

The Great Conversation 218 abc
“The Tradition in Crisis: Dissenters and Defenders”
Spring, 2011; MWF 11:50 - 12:45

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; ... Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?

--Woolf, “Modern Fiction”

Section A HH 514	Professor David Booth, Religion Department BMC 108D: office hours by appointment X3575, booth@stolaf.edu
Section B HH 515	Professor Edward Langerak, Philosophy Department HH 601C: office hours by appointment x3494, langarak@stolaf.edu
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We are examining revolutionary changes in politics, literature, philosophy, the arts, theology, and conceptions of gender at the end of the 18th and into the 20th century. We examine various attempts to restate the Western tradition in the face of continuing intellectual and social transformations.

Texts Required for Purchase:

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* Penguin 9780141439600
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Penguin 9780141441252
Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Oxford 9780199535736
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* Vintage 9780679724650
Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* Chicago 9780226583983
Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* Princeton 9780691020266
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* Bedford 9780312257378
Henrik Ibsen, *Four Major Plays* Oxford 9780199536191
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* Oxford 9780199536610
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* Vintage 9780679734505
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* Norton 9780393301588

Other Required Texts:

Melchert, *The Great Conversation*
Sylvan Barnet, *Writing About Art*, Prentice Hall 9780136138556
David, Simon Lee, Phaidon Press 9780714838045

Other Material:

Selections from Hegel, Marx, and Engels
Short Poems by Wordsworth and Whitman
Short readings and listening assignments for Beethoven and Stravinsky

Requirements and Expectations:

Wholehearted participation	10
Response Essays (2)	10
Synthesizing Essay #1	15
Mid-Term Exam	15
Synthesizing Essay #2	25
Final exam, May 21, 9:00 - 11:00 (arrange travel accordingly)	25

Everyone is expected to attend every class, having already read assigned material (including emailed communication on background and debates) and having prepared to participate in discussions. *To “participate” well in discussion means to play varied roles in each discussion, for example, to solicit opinions of others, to synthesize past questions, to ask clarifying questions, to offer and support a claim, to present an opposing view.* If you are absent, you are responsible to contact a classmate (or your instructor) to make sure you are well aware of what has happened in class, and aware of any possible adjustments to the assigned readings. Written work is due on the dates specified; late work may be penalized. Exams occur on the dates specified; arrange travel accordingly.

Note Well:

Plagiarism of any kind (from careless cutting and pasting to intentional misrepresentation of authorship) is an offense against the ideal of a conversation. It is hostile to the values of an academic community. It is against the rules of St. Olaf College. The penalty for plagiarism may include failing the course. See the Student Handbook or confer with your instructor if you have any uncertainty about what counts as plagiarism. Ask.

Consider the college's honor policy: <http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/honor.html>
And the policy on academic integrity:
<http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/thebook/academic/integrity.html>

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact Ruth Bolstad (bolstadr@stolaf.edu) or Connie Ford (ford@stolaf.edu) in the Academic Support Center (x3288) located in the Modular Village. If you already have documentation on file with Student Disability Services in the Academic Support Center you are required to present your letters to the professor within the first two weeks of class.

General Education Credits Awarded in the Great Conversation:

GC 113: One Elective
GC 115: WRI, BTS-B
GC 116: first HWC, FYS
GC 217: ALS-L, WRI
GC 218: second HWC, ALS-A, ORC, WRI

Great Con 218 ABC: Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Feb	
7	<p>Dickens, <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> Introduction (recommended) ix-xxx, Book I-Book 2 Chapter 5 (5-108). You may find it useful to mark the timeline of the novel's events and the historical events on xxxviii-xl, and the section of endnotes so that you can turn to them quickly.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The book's opening chapter sets up many parallels between France and England. What specific criticisms does Dickens make of his own country here? How are those criticisms brought to life in our reading for today (most of which takes place in England). 2. Dickens originally considered the title "Buried Alive" as a title for the book as a whole, and the image certainly extends beyond our introduction to Dr. Manette in Book I. How does Dickens extend the image of burial, entombment, etc. to other characters or places in our reading from Book 2? 3. Look closely at the characters of Sydney Carton (first introduced as the man looking at the ceiling on page 64), Mr. Lorry and Mrs. Pross. What are the most notable features of these characters?
9	<p>Dickens, <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> Book 2 Chapter 6-End of Book 2 (108-253)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does Dickens' depiction of France on the brink of revolution intersect with the arguments of Burke and Paine that we read last semester? 2. Dickens develops many of his characters here more by action than by dialogue. How does he achieve that in the characters of Madame Defarge and Gaspard (first introduced as the "tall joker" on page 32—his child is killed on page 114)? How does the neighborhood of Saint Antoine become a character in itself?
11	<p>Dickens, <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> Book 3 (255-390) AND discussion and images of <i>The Death of Marat</i> in Simon Lee's <i>David</i> (149-74).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which images of The Reign of Terror in Book III are most powerful for you, and why? 2. Is Sydney Carton a hero? Why or why not? What criteria are you applying—and does your definition here differ from that of heroism in other works we've read? 3. How does Dickens work to enlist your sympathies for the revolutionaries over the course of the novel? How do his tactics compare with those of David in painting <i>The Death of Marat</i>?
14	<p>"Beethoven's Symphony #3, 'Eroica,'" plenary lecture by Professor Martin Hodel (Music), Viking Theater Reading: Beethoven entry on Wikipedia; Solomon "Bonaparte: The Crisis of Belief" (pdf), Online Listening Assignment Microessay on Dickens due by 5:00 PM <i>Dinner: Professor Langerak on Truth and Knowledge in Hume and Kant</i></p>
16	<p>Beethoven Symphony No. 3, Lee, <i>David</i>, discussion and images for <i>The Coronation of the Emperor and Empress and Leonidas at Thermopylae</i> (221-61, 274-86)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Both Beethoven and David create art that honors homages to Napoleon. Although they are working in different art forms, are there useful points of comparison in the way they represent this figure? 2. How does David's style of painting change over the course of his career? 3. Do you see David as a political pragmatist, or an opportunist?

18	<p>“Wordsworth and English Romanticism,” plenary lecture by Colin Wells (English), Viking Theater.</p> <p>Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey"; Passages from “The Prelude”: Book First, ll. 301-463; Book Sixth, ll. 524-641; Book 12th, ll. 204-335; “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”; “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (photocopy)</p>
21	<p>Whitman, “Song of Myself” 1-5, 13,15, 21, 24, 43, 44, 48-52 (Xerox)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe the “self” in Whitman’s poem? Is it a person? A presence? A man? A woman? 2. The speaker claims to be a poet of both the soul and body. What evidence do you see of these claims? How does this dual perspective (or is it a unified perspective?) compare with other Great Con authors’ attention to human identity?
23	<p>Darwin, <i>The Origin of Species</i>. Darwin’s Intro, Chaps I-III, and IV, pp.80-93 and 98-124 (Rec. Bynum’s Intro).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State in your own words Darwin’s understanding of the following terms: Struggle for Existence; Natural Selection; Tree of Life; Species vs. Variety. Why are these central for Darwin’s project? 2. Consider carefully the open paragraph on pp.68&69 and the last paragraph of Chapter III (pp.78&79). Do you see any potential for moral mischief in (mis)using these?
25	<p>Darwin, <i>The Origin of Species</i>. VI pp.158-73 and 185-88, IX pp.249-58 and 275-76, XIII pp.361-70 and 377-82 and 398-400,and XIV.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chapters VI and IX can be seen as a dialectical inquiry in which Darwin raises objections to his theory and gives his replies. State in your own words what he sees as the major objections, and state and then evaluate his replies. 2. The concluding paragraph of the book (pp. 426&27) is justly famous; how do you interpret its scientific and religious significance? Evaluate the view of some that a naturalistic explanation of our “most wonderful world” provides even more grandeur and awe than a creationistic explanation, perhaps referring to the open paragraph on pp. 170&71.
28	<p>Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>. Author’s Dedication (pp.3-7), Intro (11-16), Chaps I-IV, IX-XI, XIII pp.239-42, and Melchert pp. 525-31.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain and evaluate: “The great misfortune is that they both acquire manners before morals’ (34); “In a great degree, love and friendship cannot subsist in the same bosom” (94); “Let women share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man” (242). 2. Locate examples of the following types of arguments the Wollstonecraft uses: Moral (rights and/or general happiness); Prudential (self-interest of society and of men); Religious or theological; Psychological; and Biological.
Mar	
2	<p>“Owls and Roosters: The History of Freedom in Hegel and Marx,” plenary lecture by Professor Casson, Viking Theater</p> <p>Reading: Melchert on Hegel, 461-464, 484-487, and on Marx, 507-514.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the goal of history according to Hegel? What does this way of looking at history elucidate? What does it justify? Explain the image of the owl of Minerva. What does such a metaphor imply about the task of the philosopher? 2. Marx argues that the "criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism." What does he mean by this? Why is "criticism" so important for emancipation? What beyond religion must be subject to

	radical criticism? 3. In the last line of A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx says that the day of German resurrection will be announced by the crowing of the French rooster. What could this mean? How does Marx's call for liberation stem from the French revolution? How does it differ?
4	Friedrich Engels, "On the Origin of the Family" Wollstonecraft has tea with Engels; what would they say to each other about women, family, sex, and love?
Sat. 5	Great Conversation 30 Year Reunion
7	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> . Preface through Problema I; Melchert pp. 488-507. 1. Why does Kierkegaard tell the story of Abraham in several different versions? Do you have an additional version? 2. Compare and contrast the Knight of Infinite Resignation with the Knight of Faith; which do you admire (or dislike) more?
9	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> . Problema II through Epilogue. 1. What is the relationship between "the absurd" and "faith"? 2. Debate whether Abraham was right to keep quiet about what he intended to do.
11	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Preface and Parts 1-2 N begins by focusing on the "will to truth." Why is truth questionable to him? What is the value of untruth? Why is untruth a "condition of life"? Why have past philosophers rejected untruth as a condition of life? How is N's "aphoristic" style suited to his claims? How do the aphorisms collectively give meaning to the title of the book? Synthetic Essay #1 Due
14	"Nietzsche and 'Nietzscheanism,'" plenary lecture by Professor Booth, Viking Theater <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> Parts 3, 5, 7 (sections 230-32), and 9 (sections 257-60) What is the value of morality? What does it mean to say morality has a "natural history"? How is it possible that "morality" might be a principle of decay? Among figures we have encountered in the Great Con, who might N regard as "noble"?
16	"Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment", plenary lecture by Professor Ed Santurri (Religion, and former director of Great Con), Regents 150 Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , Foreword, Translators' Note, and Part I (vii-xx, 4-86)
18	Mid-Term
19-27	Spring Break
28	Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> Parts II-IV (89-358) 1. Razumikhin (Dmitri Prokofich) attempts to describe Raskolnikov as having two different personalities, and the character's name does come from the Russian word for "split" or "schism," raskol, implying that he himself straddles some sort of boundary. How accurate is Razumikhin's assessment, or does it set up a misleading dichotomy? 2. How does Raskolnikov's "extraordinary man theory" compare and contrast with act utilitarianism? 3. Sonya reads the Lazarus story to Raskolnikov in IV.4. How does Dostoevsky's use of burial and resurrection imagery differ from Dickens' in <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> ? First possible due date for Microessay #2
30	Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> Part V (361-436) 1. in confessing the murder to Sonya, Raskolnikov claims, "Was it the old crone I killed?"

	<p>I killed myself, not the old crone!....And it was the devil killed the old crone, not me!” (p. 420) What does he mean by this? What motive(s) does Raskolnikov give for his murder? Why does he confess to Sonya? Why doesn't the confession ease him of his inner torment?</p> <p>2. Does Svidrigalov’s act of generosity in V.5 have genuine moral worth? Compare this act to Raskolnikov’s sporadic gestures of generosity.</p>
Apr	
1	<p>Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> Part VI and Epilogue (439-551)</p> <p>1. Compare and contrast Svidrigaylov and Raskolnikov. Is Svidrigaylov an “extraordinary man”?</p> <p>2. Many critics have problems with the way in which Dostoevsky chooses to end this novel. How does the narrative style shift in the epilogue? Why might Dostoevsky have chosen to end the novel in this way: what problems might he have confronted when deciding how to conclude? Is the epilogue meant to be didactic, and do you think that this is a problem? Why or why not?</p> <p>Last possible due date for Microessay #2</p>
4	<p>Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> and <i>On Liberty</i>. <i>Utilitarianism</i>, Chap II, pp.136-40; <i>On Liberty</i>, Chap I; Melchert pp.515-25.</p> <p>1. What complications come with Mill’s addition of <i>quality</i> of pleasures to Bentham’s quantitative calculus?</p> <p>2. What are the seven or eight distinct stages Mill sees in the struggle between liberty and authority (pp.5-14)?</p>
6	<p>Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>, Chaps II-IV.</p> <p>1. Recognizing that there is no clear line between a person’s own life and the concern of society, Mill revises his “one very simple principle” (pp.13&14) on pp. 88-91; precisely what is the revision and are you convinced by his defense of it?</p> <p>2. Consider the types of seemingly acceptable laws we have (seat-belts; social security; lewd conduct, etc.); can Mill’s “don’t harm others” principle justify them?</p>
8	<p>Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>, Chs. 1-8</p> <p>D’s humanity, as a slave, is contested throughout the narrative. What do slaveholders do to undermine his humanity? What does D do to assert his humanity? What role does religion play in the dispositions of slaveholders?</p>
11	<p>Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>, Chs. 9-11 and “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”</p> <p>Identify elements of classical rhetoric in D’s fourth of July address. Identify elements of Biblical religion in his concept of our national history. Find and explain evidence of D’s ambiguous status as a freed slave in a free nation. Through what steps does D undermine the former rationalizations of slavery?</p> <p>Synthetic Essay #2 Proposal Due</p>
13	<p>Freud, <i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i>, Chs. 1-3</p> <p>Explain how, in F’s view, society is both cause and cure for our great discontent. What is the essential, underlying truth of an individual? What role does the capacity to reason play in the life of an individual?</p> <p><i>After Dinner Reception: Johnson Award</i></p>
15	<p>Freud, <i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i>, Chs. 4-8</p> <p>Though F thought he had proposed a scientific theory of unconscious drives, modern</p>

	psychologists do not think he succeeded in this intention. In what sense if any, is the argument in CD scientific? Is F's discussion of two great drives consistent with his earlier account of individuals and their desires?
18	Ibsen, <i>A Doll House</i> . 1. Why does Torvald criticize what he sees as Nora's wasteful spending and foolishness but also support it? 2. Is Nora's transformation convincing? 3. What are we missing, if anything, by reading the play rather than seeing a production of it? <i>Dinner: Professor Gary Gisselman on Ibsen</i>
20	Ibsen, <i>A Doll House</i> , con't. Mendus, "Out of The Doll's House" (handout). 1. Revisit the third question above. 2. How do the characters in the play use "free" and "freedom"? Evaluate Mendus' thesis.
22-25	Easter Break
27	"Picasso," Ipenary lecture by Professor Matt Rohn (Art), Viking Theater First Edition of Synthetic Essay Due
29	Picasso Images TBA
May	
2	Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> , Vol. 1 "The Window" 1. Some of Woolf's characters understand the world through intellect and facts, and some through intuition or emotion. What do you think of her portrayal of these different "ways of knowing"? To what extent have both of these approaches been explored by the authors and artists we have studied in Great Con? 2. Identify as many ways as you can that Mrs. Ramsay attempts to create unity within her sphere of influence. How do these actions relate to the creative work of the artist, Lily Briscoe? To the work of Woolf herself in writing the book? 3. Where do you see characters expressing desire for permanence, anxiety about the flux, change and decay of life? Why might this desire be considered a particularly "modern" concern?
4	Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> Vols. 2 and 3 "Time Passes" and "The Lighthouse" 1. How does Woolf's use of point of view in "Time Passes" differ from that in "The Window"? How does this section of the book look back at or remind you of the events of the first section? What role does the First World War play in this book? 2. What does Lily's painting literally represent? That is, what is it a painting of? How does the painting function in the novel—what does it symbolize, how does it help to crystallize qualities of characters, how does it connect to the temporal structure of the book, etc.
6	De Beauvoir. Melchert, Chap 25. You should be able to answer the questions on pp. 689, 694, and 701.
9	Reinhold Niebuhr, <i>The Irony of American History</i> , Chs. 1-4 RN admits in his preface that the text offers no explicit definition of "irony"—what does the word mean in this text? Think of other instances of irony in this particular sense? Offer and explain some examples of the "illusions" derived from the experiences and ideologies of America's "childhood"? Final Edition of Synthetic Essay Due
11	Reinhold Niebuhr, <i>The Irony of American History</i> , Chs. 5-8 Explain why for RN the ironic view of American history is also Christian. Explain how Christian and American triumphalism merge, in RN's view. Are there any conditions

	under which history could escape irony?
13	Plenary Lecture on Stravinsky “The Rite of Spring” Professor Kathryn Ananda-Owens (Music), Urness Recital Hall <i>Friday Evening Field Trip to Minnesota Orchestra, \$6</i>
16	<i>The Rite of Spring</i> Discussion questions TBA
	Saturday, May 21, 9:00 - 11:00, Final Exam. Do not plan any travel before this day.