

**“FALSE TRUTHS: POPPYCOCK AND MODERN THOUGHT”**  
**CORE HUMANITIES SEMINAR: O’DWYER LEARNING COMMUNITY**  
Spring 2006 / Drs. Emily Wittman & Paul Wright

Meeting Times:

R01 (Wright) TR 8:30-9:45 in SAC 310  
R02 (Wright) TR 10:00-11:15 in SAC 310  
R03 (Wittman) TR 2:30-3:45 in SAC 210  
R04 (Wittman) TR 4:00-5:15 in SAC 210

***Contact information (Dr. Wright)***

My Office: SAC 271

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:00-3:00, or by appointment.

Email: paul.wright@villanova.edu

Office phone: 610-519-6943 (note that email is generally a better way to contact me than voicemail)

***Contact information (Dr. Wittman)***

My Office: SAC 76

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00-2:00

Email: emily.wittman@villanova.edu

Office phone: 610-519-4616 (note that email is generally a better way to contact me than voicemail)

***Purpose of the course***

As we saw last semester, the ancients seized on the ability to reason as the quality that sets man apart from beasts. We are animals, perhaps, but “rational animals” (to borrow Aristotle’s term). Last semester we concerned ourselves with the sources of moral authority. This semester we are also concerned with moral authority, but we will be exploring it from a new angle. As we read from a broad variety of traditions we will investigate the notion of personal responsibility. Does responsibility come with knowledge? And are we responsible for knowledge in the first place? Can demands for personal accountability be satisfactorily dismissed with claims such as *I didn’t know* or *I was just doing my job, sir* or *I was just following the law*? We will be particularly concerned with various modes of moral deception, both of others and ourselves. In an age in which our email inbox teems with financial and relationship advice from anonymous sources, what is the status of knowledge and how do we negotiate our commitment to truth? How do we distinguish between knowledge and pseudo-knowledge (what Harry Frankfurt terms “bullshit”) both in our dealings with others and in our personal lives? In moments of uncertainty, is it ethically advisable to advance *something* or to throw up our hands and say that we don’t know? Do we need an answer for everything? What decisions should we make for ourselves and which decisions can (or should) we leave to others? How can we be sure that we are not, at the end of the day, total dupes, ingesting and repeating received nonsense? The readings for this semester are canonical and controversial, lyrical and didactic. They promise to lead all of us into exciting debates and will hopefully lead to some self-scrutiny on the part of us all.

***Structure of the course***

This course is not a lecture, but a seminar, which is likely to be a new approach to learning for most of you. Unlike a lecture, in which the teacher explains and the student takes notes, a seminar proceeds primarily through conversation among the students. The teacher’s main role is to raise questions to provoke good conversation. *This means that the students have a special responsibility to read closely and carefully, to take initiative and participate in an active way.* In a seminar, we don’t follow a set course and reproduce information; instead, we “think out loud” together. We try to come to insights by building on one another’s observations and by challenging one another with questions. *Thus, whether class is boring or exhilarating depends largely on your involvement.* While the responsibility may be somewhat intimidating at first, a good seminar can be one of the most rewarding university experiences you will have.

## ***General expectations***

This course is:

**Reading-intensive:** The amount of reading assigned for each class varies, but can be heavy at times, either in terms of length, difficulty, or both. It is absolutely essential to be faithful in completing these assignments—the success of the class depends on it. *If you come to class without reading, you will be wasting your own time, and that of your classmates.* The first rule in developing good reading habits is to give yourself a lot of time to do it, more than you think you need, and to find a place to read in which you won't be distracted. A second rule is to read with a pencil or marker in hand: underline things that strike you, make notes in the margin when you have questions or want to react to something. Bring your book to class all marked up.

**Writing-intensive:** It is often said that you don't understand something until you can write about it. Learning to write better helps us to think and speak better; and these in turn help us in our writing. In addition to occasional un-graded assignments, you will have to write *three 5-page essays* and *three 2-page reaction papers* over the course of this semester. The first major paper will, moreover, require a rough draft, which you will turn in to be discussed with me in one-on-one meetings. Thus, you can expect to do a writing assignment of some form on a regular basis. The specific nature of the assignments will be explained as they arise. You will be asked to keep all of your writing assignments and papers in a portfolio, and you will turn in the whole portfolio with every assignment. This will give both you and me a chance to see how your writing is progressing. The final exam will be a *comprehensive oral examination* whose format will be explained later in the term.

**Discussion-intensive:** For the seminar to work, students have to take initiative. This means coming to every class with specific questions in mind or specific observations that you think might provoke discussion. Marking up your book while you read will help you point to texts and passages to back up what you want to say. *Because of the high value placed on participation, if you don't find yourself contributing something to discussion in every session, it will be impossible to get a good grade in the course, regardless of the quality of your written work.* You will also be responsible for *one in-class presentation* on our reading, a presentation to be scheduled in the weeks to come.

## ***Attendance and grading***

Attendance is mandatory. There will also be certain events scheduled outside of class which are likewise obligatory and will be announced in the weeks to come. You are entitled to miss two classes without penalty; more than two will lower your participation grade. More than four absences results in failure of the course.

**Grades will be calculated as follows:**

- 60% Papers and writing assignments (5% for each of the short papers, and 15% for each of the longer papers)**
- 15% Final exam**
- 25% Participation (15% for your day-to-day contributions, and 10% for your presentation)**

## ***Miscellanea***

**Plagiarism is a serious offense; students who plagiarize or otherwise commit academic integrity violations will incur failure for the course.**

You are encouraged to meet with me individually over the course of the semester. Feel free to schedule an appointment with me, or to stop by my office if you are passing by, to talk about any other matters, or even just to say hello.

You are encouraged to make full use of the Writing Center, which is an excellent resource when you are having difficulties with your writing. It is located in the Dalton Room of Old Falvey; call 519-4604 to set up an appointment. (It is good to set up an appointment at least a week in advance; if it is not an especially busy time, however, they also take “walk-ins”.)

It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and wish to request accommodations to complete your course requirements, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss the request. If you would like further information or are uncertain whether you are eligible for such accommodations, contact the Office of Learning Support Services at 519-5636, or visit the office in Geraghty Hall. Note that disabilities can include learning impediments as well as physical limitations.

### ***Required texts***

Note: these books can be found at the university bookstore. Please acquire the edition listed (make sure the ISBN matches), unless otherwise noted.

1. Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. Fourth edition. St. Martin's Press, 1999. ISBN 0312260377.
2. Frankfurt, Harry. *On Bullshit*. Princeton, 2005. ISBN 0691122946.
3. Voltaire. *Candide*. Norton, 1991. ISBN 0393960587.
4. Wordsworth. *Prelude*. Norton, 1978. ISBN 039309071x.
5. Nietzsche. *Genealogy of Morals*. Vintage, 1989. ISBN 0679724621.
6. Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Penguin, 1994. ISBN 0140187650.
7. DuBois. *Souls of Black Folk*. Norton, 1999. ISBN 039397393x.
8. Dylan, Bob. *Chronicles, vol. 1*. Simon & Schuster, 2005. ISBN 0743244583.

In addition to these texts, students need to purchase a folder, which will be used as a “portfolio” to hold all of their writing assignments over the course of the semester.

### ***Schedule***

Please note: this schedule may be modified over the course of the semester as needed.

1/17 Introduction  
1/19 Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*

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1/24 *On Bullshit* (**Reaction Paper #1 Due**)  
1/26 Voltaire, *Candide*

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1/31 *Candide*  
2/2 *Candide*

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2/7 Wordsworth, *Prelude* (excerpts to be announced)  
2/9 *Prelude*

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2/14 *Prelude*

2/16 *Prelude (Essay #1 Due)*

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2/21 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*  
Screening of *The Corporation*, 7:15 PM in Bartley 1011

2/23 *Genealogy of Morals*

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2/28 *Genealogy of Morals*

3/2 *Genealogy of Morals (Reaction Paper #2 Due)*

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### **MID-TERM BREAK**

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3/14 DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*

3/16 *Souls of Black Folk*

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3/21 *Souls of Black Folk (Essay #2 Due)*

3/23 *Souls of Black Folk*

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3/28 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

3/30 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

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4/6 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

4/8 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

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4/11 Class replaced by screening of the film *Conspiracy*, 7:15 PM in Bartley 1011

4/13 **NO CLASS**

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4/18 Dylan, *Chronicles (Essay #3 Due)*

4/20 *Chronicles*

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4/25 *Chronicles*

4/27 *Chronicles*

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5/2 **NO CLASS—ATTEND FRIDAY CLASSES**

5/4 Semester Review (**Reaction Paper #3 Due**)

### **Final Oral Examination: Schedule and teams to be announced.**

**Important Note:** According to strict university policy, final examinations *cannot* be re-scheduled; *please make all travel plans accordingly*. The *only* exception occurs when a student has three or more exams scheduled for one day; if this is the case for you, please let me know.