINGS

Required:

- Weekly Readings in handouts
- Movie scripts and play texts online
- *Tribe*, Sebastian Unger
- *Irrational Man*, William Barrett
- *The Roots of Romanticism*, Isaiah Berlin

Recommended:

- *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor
- *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James
- *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade

This is a five-credit course, but its format is a little unusual. We will meet for an hour three times a week for lecture and discussion. But I will also meet with you every Thursday evening for two hours for the ten-week duration of the course to watch the “Movie of the Week”. Attendance is optional, but watching the movie is required whether on Thursday evenings with the class or on your own. Watching and understanding these movies is essential for grasping the essential experience the course hopes to provide.

COURSE OBJECTIVES and APPROACH

The most important goal of education is to obtain the tools that will enable the student to live in the world more consciously. We live in it unconsciously to the degree that we do not understand the factors that shape our experience of it. To understand those continuously changing factors is a life-long task, and this course is intended to provide some of the tools that might be useful in undertaking it.

So then, the course goal is to help students to better understand the ‘construction’ of the contemporary ‘world picture’ by tracing its genealogy with a particular focus on the thinkers and artists of the last five hundred years. I would describe my angle of attack—or my interpretive frame—as shaped primarily by an integration of the hermeneutic approaches of Martin Heidegger and William James.

What that means will become clear as the course progresses, but the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his book *A Secular Age* will provide the basic conceptual frame for the ideas that I want to explore in this class. This book is too long and too difficult to require as reading for students who do not have enough background to benefit from reading it now. But key passages in the book will be made available. I would hope that by the end of the class some of you might feel ready to take on reading it in your own time.

As suggested above, this course seeks to provide you with a way of understanding changes in the ‘social imaginary’ of the North Atlantic Societies over the last five hundred years. That requires understanding what a social imaginary is, and the factors that have shaped it over the centuries. This is in part an exercise in the history of ideas in the Isaiah Berlin sense—you’ll be reading his wonderful *Roots of Romanticism* and William Barrett’s classic *Irrational Man* that take that approach. But it is also a history of how our sense of reality is shaped in the Heideggerian sense, which is Charles Taylor’s contribution. I am assigning parts of Sebastian Junger’s *Tribe*, which makes an eloquent case that our contemporary experience of modernity, for all its material benefits, promotes malaise and anxiety in a way completely foreign to the experience of our premodern ancestors,

It is in this respect a genealogy of the imagination of the “Real” over the last 2500 years in the West, but with a particular focus on the modern period. For our seat-of-the pants purposes, I’m going with the convention that modernity began in the Renaissance/Reformation era, thus from Shakespeare to the Coen brothers. Their plays and films, while not the exclusive focus of our Movie Nights, will play a larger role than any other artists. Whether we are, in fact, still “moderns” is something we will try to determine.

While I hope to challenge you, I have no desire to confuse or frustrate you. I will assume that you have no background and that ideas like hermeneutics, critical theory, the Jamesian Real, social imaginary, modern/postmodern, post-structuralism, etc., will all have to be explained. I look forward to the challenge of making such ideas available for your use in such a way that (I hope) will transform the way you experience and think about the world you live in.

I will be throwing a lot at you especially in the first couple of weeks, but by the end of the quarter, if I do my job in the way that I hope to, things will begin to sort out, and you will see that some of the confusing or obscure-seeming ideas presented in Week 1 light up the kinds of things we’ll be talking about in Week 10.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Since an important dimension to this course is thinking with the ideas you will be taught, I will be calling on each of you randomly to give you the opportunity to think on your feet--or in your seat, as the case may be. In order to participate effectively, you will have to integrate the information presented to you in the lectures, the movies, and the readings as we go along.

GRADING

You will have two diary submissions each in the 4k to 5K word range. Each are worth 100 points. The rubric for it is located in the right column on the course website. There will be a final project, and the prompt rubric for that will also be posted on the course website. It will be worth 200 points. There will be a final oral exam. You will set a 15-20 minute meeting with me during the last two weeks of the quarter to discuss themes and issues presented in class, and will be graded according to the criteria on the rubric posted on the course website. It will be worth 100 points.

These four grading opportunities add up to 500 possible points. When you know all your scores, add them up and divide by 5 to render a number on a 100-point scale. That number translates into your grade according to the following table:

Grade Scale

98.5	4.0
97	3.9
95.5	3.8
94	3.7
92.5	3.6
91	3.5
89.5	3.4
88	3.3
86.5	3.2
85	3.1
83.5	3.0
82	2.9
80.5	2.8
79	2.7
77.5	2.6
76	2.5
74.5	2.4
73	2.3
71.5	2.2
70	2.1

COURSE SCHEDULE

This schedule is aspirational. Since this is the first time I've taught this class, I expect to be making adjustments as we go along. The week's readings are more or less related to themes developed in the week's lectures. But I've tried to spread them out so that they don't get too burdensome in any given week. Some of these readings are more challenging than others, but all are interesting and important and worth the time and effort you give to them.

MN = Movie Night—Every Thursday evening at 7pm in Paccar 490

1	1/3	Introduction Some fundamentals
Coursepack		“What is a Social Imaginary?” “Is <i>Whale Rider</i> a Comedy?”
Junger		“Introduction” “The Men and the Dogs” “Calling Home from Mars”
MN1	1/4	<i>Whale Rider</i>
2	1/5	Social Imaginaries Discussion about movie and readings
Barrett		Chapter 1: “The Advent of Existentialism”
3	1/8	Disembedding 1
Coursepack		“Buffered and Porous Selves” “The Great Disembedding”
Barrett		Chapter 2: “The Encounter with Nothingness”
4	1/10	Disembedding 2
Barrett		Chapter 4: Hellenism and Hebraism

MN2	1/11	<i>The Matrix</i>	
5	1/12	<i>Matrix</i> Discussion The Great Chain of Being	
6	1/17	Medieval Imaginary Coursepack: Barrett	<i>Roman de la Rose</i> excerpt « Terence's Five Acts » Adams, "The Dynamo and the Virgin" Chapter 5: Christian Sources
MN3	1/18	<i>The Tempest</i>	
7	1/19	<i>The Tempest</i> Discussion Courtly Love	
8	1/22	Medieval Cosmology/Ontology Coursepack:	1 st Paper due Plotinus, "Sixth Tractate" Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> excerpt
9	1/24	Florentine Neoplatonism Coursepack	Robb, "Marsilio Ficino and the Platonic Academy of Florence"
MN4		<i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>	
10	1/26	<i>As You Like It</i> Discussion Coursepack	Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries"

11	1/29	Florentine Neoplatonism
Coursepack		Plato, <i>Symposium</i> excerpt Pico, <i>Oration on the Dignity of Man</i>
12	1/31	Shakespeare and the Renaissance Synthesis
Coursepack		Castiglione, <i>The Courtier</i> excerpt Lester, 'Artist as Divinity'
MN5	2/1	<i>Love's Labor Lost</i>
13	2/2	<i>Love's Labor Lost</i> Discussion Shakespeare Wrap
14	2/5	The Modern Disenchantment Project
Coursepack		Taylor, "The Disciplinary Society"
Berlin		Chapter 1 "In Search of a Definition"
15	2/7	Reformation/Religious Wars
Berlin		Chapter 2 "The First Attack on the Enlightenment" Chapter 3 "The True Fathers of Romanticism"
MN6	2/8	<i>King Lear</i>
16	2/9	<i>King Lear</i> Discussion
Berlin		Chapter 4 "The Restrained Romantics"
17	2//12	The Enlightenment Backlash

Berlin		Chapter 5 “Unbridled Romanticism” Chapter 6 “The Lasting Effects”	
18	2/14	The Romantic Backlash	
Barrett		Chapter 6: “The Flight from Laputa”	
Coursepack		<i>Shelley, In Defense of Poetry</i> excerpt	
MN7	2/15	<i>The Big Lebowski</i>	
19	2/16	Movie/Reading Discussion German Idealism	
Coursepack		Schiller, <i>Aesthetic Education</i> excerpt	
20	2/21	Existentialism 1: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche/Foucault	2nd Paper due
Barrett		Chap 7 Kierkegaard Chap 8 Nietzsche	
MN8	2/22	<i>Fargo</i>	
21	2/23	Movie/Readings Discussion	
22	2/26	Existentialism 2; Heidegger, Sartre/Camus	
Barrett		Chap 9 “Heidegger” Chap 10 “Sartre”	
23	2/28	Modernism/Postmodernism	
Coursepack		Hemingway, « A Clean Well-Lighted Place » Derrida Excerpt	
MN 9	3/1	<i>Memento</i>	

24	3/2	Movie/Reading Discussion	
25	3/5	Postmodernism 2	
Coursepack		Lyotard excerpt Baudrillard excerpt	
26	3/7	Zizek, Badiou, the 'Religious Turn'	
Coursepack		Zizek excerpt Badiou excerpt	
MN10	3/8	<i>O Brother Where Art Thou</i>	
27	3/9	Wrapping Up	Final Paper/Project due