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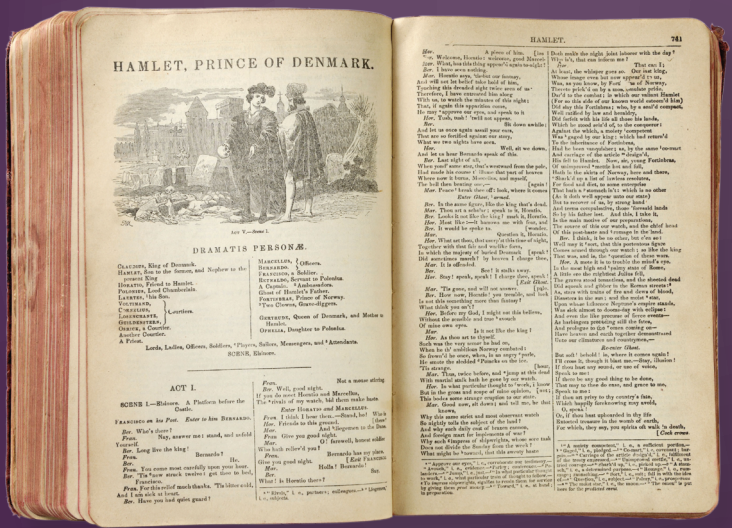
Life Lessons from the Great Books

Course Guidebook

Professor J. Rufus Fears
University of Oklahoma



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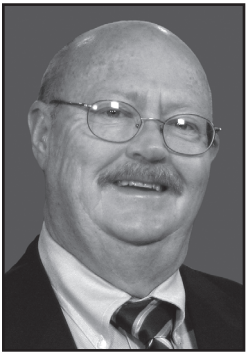

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Professor J. Rufus Fears is David Ross Boyd Professor of Classics at the University of Oklahoma, where he holds the G. T. and Libby Blankenship Chair in the History of Liberty. He also currently serves as David and Ann Brown Distinguished Fellow of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. Before joining the faculty at the University of Oklahoma, Professor Fears was Professor of History and Distinguished Faculty Research Lecturer at Indiana University, as well as Professor of Classical Studies and chair of the Department of Classical Studies at Boston University.

Professor Fears holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He has been a Danforth Fellow, a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, and a Harvard Prize Fellow. He has been a fellow of the American Academy in Rome, a Guggenheim Fellow, and twice a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. His research has been supported by grants from the American Philosophical Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the Kerr Foundation, and the Zarrow Foundation.

Professor Fears is the author of more than 100 articles and reviews on ancient history, the history of liberty, and the lessons of history for our own day. Professor Fears's books and monographs include *The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology* and *The Theology of Victory at Rome*. He has also edited a three-volume edition of *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*. His discussions of the great books have appeared in newspapers across the country and have aired on national television and radio programs.

An acclaimed teacher and scholar who has won 25 awards for teaching excellence, Professor Fears was chosen Professor of the Year on three occasions by students at the University of Oklahoma. His other accolades

include the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence's Medal for Excellence in College and University Teaching, the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA) Great Plains Region Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the UCEA's National Award for Teaching Excellence. He was chosen as Indiana University's first-ever Distinguished Faculty Research Lecturer. ■

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Life Lessons from the Great Books

Scope:

Great books change our lives. Great books also change *with* our lives. It is the mark of a great book that we can read it again and again and that at each stage of life, it speaks to us with a new voice. Our ever-changing life experiences allow us to see new lessons in a book that we have read and cherished long ago—or in a book that bored us in school yet fascinates us now.

In Books That Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life, we discussed 36 important works, focusing our lectures on themes of spirituality, politics, and history. This new course, *Life Lessons from the Great Books*, takes an entirely new set of writings, each of them a unique expression of the human spirit and each testimony that the list of great books is as inexhaustible as the human spirit. In our new course, we explore six themes that every one of us has experienced or will experience: the unconquerable human spirit; youth, old age, and all that is between; romance and love; adventure and courage; laughter and irony; and patriotism.

We consider each of these themes through works of literature that define our ideal of a great book. A great book possesses four qualities:

- It deals with a great theme.
- It is written in noble language.
- It speaks across the ages.
- It speaks to us as individuals.

All six themes are vast. All deal with the most central question that any individual faces: how we choose to live our lives. The unconquerable human spirit testifies that each of us does have free will. From youth through age, through all the twists and turns of life, we can make the choice to lead

fulfilled lives that leave the world a better place or we can choose to make ourselves and others miserable. The twists and turns of life are frequently the result of the most powerful and irrational of motives: love. Adventure and courage call to those who see life as a challenge and choose, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "to go into the arena." These are the men and women of destiny, who find that one mission in life they are meant to fulfill. Laughter and irony temper our disappointments in life and allow us to enjoy our successes. Patriotism is but the enduring quality of friendship writ large. Like religion and love, patriotism can bring forth the most noble and the most base of human emotions.

Language is inherent in the enjoyment of great literature. Any language—English, Latin, Chinese, Inuit—can be noble. It is the language that elevates our spirits by its clarity, rhythm, and appropriateness. In our course, books will range from the classical purity of Cicero's Latin and the lyrical beauty of the poetry of Euripides, to the rich and supple English of Shakespeare and the German of Goethe, to the hard, clean prose of George Orwell, Elie Wiesel, and Isaac Singer.

It is the test of a great book that it speaks across the ages. The great books inform one another. As Plato drew upon Homer, Cicero drew upon both, and Thomas Moore, Erasmus, and Goethe drew upon all three. Our lectures in this course are chosen to illustrate the societies, cultures, and ideas that have shaped the great books tradition of Europe and America.

Lectures 1 through 6 examine the lives and writings of those who have risen to the great challenges life so frequently gives each of us. Each addresses the question of why evil befalls those who are good. Such statesmen and leaders as Seneca, Boethius, and Martin Luther King, Jr., found consolation in philosophy. The Gospel of John provided inspiration for the noble Humanism of Albert Schweitzer and the profound reflections of the Russian novelist Dostoevsky. The Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel shatters our assumptions about the innate goodness of humans in his heart-wrenching *Night*.

Scope

In Lectures 7 through 12, we explore the lessons of life we can learn at each stage of our lives. We begin with the destructive adolescent love of Goethe's *The Sufferings of Young Werther* and conclude with the very

different responses to old age by the Roman patriot Cicero and the Noble Prize–winning novelist Isaac Singer.

Love has been the theme of some of the greatest works of literature. Euripides captures both the life-affirming and the destructive qualities of love in his two plays *Alcestis* and *Medea*. Courtly love of the Middle Ages is illustrated in the story of Tristan and Isolde. Shakespeare, the master student of humanity, takes us from the pathos of Antony and Cleopatra to the chilling devotion of Lady Macbeth to her husband and his career, while a *Brave New World* with no room for love is pilloried by Aldous Huxley.

From Homer's *Odyssey* to Lawrence of Arabia, Lectures 19 through 24 let us sail and ride in search of adventure. Men and women of destiny are those blessed few who find the one mission in life that is uniquely meant for them. Adventure is the fuel for the medieval epics of *The Song of Roland* and the *Nibelungenlied* and for the exploits of modern-day and highly controversial figures, including Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and T. E. Lawrence.

Life presents challenges, and Lectures 25 through 30 teach us that we meet these challenges best if we remember to laugh. Great books of humor and irony make us think about important questions by teaching us that it is frequently best not to take ourselves or others too seriously. The Greeks moderated the tragedies of Sophocles with the comedies of Aristophanes and Menander. The Humanists Erasmus and More knew how to give lessons in life by playful irony. George Orwell skewered the counterfeit promises of totalitarianism with *Animal Farm*.

Like romantic love, patriotism—love of country—is one of the richest fountains of great books. The Founders of the United States cherished the ideal of patriotism and saw it exemplified in the history of Israel, Greece, and Rome. In our final six lectures, we reflect upon the meaning of true patriotism. The heroic struggle of the Jewish people for freedom was told by Josephus in his *Jewish Wars*, a work highly valued by the Founders. The ideals of the American Revolution were embodied in Joseph Addison's play *Cato*. George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and General George Patton exemplified those ideals. The lives and messages of these three unique

Americans provide a final set of reflections on the choices each of us makes in our private, professional, and civic lives.

The enduring importance of great books is the guidance they offer in making those choices. As each of our choices must be different, so each of us will be moved by a different set of books, ideas, and historical role models. Perhaps the ultimate mark of a great book is that it leads onward to more books and to realms of ideas we never dreamed existed. ■

Seneca—"On Providence"

Lecture 1

A great book is a book that has a great theme; it is a book that speaks across the ages; it is a book that is written in noble language; and it is a book, I believe, that must also speak to you individually.

In this course, we examine a series of great books—spanning from the time of classical Greece to the 20th century—from which we can learn lessons that apply to our own lives. Each of the books we will read addresses some of the most important questions we can ask: How should we live our lives? What decisions should we make? We will explore what we mean by "wisdom," for each of these books is also about wisdom. A great book should be written in noble language, language that elevates the soul. We will explore the ways in which each book contributes to an ongoing current of intellectual excitement and dialogue. In each lecture, we will place a book into its historical context and examine the lessons that we can draw from it to apply to our own lives.

The first of our authors is Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C.–65 A.D.), and we begin with a look at his life. Seneca came from a distinguished family in Córdoba, then part of the Roman Empire. Seneca studied in Greece and was much taken with the philosophy of Stoicism. He wanted to dedicate his life to *philosophia*, the study and pursuit of wisdom. After his return to Rome, Seneca wrote a series of creative tragedies that breathed new life into the established tradition. But outwitted by the malicious intrigues of the Roman court, Seneca was exiled to Corsica for eight years on allegations of treason and was able to return only at the behest of the emperor's wife, Agrippina, who was born with a lust for power. For Agrippina, Seneca was just a tool that would help her rid of her husband and his son so that her son, Nero (from a previous marriage), could be ruler. Seneca, convincing himself that it was all for the greater good, got caught up in the pursuit of power.

But at the age of 66, Seneca withdrew as a great statesman and moved to his lavish country estate (by then he was the second richest man in Rome), where he wrote "On Providence," or "On God," and a series of *Dialogues*—

philosophical dialogues—in which he went back to the pathway that he had once known in his youth, the path he knew he should have taken.

Although Socrates taught that suicide was wrong, that it was wrong to take away the life God had given you, that was not the Stoic view. For the Stoics, when life became unbearable, you put an end to it, and death was far better than subjugation to a tyranny. These Stoic concepts informed Seneca's attitude toward suicide, as exemplified by the story of Marcus Porcius Cato.

Falsely accused of acts of treason against Nero, Seneca took his own life rather than ask for mercy or die at the hands of Nero's soldiers. Though he had sought power and done wrong during his life, Seneca ultimately embraced the philosophy of his youth. Seneca left us the lesson that no good person ever truly suffers evil as long as he believes that God designs all things for a greater good. ■

Suggested Reading

Fears, *Famous Romans*, Lecture 18.

Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*.

Gummere, *Seneca*: *The Philosopher and His Modern Message*.

Seneca, *Letters and Dialogues*.

———, *Moral Essays*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think that the principles of Seneca, embodied in the philosophy of Stoicism, represent a viable approach to life for a private individual today or for a politician?

2. Can you think of anyone in American political life who calls to mind Seneca (or Nero)?

The Gospel of John

Lecture 2

Romance—I try to explain to my students, but they really don't believe it—love and romance are the most powerful single emotions, and history is filled with great men and great women who have thrown away everything in the course of love.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of life lessons from the great books, concentrating on the theme of the unconquerable human spirit as depicted in the Gospel of John. The first persecution of Christians was launched by Nero in 64 A.D. Nero was blamed for a great fire that destroyed large areas of the city of Rome, and he found a scapegoat among the Christians. Christians were known to the Romans at the time but only in dubious terms. Nero demanded that every person suspected of being a Christian either reject Christianity and offer a sacrifice to the emperor as a living god or be put to death. As the Roman populace witnessed, Christians consistently rejected the emperor's demands and endured the subsequent atrocities inflicted. The Romans began to question their own beliefs and grew curious about the true nature of Christianity. Christians subjected to Nero's persecution became models of the unconquerable human spirit, and the life of Jesus (which was at the core of their beliefs) became one of the greatest examples of the ability of the human spirit to move men and women century after century.

We know about the life of Jesus from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four Gospels represent different ways of viewing Jesus, but the Gospel of John in particular stands apart from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). John attempts to translate the mystery of the life of Jesus into a philosophical framework that incorporates Greek thought. The Gospel of John, with its evocation of the Word and the light of God, initially calls to mind the beginning of the Old Testament. The Gospel of John is a story about light. John the Baptist appears at the beginning of the Gospel of John as the figure meant to testify to the coming of the light and the Word. When the Pharisees come to question John the Baptist, he recognizes Jesus among them.

The chronology of events in the Gospel of John is different from that of the synoptic Gospels. Jesus calls his disciples after the testimony of John the Baptist. The first miracle described in the Gospel of John is the turning of water into wine at the wedding at Cana. Jesus then drives the money changers from the Temple in Jerusalem and encounters Nicodemus.

After Jesus cures a blind man and raises Lazarus from the dead, he becomes so influential as to be considered a threat to the established authorities.

The Gospel of John also differs from the synoptic Gospels in that it shows Jesus willing to admit he is the Messiah from the beginning. Jesus uses philosophical explanations rather than parables to explain how salvation is to be brought into the world. Jesus announces to a Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah, and her belief and subsequent testimony anger the Pharisees. The miracles performed by Jesus become ever greater testimonies. As he feeds the multitudes with two fish and five loaves of bread, Jesus explains that he is the bread and wine of life. The idea of partaking of the divinity to ensure salvation would make sense to a Greek worshiper of Dionysus but was unthinkable to Jesus's Jewish audience.

Jesus prevents the stoning of a woman accused of adultery, reinforcing the lesson of forgiveness. After Jesus cures a blind man and raises Lazarus from the dead, he becomes so influential as to be considered a threat to the established authorities. Although Pontius Pilate is portrayed in the Gospel of John (more than in the other Gospels) as a sensitive and conscientious bureaucrat, the decision is made to put Jesus to death. The unconquerable human spirit is evident not only in Jesus but in his disciples as they undergo a series of torments in order to carry his message through the world. As we know, their legacy transformed history. ■

Suggested Reading

Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*.

Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*.

Fears, *A History of Freedom*, Lecture 12.

Gospel of John. (I read the King James version. You should read any translation that speaks to you.)

Questions to Consider

1. In our lecture, we suggested that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John reflect how four different believers perceived and described their encounters with Jesus for different audiences. Do you agree?

2. Why do you believe that John portrays the Roman governor Pontius Pilate in such sympathetic terms?

Boethius, Martin Luther King—Conscience

Lecture 3

Also early on, Christian thinkers believed it necessary to try to interpret the mystery of Christianity within a framework of classical philosophy.

The Romans of the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. regarded Christianity as a philosophy. It was no longer seen as a sect of Judaism but part of the intellectual currents of Greece and Rome. Christianity absorbed and was transformed by these currents, but it also had to adapt itself to the world of Rome. The Roman Empire was tolerant of religions as long as an individual was also a patriot and worshiped the gods of Rome, including the emperor. Because Christians would not worship the emperor, they were traitors in the eyes of the Romans. From the 1st through the 3rd centuries, they were violently persecuted for their refusal to conform. Constantine was impressed by the faith and devotion of Christians and converted to Christianity after winning a battle he believed had been influenced by the Christian God. Within a generation after Constantine, Christianity had become the established religion of the Roman Empire.

Theodoric, king of the Goths, came to power in Italy after the fall of the western Roman Empire in 476 A.D. Theodoric sought to bring into his administration the finest minds of the day, among them, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (470–475?–524). Boethius came from a distinguished Roman family and was a strong Christian. He was also an established scientist and author. Like Seneca, Boethius believed in doing good. As an administrator of Theodoric, he thought it was his public duty to ensure a civilized, reasonable government. Boethius rose quickly under Theodoric, but his attempts to make positive changes put him out of favor with other high officials, who sought to remove him from office. Charged with numerous counts of treason, Boethius was imprisoned, his wealth was confiscated, and his library was destroyed.

Boethius wrote one of the most influential books in history, *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, while in prison. The book begins with the vision of a woman, Philosophy personified, who appears to Boethius in

prison. Boethius complains about the slander and losses he has suffered from his attempts to do good deeds. Philosophy replies that such things as fame, wealth, and power are not possessions but gifts given by fortune that can be taken away at any time. In the ensuing dialogue, Boethius learns that happiness cannot be based on such gifts of fortune but only on the understanding of good.

Philosophy argues that God is good and that everything—even that which seems to be evil—does the work of God. Evil in the world is the instrument of God that brings us to a true realization of what is permanent and enduring. God has foreordained all things, but we have the freedom to respond to what God gives us. God may have set adversity upon us, but our minds our free, and with our minds, we are free to respond with hate or with love, to return evil with evil or with good. *On the Consolation of Philosophy* was deeply admired in the Middle Ages and is one of the most influential books ever written.

Another powerful statement of the unconquerable human spirit speaking out of the darkness of prison is the *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968). King was jailed in 1963 for organizing and participating in demonstrations against racial segregation. A group of white clergymen wrote a letter claiming that King's participation in such demonstrations was an embarrassment given his position as a "minister of Jesus." King responded, citing examples from the Bible, history, and philosophy to show that the laws and policies he demonstrated against were unjust and that no man or woman should follow an unjust law. King went on to lead the march on Washington and would tell us of his dream of freedom and brotherhood. He came to understand that war, like the war in Vietnam, was unjust and that freedom without economic viability meant nothing. He was willing to jeopardize the political influence he had won to continually stand up for the truth—a true example of the unconquerable human spirit. ■

[Martin Luther King Jr.] came to understand that war, like the war in Vietnam, was unjust and that freedom without economic viability meant nothing.

Suggested Reading

Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."*

Boethius, *On the Consolation of Philosophy*.

Marenbon, *Boethius*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you agree with Seneca and Boethius that no evil can ever befall a good person?

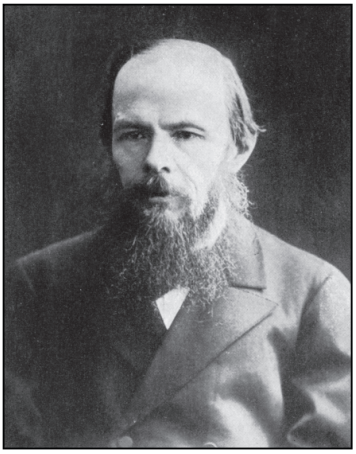
2. Why could it be said that Martin Luther King Jr. exemplifies the application of classical and Christian morality to the solution of a contemporary moral evil?

Dostoevsky—*The Brothers Karamazov*

Lecture 4

The same way that Seneca affirmed that his life would go on—his soul was unconquered, even if his body died [and, much like] the message of Socrates, that the soul is immortal—the lesson, the fundamental mystery, of Christianity is that out of death comes life.

One of the most powerful novels ever written, *The Brothers Karamazov* incorporates many of the themes we have explored so far in the course. The novel is also an enduring monument to the creativity that existed even under the despotism of the 19th-century Russian tsars. In the course of the 5th century in Rome, the popes developed a theory that became fundamental to political thought in Western Europe. The theory was that there are two powers: the power of this Earth and the power of God. The pope was considered the embodiment of the power of God and, therefore, the supreme ruler.



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Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881).

This theory never developed in Russia. Russia adopted its Christianity from the Orthodox Church in Constantinople, which never acknowledged the power of the pope. Russians believed there was to be only one power, the monarch, who was the absolute voice of God on Earth. Throughout history, Russia failed to take the path that was taken in Western Europe. While England was developing the instruments of parliamentary government, Russia stayed rooted in autocracy.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) was born into the world of autocracy and orthodoxy that dominated 19th-century Russia. He was educated at a military school, but epilepsy kept him from a military career. After resigning his commission, Dostoevsky began to write and was drawn into revolutionary circles. He was imprisoned and almost put to death for disseminating propaganda and for treason. After his imprisonment and a brief stay in Europe, he became increasingly convinced of the ability of the Russian Orthodox Church to foster a mystical union of love with God.

Crime and Punishment was written during this period of creativity. The death of Dostoevsky's son, who suffered from the same seizures his father endured, fueled his questioning of the nature of good and evil, of Russia's place in the world, and of the meaning of God. These questions were addressed in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Dostoevsky refused to allow his soul to be destroyed by what many would view as the random chances of life and the misery of death.

The Brothers Karamazov is a story of what we would call a dysfunctional family. The father is cruel and given to excess. He has three sons (the heroes of the novel) from two wives and a fourth son who is the product of an illicit relationship. In Dostoevsky's mind, each of the four sons represents a part of the Russian soul: the violent and sensuous (Dmitri), the misguided (Ivan, trying to import Western ideas), the strong in faith and conviction (Alexei, the true spirit of Russia), and the mysterious and vile (Smerdyakov). The action is motivated by a quarrel between Dmitri and his father, which Alexei offers to help resolve by bringing the family together for a discussion. The family meets at the monastery where Alexei lives. There, Ivan challenges Alexei's religious convictions by reading a prose poem he has written. The action of the poem takes place in 16th-century Spain and involves an encounter between the Grand Inquisitor and Jesus. At the end of the poem, Ivan voices many of the questions and themes related to love and hate, good and evil that Dostoevsky himself grappled with during his lifetime.

Dostoevsky concludes the story with a graveside service held for a child who had been loved by Alexei but tormented by his peers. When one of the children at the service inquires about resurrection, Alexei responds with an affirmation of the story of Christ and the tradition of Easter. So it was that Dostoevsky refused to allow his soul to be destroyed by what many would view as the random chances of life and the misery of death. His novel stands as a creatively written and profound statement about the unconquerable human spirit. ■

Suggested Reading

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Frank, *Dostoevsky*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think Dostoevsky meant when in his novel *The Idiot*, he called the Russian soul "a dark place"? Does that dark place have a reflection in the main characters of *The Brothers Karamazov*?

2. Why did the Grand Inquisitor really fear Jesus and his pure message?

Elie Wiesel—*Night*

Lecture 5

Moses, like the Moses of the Bible, said, "Yes. The questions are the way we communicate with God. The questions are more important than the answers. Man lifts his soul by the questions he asks."

The novel *Night* by Elie Wiesel (b. 1928) is a stark yet moving statement of the indomitable human spirit. The novel begins with Eliezer Wiesel in the town of Sighet, Transylvania. Sighet is a Jewish town, an exemplar of one of the great traditions of world history, the tradition of Judaism. Under Roman rule, the rabbinical schools in Judaea flourished, and the literature of the Talmud was developed. Jews living in Diaspora became the great bearers of culture and provided a medium for the transmission of classical philosophy to the West. As Jews made their way to Eastern Europe, welcomed by Poland and Lithuania, a new age of Jewish culture began, centered on the Yiddish language. Sighet was one of the towns in which this culture flourished. The Jews of Sighet watched with a certain security as Hitler came to power.

Although the Hungarian government was allied with Hitler, it protected its Jewish population until 1943. Eliezer Wiesel continued his studies in the midst of the turmoil of World War II. Despite his father's insistence that he was too young to study the Kabbalah, Eliezer read the work under the guidance of a custodian of the synagogue named Moses. After a shift in government, Moses was deported, but his absence was not particularly noted by the townspeople. When Moses returned, his attempts to warn the villagers about atrocities committed by German soldiers and the "organized extermination" of every Jew in Europe went unheeded. Eliezer's first experience of human cruelty came when the Germans moved into Sighet and, aided by Hungarian policemen, violently ordered the Jews into a ghetto. It wasn't until Eliezer had experienced the horrors of Auschwitz that he realized the dehumanizing effects of starvation and senseless brutality. Eliezer lost the ability to pray. He began to question his beliefs, wondering how an eternal God could exist given the evil he witnessed every day.

As the Third Reich began to collapse, the Germans became more intent on carrying out Hitler's promise to kill every Jew. Eliezer and his father were forced to march from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. Although they had a chance to stay at a camp hospital, Eliezer and his father continued to march because of rumors that the Germans would kill every Jew in the hospital before the Russians could liberate the camp. At Buchenwald, Eliezer's father died of dysentery; Eliezer was the only member of his family to survive the Nazi death camps. Hearing that the Americans were near, the camp resistance unit rose up against the guards, and when the Americans arrived, the camp was liberated.

Wiesel is a strong supporter of Israel but has spent his life trying to bring about reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. He teaches that peace alone will bring about goodness in the world.

Elie Wiesel swore an oath that he would not write about the horror he had witnessed for at least 10 years. He finally wrote *Night* after François Mauriac convinced him to tell his story. Wiesel is a strong supporter of Israel but has spent his life trying to bring about reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. He teaches that peace alone will bring about goodness in the world. It is interesting to consider that, of all the nations that have passed through the Middle East, no one still speaks ancient Egyptian, no one speaks ancient Libyan or Hittite, no one worships the god Anubis. Yet one people still worship their god, the God of Israel; speak their language, Hebrew; and read their book, the testament of God. Like Elie Wiesel, I believe that that is no accident, that there is a purpose. ■

Suggested Reading

Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs*.

———, *Night*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the significance of the figure of Moses at the beginning of the novel?

2. In its original version, *Night* was titled *And the World Kept Silent*. What meaning do you find in both these titles?

Schweitzer—*Out of My Life and Thought*

Lecture 6

Then one day, they arrived and said, "You have got to be deported." It was 1917, a dangerous time: The French army had mutinied; the war seemed lost. So the bureaucrats said, "Aha, there is one German there in West Africa; we have to bring him to an internment camp."

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of life lessons from the great books and our theme of the unconquerable human spirit. From about 1870–1914, the people of Europe believed they were living in a great new era of peace, progress, and prosperity. However, in 1914, Europe found itself enmeshed in the greatest war in history. Instead of preventing war, new technology increased the horror of the conflict. Barely 20 years later, Europe would again find itself at war, resulting in millions of deaths and—with the development of the atomic bomb—the threat of worldwide destruction.

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) lived through this period of turmoil but refused to be crushed by the terror of war. Schweitzer was born in a small village in Alsace, which was part of the German Reich at the time. He studied in universities at Berlin and Strasbourg, immersing himself in the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman traditions and becoming a student of the Bible. Schweitzer became a professor at the University of Strasbourg and was made director of the theological college at a young age. Schweitzer's first great book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, was an attempt to examine the work of the generation of German theological scholars who had tried to find the historical truth about Jesus and the Gospels. As he studied the historical Jesus, Schweitzer became convinced that Jesus was human, not divine. He also believed that Jesus never thought of himself as divine but, rather, as a teacher who could bring the kingdom of God into being. Schweitzer's views disturbed many scholars, but his work was largely ignored instead of attacked. Schweitzer was also an accomplished musician, and his book on Bach won a great deal of notice.

Not yet 30 years old, Schweitzer had become a distinguished teacher and scholar and was reaching the pinnacle of academic success. He chose, however, to go out into the world and devote his life to humanity rather than remain cloistered in academia. Inspired by a call for medical missionaries in West Africa, Schweitzer set aside his professorship to obtain a medical degree.

In 1913, Schweitzer and his wife arrived in West Africa, in the area we would call Gabon today. He built a hospital with limited funding and provided medical care for people who desperately needed it. He no longer believed in a personal God and used the term "God" only when describing historical religions. For Schweitzer, God was the whole human spirit. During the war, Schweitzer was deported and temporarily interned. Despite many bureaucratic obstacles, Schweitzer and his wife eventually returned to Africa to rebuild their hospital.

As he studied the historical Jesus, Schweitzer became convinced that Jesus was human, not divine. He also believed that Jesus never thought of himself as divine but, rather, as a teacher who could bring the kingdom of God into being.

Schweitzer had a spiritual awakening during the years he spent rebuilding his hospital. He came to the realization that reverence for life—reverence and awe before all living creatures—was the essential component missing from the world and that every living creature had a purpose. Schweitzer recognized the destructive aspects of technology and its negative impact on human life and the environment. In such books as *Civilization and Ethics*, Schweitzer set forth his creed: Humans must affirm that we have a purpose in life, we must live actively and engage deeply, and we must revere all life. The world was drawn to Schweitzer, and donations and volunteers began to pour into his hospital. At the same time, he continued to warn Europeans that they had learned nothing from the war and were headed for disaster.

He did not despise technology, but he believed it should be controlled. Just as he had warned, technology made possible the terrible slaughter of the death camps and the explosion of the atomic bomb. Albert Einstein convinced Schweitzer to speak out against the development of the atomic bomb, despite Schweitzer's desire to remove himself from political issues. His open letters and speeches aroused the attention of the FBI and CIA and eventually caused the funds he received from various foundations to dry up. Schweitzer continued to write and to work at the hospital until his death in 1965.

It is unfortunate that in the modern world, we don't seem to want to read about or learn from good people. The press tried to denigrate Schweitzer. Articles were written that did him much harm in terms of donations but never touched his spirit. The world couldn't accept a truly good man, but how right was Schweitzer when he told us that technology would become our master? He would not have been surprised at all by global warming and other disasters that loom before us. He would have said that our current global situation stems from our refusal to revere life. Schweitzer and his unconquerable spirit still speak to us today. ■

Suggested Reading

Brabazon, *Albert Schweitzer: A Biography*.

Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*.

———, *Reverence for Life*.

Questions to Consider

1. What elements of Hinduism or Buddhism are echoed in Schweitzer's thinking?

2. What other modern problems, in addition to global warming, might Schweitzer attribute to our lack of reverence for life?

Goethe—*The Sufferings of Young Werther*

Lecture 7

Goethe was so much in love with the beautiful Lotte that he seriously contemplated suicide. He was of a deeply melancholy disposition, and he took out a dagger—he said—time and time again and would poke himself to see how far he could drive it in. Then he decided, "No, instead of killing myself, I'm going to make a creative act."

In our second set of lectures, we ask the question: How do we live our lives? We will explore developments in our lives from youth to old age, the issues that confront us, and the lessons we derive from great books at each stage. We begin by looking at youth and one of the greatest novels ever to explore the follies, search for wisdom, and irrevocable decisions of young people: *The Sufferings of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). Goethe's father was a successful businessman and saw to it that his son received the best possible education. Goethe wanted to be an artist, but his father insisted that he pursue a career in law. At the age of 24, Goethe began to practice law in the town of Wetzlar in Germany. Goethe's unrequited love for a young woman named Charlotte (referred to affectionately as Lotte) drove him to suicidal despair. However, rather than end his life, he decided to channel his energy into the creation of a novel.

Faust, like Werther, contemplates suicide after the realization that all his efforts (in Faust's case, scholarly) have come to nothing.

Goethe wrote *The Sufferings of Young Werther* in approximately four weeks. The novel was an immediate success, and Goethe became an overnight sensation because of it. *The Sufferings of Young Werther* is written in the format of an epistolary novel—the primary correspondence being between Werther and his friend Wilhelm, who becomes the "editor" of Goethe's novel. Werther, like Goethe, moves to a small town and soon falls in love with a young woman named Charlotte. Charlotte is engaged to a man named Albert. Though Albert detects

that Werther is much taken with Charlotte, he considers Werther's affection a testimony to his own good taste and permits the friendship to continue. As Werther's passion for Charlotte deepens, he is encouraged by both Wilhelm and Charlotte to leave Wahlheim. Werther takes an administrative post with a character named Count C. and strikes up a new relationship with an aristocratic young woman. This woman eventually rejects Werther as an "embarrassment" because he is not part of the right social group.

Count C. suggests that Werther find other employment, and Werther learns that Albert and Charlotte have married. Werther has failed as an artist, he has failed with Charlotte, and he has failed in his job. Irrepressibly, he is drawn back to Wahlheim. Werther rekindles his friendship with Albert, which again becomes strained when Werther's passion for Charlotte reaches the point of obsession. Werther's obsession turns to suicidal despair after Charlotte rejects his advances. The next day, Werther (wearing the same blue suit and yellow vest he wore when he first met Charlotte) borrows Albert's hunting pistols, settles his debts, sends a final note to Wilhelm, and attempts to take his own life. Werther is still alive when a servant finds him the following morning. A doctor is brought in with Charlotte and Albert, and Werther dies in his bed. He is taken in the dark of night and buried in unconsecrated ground.

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).

This melodramatic tale swept Europe and made Goethe immediately famous. The Duke of Weimar appointed Goethe to be his counselor; Goethe would spend the rest of his life with the duke, climbing to ever greater renown. Goethe became the most celebrated intellect in Europe. He wrote magnificent works on science, nature, and history, as well as plays. "Werther fever" swept Europe. Some authorities claimed that hundreds, even thousands, of young men had killed themselves in a manner similar to Werther. Goethe bemoaned this obsession but continued to grapple with

the issue of carrying on in the face of despair in his own creative output. Already famous in middle age, Goethe began what he would regard as his greatest literary work: *Faust*. Faust, like Werther, contemplates suicide after the realization that all his efforts (in Faust's case, scholarly) have come to nothing. On his deathbed, Faust is saved from damnation by the intervention of the Virgin Mary.

Throughout his life, Goethe explored the role of love in human salvation. *The Sufferings of Young Werther* remains an enduring statement about the serious passions of the young and about situations that seem irredeemable. Goethe recalls for us the maxim spoken later by Winston Churchill: "As long as there is life, there is hope." ■

Suggested Reading

Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*.

Fears, *Books That Have Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life*, Lectures 28 and 29.

Goethe, *Selected Works*.

Questions to Consider

1. The imagery of the seasons is fundamental to the meaning of *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. Does that imagery have a meaning for our theme of youth through old age?

2. Can you explain why the Emperor Napoleon was so enamored of *The Sufferings of Young Werther?*

Shakespeare—*Hamlet*

Lecture 8

Every play of Shakespeare is profound in its simple understanding of how people really operate, what their motives are. Without going to religion—deep beliefs in God—[he asks] simply: How do humans operate? One of his central themes is jealousy and vengeance, these motives that drive far too many human concerns and actions.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of how great books inform the decisions we make at each stage of our lives, from youth through old age, and how we read these great books with new insights brought about by our own life experiences. Our second study in this section of the course is the play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (1564–1616). One of the situations we confront periodically in life concerns the question of revenge. Should we seek revenge? Should we devote time and energy to pondering revenge? *Hamlet* is the story of a youth who sets out on the path of vengeance, driven by the desire to avenge the death of his father.

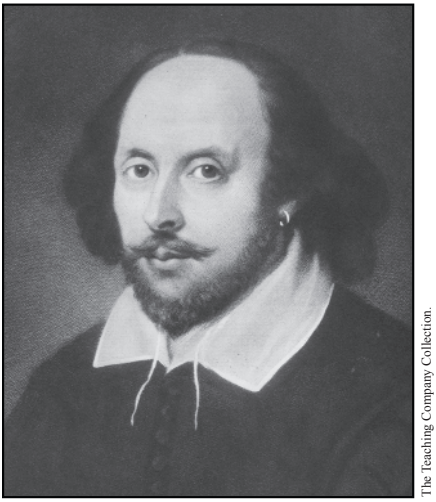
Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from *Hamlet* is this: Move on. Vengeance will change nothing.

We have already seen, particularly with Albert Schweitzer, that mediocre minds invariably hate genius. Shakespeare is a genius who wrote with a deeper understanding of human nature than almost any other author. *Hamlet* takes place in Denmark. Claudius, the new king, has assumed the throne after the death of his brother and has married his sister-in-law, Gertrude. A ghost bearing the likeness of the former king has repeatedly appeared before the night watchmen but will not speak to them. Prince Hamlet, pondering the mysterious death of his father and the subsequent (and sudden) marriage of his Uncle Claudius to his mother, is asked to try to speak to the ghost.

The ghost appears to Hamlet, claiming to be his father, and tells Hamlet that not only was he killed by Claudius, but Claudius and Gertrude had been engaged in an affair at the time. The ghost tells Hamlet to kill Claudius but

to spare Gertrude. As Hamlet begins to plot revenge, he adopts a pose of madness. Hamlet's behavior concerns Claudius, Gertrude, and the adviser Polonius, who urge the young prince to stay at home rather than return to his studies at Wittenberg. Shakespeare's language is the essence of elevated speech that is part of our definition of a great book. A memorable example is the speech Polonius gives to his son, Laertes, before he returns to study in Paris.

The plot thickens as Hamlet's apparent madness becomes more evident around the court. Ophelia (the daughter of Polonius), whom Hamlet has been courting, concludes that she has driven him crazy by not accepting his love. Pondering his future, Hamlet asks (in one of the most magnificent sets of lines in all of literature) the central question of our whole course: "To be or not to be—that is the question." Do we suffer the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," or do we take action? We have the path to freedom but fear what might occur if we take it. When Ophelia attempts to set things right with Hamlet, to accept his love, he spurns her, and his rejection drives her mad.



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William Shakespeare (1564–1616).

Hamlet then asks a group of actors who have come to court to perform a play that mirrors the murder of his father. The play disturbs both the king and queen, who leave the room, and Hamlet follows to confront them. Claudius goes to pray in the chapel, and Hamlet decides that he cannot kill the king at that moment, because he is confessing his sins and will not, therefore, suffer eternal torment. As he confronts his mother, Hamlet hears a rustle behind a curtain in the room. Thinking Claudius is hiding there, Hamlet stabs through the curtain, killing Polonius. Claudius schemes to send Hamlet to England to be murdered by the king

of England. Returning from Paris, Laertes learns that his father has been killed by Hamlet and that his sister, Ophelia, driven mad by Hamlet, has drowned and will be buried in unconsecrated ground (her death was ruled a suicide). Hamlet visits the graveyard as the gravediggers make preparations for Ophelia's burial. He ponders the bones being dug up and the transitory nature of life.

Laertes and Claudius conspire to get rid of Hamlet by offering forgiveness in exchange for a duel. Hamlet regrets the wrong he has caused Laertes and agrees to the duel, not knowing that the rapier Laertes intends to use will be dipped in poison. The duel begins, and Claudius offers Hamlet a drink from a goblet of poisoned wine. Hamlet refuses, but the queen drinks. Hamlet is wounded by Laertes, and wounds Laertes in turn with the poisoned rapier. When Hamlet learns that the rapier has been poisoned, he stabs Claudius. The prince of Norway, Fortinbras, arrives at the castle, and Hamlet proclaims him king of Denmark with his dying breath. Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from *Hamlet* is this: Move on. Vengeance will change nothing. ■

Suggested Reading

Dobson, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*.

Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

Questions to Consider

1. Does Shakespeare portray Hamlet's mother and stepfather as evil?

2. How might a more dispassionate and calculating heir to the throne have handled Hamlet's problems?

Sophocles—*Ajax*

Lecture 9

I'm always amused when people come up and say, "But you're not quoting Shakespeare exactly." He never oversaw the published versions of his plays. Few went to the same play *Hamlet* four nights in a row; you'd see four different versions. Shakespeare never dragged an actor offstage and said, "You're not following what I wrote." The actor improvised, and if it worked with the audience, that was good enough for Shakespeare.

In this lecture, we look at the tragic vision of another of the greatest writers of all time: Sophocles (c. 496–406 B.C.). Like Shakespeare, Sophocles wrote to please an audience, but his audience was democratic. Sophocles believed in the true greatness of the Athenian democracy. The Athenians ruled an empire, and every decision concerning war and peace, taxation, and other issues was made by all the Athenians voting in an assembly. Annual performances of Athenian tragedy were aimed at providing a continuous forum to illustrate the profound moral implications of politics. The plays of Sophocles were sung and featured elaborate music, stage effects, and costumes. Aristotle defined tragedy as the imitation of an action that is complete and noble, is performed with music and effects, and achieves catharsis by arousing in the audience emotions of fear and pity for the central (noble) character.

Sophocles explored tragedy in the fate of Ajax. Almost all of the tragedies of Sophocles were set in the distant past, not the immediate present of the 5th century B.C. The central issue in *Ajax* is the pride that goes before a fall. Ajax was one of the mightiest warriors of the Greek army that besieged the city of Troy. The Trojan War was a constant source of inspiration for Athenian tragedies because it embodied one of the great statements of folly and hubris. The mightiest of warriors, Achilles, died during the Trojan War. After his death, there was much debate over which Greek warrior should receive the armor of Achilles as a sign of highest recognition. Ajax was the obvious candidate for such an honor; he had so proven his glory

on the field of battle that Hector had recognized him with friendship as the greatest of all the Greek foes. Menelaus and Agamemnon saw Ajax as a threat to their power and rigged an election to cause Odysseus to receive the armor of Achilles.

The play begins after the rigged election, with Ajax utterly undone by the decision to honor Odysseus. He believes he can regain his honor only with blood and, thus, determines to shed the blood of the entire Greek army. The Greek gods looked down upon Ajax as a man filled with pride. Before Ajax left for the war, he had told his father that all he needed was his sword and shield, not the gods, to win glory.

The play begins after the rigged election, with Ajax utterly undone by the decision to honor Odysseus. He believes he can regain his honor only with blood and, thus, determines to shed the blood of the entire Greek army.

The goddess Athena settles a form of blindness on Ajax that causes him to mistake a herd of cattle and sheep for the Greek army. When he sets out to destroy the Greeks, he instead falls upon the herd. When Athena restores his sight, Ajax realizes that he has publicly dishonored himself by his actions—a dishonor compounded by the fact that he had not won the armor of Achilles.

Utterly shamed and disregarding his wife's pleas, Ajax takes his own life with the sword Hector had given him. Ajax's brother asks for a funeral pyre to be built but is denied by Menelaus and Agamemnon, who wish to continue their humiliation of Ajax by leaving his body as it lies. When Odysseus learns of the situation, he tells Agamemnon that his actions have violated the laws of the gods and will bring disaster. Odysseus arranges for an honorable funeral for Ajax, as well as care for his son and the return of his wife to Greece. In a far less noble way, how much today are we not creatures of reputation? But we must remember that a reputation based only on what others think is a delusion. ■

Suggested Reading

Aristotle, *Poetics*.

Fears, *Famous Greeks*, Lectures 12 through 14.

Sophocles, *Ajax*.

Questions to Consider

1. How would you adapt the character of Ajax to represent a contemporary, success-driven CEO?

2. What role does the wife of Ajax play in the tragic action? Women did not vote in ancient Athens any more than they did in the United States of 1787. The personal freedom of Athenian women was extremely limited. Do these facts negate the lessons we can learn today from Athenian tragedy?

Plato—Epistle VII

Lecture 10

Gandhi said, "I make mistakes, and when I make them, they are Himalayan in size; I make the biggest possible mistakes. I take comfort as I make one mistake after another in the fact that the wisest person who ever lived, I believe—Plato—made mistakes and admitted them."

Each of us probably has some aspect of our lives that we take far too seriously, causing us to make mistakes. It is comforting to know that Plato, one of the wisest people ever to have lived, also made mistakes and admitted to them. Plato is at the center of any discussion of great books. His works endure as attempts to understand the most fundamental questions. Plato made one big mistake, he said, when he decided for a period to get involved in politics. Plato believed that he could make a change in the way politics worked in Sicily. He discussed his career there in the letter known as Epistle VII.

In Plato's time, the Athenian democracy had ignored the lessons of Sophocles's tragedies and chose to involve itself in a preemptive war against Sparta. The war was expected to be quick, but it lasted for decades and ended with the complete destruction of Athens, the loss of its empire, and the loss of its navy. Athens became a Spartan dependency.

The Spartans placed 30 men in control of Athens, but when that government collapsed, democracy returned. Plato resolved to dedicate his life to teaching and to the pursuit of wisdom. He wished to continue the mission of Socrates. Called by King Dionysius to lecture in Sicily, Plato spent some months teaching there. He desired to bring justice to the world and to government by educating Dionysius. When Dionysius died, he was succeeded by his son, Dionysius II. Dion, the brother of Dionysius I, called Plato back to Sicily to act as tutor for the young ruler. Plato soon discovered that the court was a hotbed of intrigue and suspicion. The young Dionysius ruled like a tyrant, and after he exiled his uncle, Plato resolved to return to Athens.

In Athens, Plato continued to ponder the meaning of power and justice. He finished the *Republic*, using dialogues with Socrates to illustrate the nuances of government. He suggested that the foundation of a truly good government must be justice and that rulers and citizens must possess the cardinal virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation.

Great books make us better as individuals, but they also make us better citizens.

Plato was asked by Dionysius II to return to Sicily and was offered lavish gifts as incentives. Dionysius at first attempted to convince Plato that he was a dedicated student and that he believed in the wisdom Plato had written. Plato became caught up in political scheming when Dionysius asked him to sign a letter to his uncle regarding the disbursement of money owed. When Plato eventually agreed to sign the document in exchange for permission to return to Athens, he found himself trapped by Dionysius and slandered because of the fraudulent nature of the document he had signed. But Greek leaders exerted a great deal of pressure on Dionysius, and Plato was finally allowed to return to Athens. There, he reconsidered the definition of a commonwealth and came to the understanding that only the law can be the true ruler of a nation.

Great books make us better as individuals, but they also make us better citizens. The Founding Fathers of the United States read the *Laws* of Plato and used it as a basis for framing the Constitution. It is perhaps not so important that ordinary Americans know exactly what's in the Constitution but that they have imbibed its spirit. Our country's grounding in the Constitution explains why America has brought more freedom to the world than any other nation in history. ■

Suggested Reading

Kraut, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*.

Plato, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Cleitophon*, *Menexenus*, *Epistles*.

Questions to Consider

1. How could Plato have been so misguided as to undertake this task?

2. With the example of Plato before them, why did Seneca and Boethius make the same mistake?

Cicero—"On Old Age"

Lecture 11

It was Cicero far more than Plato that the Founders of our country admired—admired him for his political life and principles, admired him for the purity of his Latin, and enjoyed his speeches and philosophical works.

After we have expended our youth and made the mistakes of middle age, how will we deal with old age? To answer this question, we look to Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.) and his essay "On Old Age." Cicero, along with Plato, deserves to be in any course on great books. He is the Roman equivalent of Plato: a man of great philosophical learning, a brilliant Latin stylist, and a true patriot. Cicero was born in a small town in Italy. His father was a successful businessman who set out to give Cicero the true opportunity of education. Cicero spent several years abroad in Greece, immersing himself in Greek learning, philosophy, and rhetoric. He embarked on a successful career in law, winning a reputation as a man of honesty. When he was still relatively young, Cicero reached the height of a political career in the old Roman Republic. He held the office of consul during a year when Rome was threatened by a rebellion and civil war. Despite his sterling reputation, Cicero's political enemies had him exiled on trumped-up charges. He endured his exile with dignity before returning to Rome.

We know a great deal about Cicero because he left a large number of letters. Cicero believed that Rome could keep its constitution, despite the maneuvering of such men as Julius Caesar, if all parties in the commonwealth would put aside their differences and work together for the common good. When Caesar emerged as the dictator of Rome, he offered Cicero the leading position among his advisers. Cicero, feeling that he had failed the Roman people and not wanting to serve a tyrant, refused the position and retired to his country estates. Cicero's life was in ruins. He had divorced, his daughter had died, and his son was in Greece, squandering his father's money. Rather than let his situation defeat him, Cicero turned his misfortune into a period of creativity.

At the age of 61, with Caesar at the height of his power and Cicero in what he saw as self-imposed exile, Cicero wrote his work "On Old Age." The work is in Latin and written in the form of a dialogue. The principal participants are Marcus Porcius Cato, Publius Cornelius Scipio, and Laelius, called the "wise one." Unlike Plato, Cicero uses historical figures instead of abstractions to disprove common misconceptions about old age. Romans always believed, as the Spartans did, that age brings wisdom. Cicero insisted that each stage of life has its own abilities and obligations, pleasures, and significance.

On the floor of the Senate, Cicero gave some of the most remarkable and moving speeches in the history of political oratory, denouncing Mark Antony as a usurper and a potential tyrant.

Cicero returned to the Senate after the assassination of Caesar. He was determined to oppose Mark Antony and restore freedom to Rome. On the floor of the Senate, Cicero gave some of the most remarkable and moving speeches in the history of political oratory, denouncing Mark Antony as a usurper and a potential tyrant. Antony was driven out but later reached an agreement with Octavian to pursue the conspirators Brutus and Cassius, who had killed Julius Caesar. Before he would join forces with Octavian, Antony insisted that Cicero be killed. Octavian reluctantly agreed. Rather than flee, Cicero accepted the decision of Antony and Octavian and offered himself to his executioners. We might find parallels to Cicero's final appearance at the Roman Senate in Benjamin Franklin's decision to appear at the Constitutional Convention. Despite his old age and infirmity, Franklin was instrumental in persuading participants at the convention to sign the Constitution. ■

Suggested Reading

Cicero, *On Old Age*.

Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician*.

Questions to Consider

1. How would we answer Cicero if he asked us moderns why we are so determined to continue the physical pleasures of youth into old age?

2. Do Cicero's reflections on old age take on a deeper meaning if we recognize that he gave up the leisured old age he describes to fight and die for his country and its freedom?

Isaac Bashevis Singer—*The Penitent*

Lecture 12

What is the good of living a long or short life if we do not learn and if we do not grow intellectually, morally, and spiritually as a result of the life we live and the experiences that we have?

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of how we live our lives. We've progressed from youth to middle age to old age and will now consider what happens when we suddenly decide, at any stage in our lives, that we've made a terrible mistake. One of the most noble, enduring, and powerful studies of the realization of a mistake is *The Penitent* by Isaac Singer (1902–1991). Singer addresses the question the good of living a long or short life if we do not learn and grow intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

Isaac Singer was born in Poland to a Jewish family. His father was a rabbi and a deeply devout man. The story of *The Penitent* takes us back to that same rich Jewish culture that we explored when we talked about Elie Wiesel's *Night*. From the 18th century, there had been a strong tendency among many Jewish people to assimilate, to become part of European life.

Nonetheless, Singer realized that European Jews were in serious danger. So in 1935 he left Poland for the United States. Even so, Singer believed that there was something special about his mother tongue, the Yiddish language and wrote magnificent novels in Yiddish.

For Shapiro, seeking communion with God is the most meaningful pursuit a person can undertake.

One of his most beautiful works was *The Penitent*, which takes place in 1969 and is narrated by Singer. In the story, Singer is visiting Jerusalem for the first time. There he listens to the story of Joseph Shapiro (the penitent). Shapiro tells Singer how he endured the horror of World War II and became a dedicated communist, looking disdainfully upon the devout Jewish community. With his girlfriend, Shapiro

wanted to move to Palestine to rebuild a socialist Israel. When Shapiro could not obtain a visa to get into Palestine, he moved to New York, married his girlfriend, and developed a successful real estate business. In New York, Shapiro indulged in a lavish lifestyle but became disillusioned when he discovered that his wife was having an affair. Wandering the streets of New York, Shapiro was pulled into a prayer group, where he was reminded of his youth. Though hesitant at first, he suddenly finds his voice and begins to pray. The experience inspires him to move to Israel. When he arrives in Israel, Shapiro divorces his wife and eventually marries a woman named Sarah. He finds his way back to the Jewish tradition he had rejected. Shapiro urges Singer to reject material success and the poison of modern media, to look instead to the wisdom of God and the scriptures and the wisdom already inside himself. For Shapiro, seeking communion with God is the most meaningful pursuit a person can undertake.

Isaac Singer did not write *The Penitent* to force his beliefs on others. He wrote the novel to prompt us to ponder, at each stage of our lives, where we came from and where we are going and to realize that we can always change. ■

Suggested Reading

Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

Singer, *The Penitent*.

Wigoder, *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*.

Questions to Consider

1. What makes *The Penitent* so much more than the story of a midlife crisis?

2. What is Joseph Shapiro's attitude toward our modern absorption with fundraising for educational and religious purposes?

Euripides—*Alcestis*

Lecture 13

The purpose of the play, the tragedy, was to awaken in you the emotions of fear and pity and, thereby, to achieve a catharsis—a purging of those emotions, as when you eat too many prunes—to cleanse you so you could then, without fear and pity, make decisions.

In this lecture, we turn to the third theme in this course. We began with examples of the unconquerable human spirit. Then we explored youth and aging. Now we turn to love, perhaps the most powerful of human emotions. We begin with the classical Greeks and with two dramas by Euripides (c. 484–406 B.C.). The first drama we will examine is *Alcestis*.

Recall the principles of Athenian tragedy discussed in our lecture on Sophocles: Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is complete and noble. It is performed, not narrated, with beautiful music and aristocratic language to arouse in the audience the emotions of fear and pity. The great day of the Athenian tragedy was coterminous with the great day of the Athenian democracy. Euripides was somewhat unpopular with his Athenian audience because his views tended to be more forward-looking than those of other playwrights. Aristotle believed that some of Euripides's characters did not satisfy the requirement of nobility and that much of his work was too melodramatic. Later audiences admired Euripides tremendously.

In the play *Alcestis*, Euripides explores the question of what we mean by true love. The play is set in the little kingdom of Pherae in Thessaly, which is ruled by a man named Admetus. As punishment for killing the Cyclopes, Zeus sends the god Apollo to serve as King Admetus's slave for one year. Admetus treats Apollo with great kindness. As a reward, Apollo tells Admetus that he will not have to die at his appointed time as long as he can find someone to willingly die in his place. When Death comes for Admetus, the only person willing to die for him is his wife, Alcestis. While the kingdom mourns the loss of Alcestis, Hercules arrives at the house of Admetus.

Hercules defeats Death and brings Alcestis back from the grave. She is unable to speak for three days but soon will have all her faculties returned. Euripides ends the action with a chorus made up of the elders of Pherae, who deliver the lesson of the play: The ways of the gods are incomprehensible to humans; what we pray for, they do not send us, and they send us what we do not ask for. The resurrection of Alcestis is a simple miracle that should cause us to believe.

This Greek tragedy and the lesson of the vicarious sacrifice would find a profound echo in the essence of the mystery of Christianity.

Euripides was not a religious skeptic and, in fact, had deep religious beliefs. His plays were religious performances, the equivalent of an altar set in the middle of the theater, and each play was devoted to the god Dionysus. Worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, was the civic religion of Athens. Dionysus was the son of Zeus by a mortal woman. Zeus resurrected Dionysus after the jealous goddess Hera destroyed him. The Greeks believed that Dionysus had immortal life and that whoever believed in him would live forever. The Greeks saw a profound mystery in the power of the gods to bring life out of death every year—to make the grape vines blossom in the spring after the desolation of winter.

Dionysus represents the hero who suffered and was brought back to life to save all of humanity, and this was the message of *Alcestis*, as well. This Greek tragedy and the lesson of the vicarious sacrifice would find a profound echo in the essence of the mystery of Christianity. Learned Christians in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. saw in the story of Alcestis the idea that God himself sought to prepare the minds of Gentiles for the coming of the true message of Christianity. ■

Suggested Reading

Euripides, *Alcestis*.

Fears, *Books That Have Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life*, Lecture 12.

Murray, *Euripides and His Age*.

Questions to Consider

1. Euripides has been called "more modern" than Sophocles. This characterization refers to an understanding of psychology and a more sympathetic view of women. Comparing the tragedies *Alcestis* and *Ajax*, do you agree?

2. Privately, ask yourself: Who might be willing to die for you?

Euripides—*Medea*

Lecture 14

To study under one of these Sophists cost as much as it would be to send your son or daughter to Harvard today; it cost in real currency of today about $44,000 a year.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of the theme of love as we examine the play *Medea* by Euripides. The Athenians cherished democracy and emphasized the importance of civic responsibility, but women were considered passive citizens and were not allowed to vote or to attend the performance of tragedies (attendance was considered the duty of a citizen). The freedom afforded by democracy spawned a great burst of creativity in Athens, seen largely in the arts but also in the questioning of Athenian values. The Sophists were one of the first groups to question all aspects of Athenian life and beliefs, as well as the first group of professional educators. Citizens paid large sums of money for their sons to study with the Sophists to learn how to speak well and be persuasive and successful in the political arena. Sophists believed that in order to sway an audience, speakers had to be able to present a false argument just as well as a true one. The first step in learning how to be a successful politician was to learn to lie effectively. Sophists also taught that eternal, objective values did not exist. This questioning of values led to an evaluation of women's rights. Plato tells us that Athenian democracy had progressed so far in its definition of liberty as equality that many began to advocate full political rights for women.

In *Medea*, however, Euripides shows his audience that women are dangerous when allowed outside of their accustomed boundaries of utter subordination.

Euripides ponders the issue of women's rights in his play *Medea*. Set in the mythological past, the play asks the question: Should women be kept under close control by men? The story is set in Corinth and centers on Jason, the hero of the Argonauts, and his wife, Medea. The Athenian audience had

a certain background understanding of Jason, Medea, and the story of the Argonauts. This shared knowledge allowed Euripides to begin his play at the point where the two main characters have settled in Corinth and have children. Jason is approached by King Creon of Corinth and asked if he would like to marry Creon's daughter. To advance his position, Jason agrees to the union. Medea is outraged when she hears the news and swears to take vengeance on Jason, his new wife, and the entire kingdom of Corinth.

Jason attempts to persuade Medea that his decision will benefit everyone, including their children. Nevertheless, Medea continues her ranting until she is deemed dangerous by King Creon and banished from his kingdom. Euripides shows us the language of the Sophists in Jason's final attempt to persuade Medea that his actions are just. Medea pretends to be persuaded by Jason and offers a crown and golden dress to his wife-to-be. However, Medea has poisoned the gifts, and the princess bursts into flames when she puts them on. Creon tries to help his daughter, but they are both killed. Medea then gathers her own children, asks them for a final kiss, and slays them. Calling on a favor from King Aegeus, Medea takes refuge in Athens, and Jason is left in ruin.

Medea was presented to an entirely male audience. Frequently, we hear that some dramatists, such as Aeschylus, were trying to speak out for women's rights. In *Medea*, however, Euripides shows his audience that women are dangerous when allowed outside of their accustomed boundaries of utter subordination. This opinion was shared by many Athenian statesmen and philosophers. Such plays as *Medea* speak to us across the ages, but in interpreting them, we must be aware of applying our own values to a very different kind of democracy. ■

Suggested Reading

Euripides, *Medea*.

Fantham, *Women in the Classical World*.

Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*.

Murray, *Euripides and His Age*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you find Medea and Jason to be realistic characters?

2. Women in the Athenian democracy had no political rights, had little individual freedom, and were held in low esteem by men. Explain the characters of Medea and Alcestis within that context.

Von Strasburg—*Tristan and Isolde*

Lecture 15

"Honor" is a word that we use all the time today, but it has no meaning in our own society. Honor: It could only flourish in a society that recognizes the duel, and the duel combat was at the very heart of the feudal system.

In this lecture, we continue our discussion of the theme of love. In the story of Tristan and Isolde, told in the magnificent poetry of Gottfried von Strasburg in the early 13th century A.D., we ponder why it is perhaps best to always tell the truth about one's relationships. The late 12th and early 13th centuries saw the full flowering of the feudal system in Western Europe. The system had grown out of the chaos of the social, economic, and political collapse of the Roman Empire and rested on a local duke's need to possess an army to protect his own people and his livelihood. Knights served the local duke, and the duke, in turn, served the king.

Out of the feudal system emerged the knight and, with him, the noble idea of chivalry. Knights were not simply warriors; they were bound by a code of conduct that rested on the principles of honor. The code of chivalry was elevated by the ideal of courtly love. In an era when aristocratic women were generally unable to choose their own husbands, the idea of courtly love legitimized the arrangement in which a wife became the cherished object of a lover. One of the most fabled of all stories of such lovers is that of Tristan and Isolde. Such medieval romances come in many versions because they changed every time they were sung at court. Perhaps the finest version of *Tristan and Isolde* was sung by Gottfried von Strasburg.

Gottfried probably composed his version of *Tristan and Isolde* around 1210, the year he died. The story is set in Britain and Brittany. The story begins in Cornwall with the famed Knight Rivalin, who falls in love with Blanchefleur, sister of King Marke. Afraid to tell the king of their love, Rivalin and Blanchefleur go to Brittany, where they are wed and Blanchefleur becomes pregnant. Rivalin is killed in a duel, and Blanchefleur gives birth before she, too, dies. The child is named Tristan and is taken up by one of Rivalin's

trusted friends, who raises Tristan as his own. Tristan is taught all the skills of a knight and eventually journeys to Cornwall, where he is persuaded to serve King Marke. Cornwall struggles under a heavy tribute required from the king of Ireland. To resolve this problem and bring peace between King Marke and the king of Ireland, Tristan suggests that King Marke marry Isolde, daughter of the Irish king. Tristan goes to Ireland and wins the favor of the king by slaying a dragon; the marriage of Isolde and King Marke is arranged. Knowing that King Marke was much older than Isolde, Isolde's maid made a love potion hoping it would help Isolde to fall in love with him. But during the journey back to Cornwall, Tristan and Isolde accidentally drank the love potion and fell madly in love with each other.

They realized they were under the influence of the love potion, but they consummated their love anyways, knowing they still must return to King Marke. Deception in the name of love is never dishonor in the courtly tradition; thus, Tristan and Isolde begin a series of deceptions of King Marke. Their love is clear to anyone who watches them, but King Marke will not believe anything said against Tristan.

At the heart of the medieval cult of courtly love was the idea that however imperfect we are on Earth, there is in us a spark of that divine love that unites us with God.

To quell the circulating rumors, Isolde tells Marke that she will swear an oath that she has never been in the arms of another man and will do so in front of the entire kingdom. When the arrangements are made for Isolde to make her public oath, Tristan (disguised as a pilgrim) is sent to help Isolde off the boat. She intentionally falls in front of the king and witnesses and is caught by Tristan. Thus, she can swear publicly that she has never lain in the arms of another man except for the pilgrim who tried to help her from the boat. The rumors about Tristan and Isolde persist, and King Marke eventually realizes the truth of the situation. He sends Tristan and Isolde away to live happily, rather than stay at court and break his heart. After some time, King Marke spies on the lovers and convinces himself that they have been chaste. He invites them back to his court, but the rumors recur, and the king eventually tells Tristan to leave and never return.

Tristan journeys far and performs many knightly deeds, eventually offering his services to the king of Arundel, whose lands are off the coast of Scotland. By coincidence, the daughter of this king is also named Isolde, Isolde of the White Hands. She falls madly in love with Tristan, and eventually, they marry. Tristan is wounded by a poisoned spear while trying to help his wife's brother. He believes only his true love—the true Isolde—can save him, and so he sends for her. When Tristan's wife learns about the first Isolde, she becomes insanely jealous. As Isolde's ship arrives, Tristan's wife tells him that Isolde has turned her back on him, and he dies.

Isolde learns of Tristan's death, goes to the castle where he lies dead, embraces him, and dies of love. When King Marke learns of the events, he travels to Arundel, wishing that Isolde had trusted him from the beginning and told him of her love for Tristan. He would have allowed them to be together rather than endure this tragedy. King Marke takes the bodies of Tristan and Isolde back to Cornwall, builds a chapel for them, and buries them in the same casket. At the heart of the medieval cult of courtly love was the idea that however imperfect we are on Earth, there is in us a spark of that divine love that unites us with God. ■

Suggested Reading

Fears, *Books That Have Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life*, Lecture 27.

Lambdin, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*.

Von Strasburg, *Tristan and Isolde*.

Questions to Consider

1. In the medieval system of feudalism and chivalry, Tristan's first duty lay with King Marke. Why did he betray that duty?

2. Do you find Tristan and Isolde admirable or even sympathetic?

Shakespeare—*Antony and Cleopatra*

Lecture 16

This most profound student of human nature, Shakespeare, saw not just the drama but the lesson and character study in a tale of Antony and Cleopatra. It is one of his masterpieces, produced in 1607, when he was at the height of his creative powers.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of the theme of love with a play that is based on historical rather than fictional events. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is one of the most spectacular examples of the author's creative genius. Much of Shakespeare's audience knew something about Caesar, Octavian, and about the struggles for empire. The play has as its theme this struggle and one man's choice to throw away his power for love. After the assassination of Caesar in 44 B.C., the Roman people did not, as Brutus and Cassius had expected, welcome the return to liberty. They hated the conspirators for what they had done. Mark Antony, who had been Caesar's consul, stepped in and began to consolidate the power that Caesar once possessed.

The story told by Shakespeare is not just a story of Antony. It is the story of four men, each of whom had the opportunity to assume world power in the wake of Caesar's assassination. Lepidus came from a highly distinguished Roman family, was a capable general, a good administrator, and a real challenge to Mark Antony. Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompey the Great, would also make a bid for power. But the most surprising entrant into the fray was Gaius Octavius. He was only 19 when he received the news that his great uncle Caesar had been assassinated and had adopted him posthumously, leaving him the name of Caesar, as well as a vast fortune. We know him as Octavian, but Shakespeare, throughout the play, refers to him as Caesar.

Shakespeare begins his play in 42 B.C. After an initial period of conflict, Antony and young Caesar have combined their forces with Lepidus. They have defeated the conspirators in Greece, and young Caesar has fulfilled his vow to avenge his father. As the play begins, Antony has left Rome to

restore order in the Middle East, collect taxes, and bring under control the various client states that have tried to break away. Antony must deal with Cleopatra, who has refused to meet his demand that the client kings come to meet with him in Syria. When he eventually sees Cleopatra on her yacht, Antony is absolutely taken by the queen, and she becomes his mistress. It is interesting to note that Cleopatra, in Shakespeare's pages, is little more than a demanding mistress, because the real Cleopatra was very different.

In the first act, messengers bring Antony serious news. His sister and brother have broken his agreement with young Caesar and started a civil war in Italy, claiming that they acted in Antony's name. The Roman Senate and the young Caesar blame Antony for this turn of events. Further, Antony's forces have been defeated by the Iranians, and he learns of the death of his sister. Antony decides that he must return to Rome, see to matters with the young Caesar, and reassert his authority. Cleopatra, the wounded mistress, insists that Antony will forget her as soon as he returns to Rome, but he has become so taken with her that he swears this will not happen.

Young Caesar is next to be outraged when word is brought to him that Antony has bestowed upon Cleopatra and her children the whole of the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

Shakespeare gives us a magnificent portrait of Antony, Caesar, and Lepidus coming together. It is clear from the introduction that Caesar will win power, but he respects Antony at this point. Lepidus is the weakest member of the group. The three men patch up their quarrel and agree to turn their forces against Pompey, whom Shakespeare paints sympathetically. He is a capable and honorable man, and that is his mistake. It is decided that Antony will return to the East, Pompey will clear the seas of pirates, Lepidus will continue in his administrative functions, and Caesar will return to Rome. Antony goes back to Cleopatra but has acquired a wife, Caesar's sister, whom he has married as part of the arrangement to bring order to the Roman Empire. Antony soon receives word that Caesar has, without the permission of Antony, destroyed Pompey and removed Lepidus from power.

Young Caesar is next to be outraged when word is brought to him that Antony has bestowed upon Cleopatra and her children the whole of the eastern part of the Roman Empire and that he has given the name "King of Kings" to Cleopatra's child by Great Caesar. Caesar goes before the Roman Senate and claims that Cleopatra has destroyed Antony's mind, that he is deranged and dangerous. Shakespeare moves the scene quickly to the climactic battle between young Caesar and Mark Antony. Shakespeare makes clear the fundamental division between Roman values and the values of the Middle East. As Antony prepares to go to war, Cleopatra convinces Antony to fight a naval battle rather a ground battle. Antony hesitates for he knows he would be utterly dependent upon Cleopatras's ships. Despite his friends' warnings, Antony seeks to show his trust in Cleopatra. Antony's fleet was winning until Cleopatra turned and fled, causing the fleet to surrender. The betrayed Antony is forced to surrender to Caesar, and he returns to Cleopatra in Alexandria a defeated man.

With Caesar now marching on Alexandria, Antony makes a foolish attempt to challenge Caesar to hand-to-hand combat. Caesar refuses mockingly, and Antony is once again betrayed by his fleet. Cleopatra locks herself in a tower, awaiting the arrival of Caesar. She sends a messenger to tell Antony that she has killed herself, and in despair, Antony tries to run himself through with his sword. It's very difficult to kill yourself with a two-foot sword. Antony botches the suicide attempt, and wounded, he is carried through the streets of Alexandria and brought to Cleopatra in a basket. He dies in her arms.

When Caesar arrives in Alexandria, Cleopatra offers to divide her possessions with him but lies about the extent of her wealth. A clown brings Cleopatra a box of figs with a viper in it; she presses the snake to her breast and dies. The last words of the play belong to Caesar. Antony and Cleopatra are to be buried side by side in a magnificent tomb. The procession marches off stage: Caesar the winner and Antony, the man who threw away everything for love. ■

Suggested Reading

Dobson, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*.

Fears, *Famous Greeks*, Lecture 22.

Plutarch, *Life of Antony*.

Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you draw deeper meaning from this play, based on history, than you might from a completely fictional work dealing with the same theme?

2. Why does Shakespeare use a clown to bring the poisonous snake to Cleopatra?

Shakespeare—*Macbeth*

Lecture 17

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is one of his most powerful plays. It was, in fact, the favorite play of President Lincoln of all the Shakespearean plays, and he knew the plays very, very well.

We continue our exploration of the theme of love with one of the most violent and cold-blooded loves of all time: The love between the thane of Cawdor, Macbeth, and his wife, Lady Macbeth. Scotland has a blood-stained history. By the year 1040, which is the time of *Macbeth*, the region was divided into clan territories ruled by warlike chieftains. The land of *Macbeth* is a land torn by rivalries. The high king of Scotland sits precariously upon his throne, and the country is under attack by enemies from all sides. The witches in the opening scene of the play would have represented real evil to a 17th-century audience. Their presence indicates that the normal course of events will be turned upside down in the play and nothing will be as it should be.

Macbeth is a chilling portrait of the true evil of tyranny, but the idea shared by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth that happiness comes with power is not lost to the past; it still stalks us today.

We are introduced to Macbeth through the eyes of Duncan, the king of Scotland. Duncan intends to make Macbeth the thane of Cawdor. Macbeth encounters the witches as he rides to see the king. They tell him of his new title and that he will be king hereafter. They also tell Banquo, a commander, that he will be the father of kings. Lady Macbeth is determined that her husband will become king by any means necessary. She devises a plan to kill Duncan and frame his watchmen for the murder. Macbeth kills the king and his watchmen and blames the king's sons (who have fled for their lives) for the conspiracy. Macbeth is crowned king of Scotland. Fearing the witches' prophecies regarding Banquo, Macbeth resolves to kill him and his son to ensure that his reign will continue. Banquo is murdered, but his son escapes.

Power and ambition corrupt us, as seen in Macbeth's actions. His bloody reign settles over Scotland—tyrannous and murderous. The thane of Fife flees to England to find Duncan's son, Malcolm, and convince him to recapture the throne. Malcolm wants to restore the peace and sanity of his country and agrees to overthrow Macbeth. Macbeth seeks out the witches for advice. He is told to beware of the thane of Fife but to wage war knowing that no man born of woman can defeat him. Lady Macbeth is driven mad with guilt and commits suicide. Malcolm and Macduff (the thane of Fife) advance on the castle. Macduff seeks out Macbeth and kills him, for he had been "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb and was not, therefore, "born of woman." Malcolm is crowned king of Scotland.

Macbeth is a chilling portrait of the true evil of tyranny, but the idea shared by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth that happiness comes with power is not lost to the past; it still stalks us today. ■

Suggested Reading

Dobson, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.

Questions to Consider

1. Who is more to blame, Lady Macbeth or her husband?

2. How might a man more calculating and less dependent on his wife than Macbeth have achieved the kingship?

Aldous Huxley—*Brave New World*

Lecture 18

There is a long assembly line, and we see how the little embryos are laid on the assembly line, having been gathered very scientifically and hygienically. Then, each one is fertilized, and then, they go along and they receive just the right inoculations, so that they'll never be sick [and] they'll never have any birth defects.

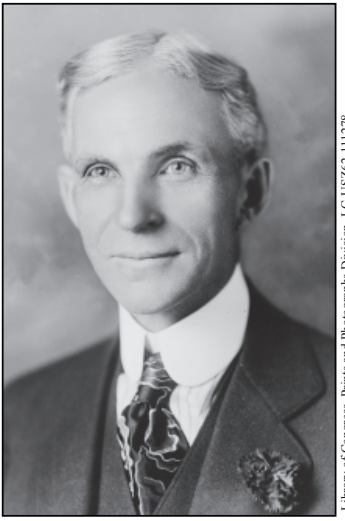
From *Alcestis* to *Macbeth*, we have explored the theme of love and learned how much trouble and destruction it can cause. In the last book in this section of our course, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), we will see love eliminated. Huxley was born into an influential and intellectual English family. He was educated at Eton College, then took a degree from Oxford. He started his writing career as a journalist but later turned to novels. In 1932, Huxley published *Brave New World*, one of the most prophetic novels of the 20th century.

The title *Brave New World* comes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

The story begins in the year 632 A.F. (a designation inspired by Henry Ford), 600 years after 1932. The setting is London, at a center for hatching and conditioning, where new creatures are created and trained to be good citizens of this new world. The director is introducing a group of new workers to the process of generating, on an assembly line, children that will not have birth defects or ever become sick. The babies are divided into groups according to disposition and ability. The entire society is geared toward a consumer economy. Children are conditioned to avoid enriching experiences, such as enjoying nature or reading books, and their predetermined stations in life are reinforced at every opportunity. Henry Ford is revered as a prophet for having developed the assembly line and understanding the need for consumer goods.

Working in the hatchery are several young intellectuals, members of the Alpha group: Bernard, Helmholtz, and Henry. Bernard and Helmholtz have

struck up a friendship and are looked upon as a little outside the norm. Rather than concern themselves with the typical pleasures indulged in by the other members of society, they think about reading, being alone, and traveling to areas of the world that have not been "sanitized." Bernard wants to take a girl named Lenina to New Mexico to a reservation populated by "savages"—those who live as humans did in the past. After obtaining permission from the director, Bernard and Lenina travel to the reservation and witness things they have never seen before—religious ceremonies, the elderly, and the everyday messiness of human life. Bernard and Lenina are introduced to a woman named Linda, whom they learn at one time had a relationship with the director of the hatchery back in London. Linda has a child named John, who speaks in a kind of Shakespearean English.



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Henry Ford (1863–1947).

Linda and John return to London with Bernard and Lenina. John and Bernard become celebrities. John grows increasingly uncomfortable in London, and eventually, John, Bernard, and Helmholtz are brought before "his fordship," Mustapha, a kind of enlightened dictator. Mustapha explains the tenets of the new society and allows Helmholtz and John to leave London. John is sent to a lighthouse on the coast of London but is perpetually bothered by the press and tourists. The constant intrusions eventually drive him to suicide.

The title *Brave New World* comes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In Shakespeare's day, the discovery of the New World seemed to open up a new page in human history and an opportunity to achieve a better way of living. Unfortunately, that vision was never realized. The new science and technology of the 19th century became one more engine of destruction rather than a means to abolish human suffering. Huxley commented on the misuse

of technology in his foreword to a later edition of *Brave New World*. Huxley saw in the future only the possibility of a world divided into a number of nuclear powers or a world government much like that in the brave new world of his novel. ■

Suggested Reading

Huxley, *Brave New World*.

———, *Brave New World Revisited*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you find *Brave New World* outdated or terribly relevant?

2. Why is Henry Ford the "Founding Father" of *Brave New World*?

Homer—*Odyssey*

Lecture 19

"I don't care a thing for the god Zeus," says Polyphemus, "but I'll tell you what, I'm a little hungry." He grabs two of Odysseus's men; bites their heads off, the way you'd snap a can [open], and drinks their blood; and crunches them up, the way you'd eat up a chicken wing—crunch, crunch, crunch. "There," he says and falls asleep.

We have examined the unconquerable human spirit, looked at how we live our lives from youth to old age, and explored the theme of love. In this lecture, we turn to the fourth of our themes: adventure. Homer's *Odyssey* epitomizes a great book: It has a great theme, it is written in noble language, and it speaks across the ages. British Prime Minister William Gladstone believed that one could develop the entire moral code needed to live a good and just life by studying the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* was composed by Homer (fl. 9th or 8th century B.C.) in his later years. It is a poem about an old man, Odysseus, who wants only to return home after the Trojan War to find peace and quiet, but who knows all the troubles that life can bring.

At the end of a long life of suffering, maybe the best lesson that any of us can learn is to stay home, take care of our families, and be content with a life that brings simple happiness instead of glory.

Odysseus had been reluctant to fight the Trojan War from the beginning and was not surprised that it dragged on for 10 years. The gods, having given the Greeks victory over the Trojans, were now determined to make them pay. None of the Greeks were made to suffer longer or harder than Odysseus. As Odysseus begins his return journey with his men, he first attempts to attack the Ciconians but is driven back; a storm carries his ship into uncharted waters. At the next landfall, Odysseus must rescue his men who have gone ashore and, having partaken of the lotus, lost all memory of home. The gods drive Odysseus's ship to the land of the Cyclopes, where

Odysseus and his men are captured by Polyphemus. They are able to escape by serving Polyphemus wine until he passes out, at which point they drive a stake into his eye to blind him. The crew arrives next at the land of King Aeolus. Aeolus, king of the winds, attempts to help Odysseus by binding all the bad winds in a bag to be opened only after Odysseus is safe in Ithaca. The plan is foiled by curious crewmembers who open the bag and release the winds, which drive the ship to the island of the goddess Circe.

Odysseus is given a potion by Hermes to protect him from Circe's magic. He stays with Circe for quite some time before his men are able to convince him to resume their journey home. Odysseus endures many more dangers and trials—among them, a journey to the underworld—before arriving at the island of Apollo. Although advised against eating the cattle on the island, the men disobey and, once more, incur the wrath of the gods.

As the ship sets out from Apollo's island, it is destroyed by a storm and Odysseus alone survives. He is washed up on an island in the land of the Phaeacians. Odysseus tells his tale at the court of the Phaeacians, who finally return him to Ithaca.

One of our life lessons is that just when everything looks right, more trouble comes along. Back in Ithaca, Odysseus is told by Athena that although Penelope, his wife, has been faithful to him, his home is full of suitors demanding that she remarry. Odysseus returns to his home disguised as a beggar. He is recognized only by his dog and a servant. Odysseus meets privately with his son, Telemachus, and is told about the suitors and Penelope's strategy for fending them off. With his father still disguised as a beggar, Telemachus gathers the suitors together and announces that his mother will marry the man who is able to string his father's bow. When none of the suitors is able to string the bow, Odysseus requests a chance. He strings the bow, kills every suitor in the house, and is finally reunited with his wife and son. At the end of a long life of suffering, maybe the best lesson that any of us can learn is to stay home, take care of our families, and be content with a life that brings simple happiness instead of glory. ■

Suggested Reading

Dalby, *Rediscovering Homer*.

Fears, *Famous Greeks*, Lecture 4.

Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you find Odysseus admirable?

2. We sometimes hear today that "there is no such thing as lying; there is only getting caught." How would Odysseus have responded to that sentiment?

Sophocles—*Philoctetes*

Lecture 20

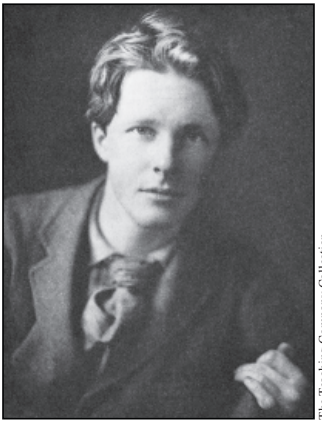
There were warnings, and Sophocles brought out these warnings. The great plague hit Athens in 430 B.C. In 429, Sophocles had produced his play the *Oedipus* about a statesman, the king of Thebes, who believed that human reason could solve all things, and suddenly, [he] found himself confronted with a terrible plague.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of the theme of adventure with a look at the play *Philoctetes* by Sophocles. It is a story of war and suffering. If war is anything, we learn in *Philoctetes*, it is not one great adventure. In 409 B.C., the Athenians were in the midst of the greatest conflict in the history of Greece, the war between Athens and Sparta. The war had begun under Pericles, one of the wisest of Athenian statesmen. Pericles convinced the Athenians that Sparta was an evil regime that desired to destroy Athens and that the war would be quick and glorious. Sophocles had opposed the war, warning Pericles against it in his play *Oedipus Rex*.

It seems ironic that three millennia later, the young men who marched off to war in 1914 were among the best educated in the classics of any generation that had ever lived.

Philoctetes was produced in 409 B.C. Philoctetes was a hero who had served Hercules and won his favor. Hercules gave Philoctetes his invincible bow and chose him to light his funeral pyre. Philoctetes sailed for Troy along with Achilles, Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus—all young heroes eager for the glory of battle. As they traveled to Troy, the young warriors stopped on an island. There, Philoctetes committed a sin by inadvertently entering a shrine of the gods; the gods punished him by causing a snake to wound him. The wound festers and becomes so repugnant to the others that Philoctetes is left on the island to die. Philoctetes survives on the island as the war rages in Troy. When Achilles is killed, the Greeks are told by a soothsayer that if they can obtain the bow of Hercules, they will be able to conquer Troy.

The Greek leaders decide to send Odysseus and Neoptolemus (the son of Achilles) to retrieve the bow from Philoctetes. Odysseus instructs Neoptolemus to lie to Philoctetes, to tell him that he has come to bring Philoctetes home to avenge the decision to give the armor of Achilles to Odysseus. Philoctetes agrees to go, but when he blacks out from the pain of his wound, Odysseus suggests that they simply steal the bow and leave Philoctetes on the island. Neoptolemus refuses to go along with Odysseus's plan and finally tells the truth to Philoctetes. Philoctetes refuses to go to Troy or to offer his bow, but Hercules, now a god, descends to intervene. Hercules tells Philoctetes to forgive Odysseus and to help in the capture Troy. The son of Apollo will cure his wound and bring him ultimate health and glory. With the help of Philoctetes, the Greeks finally take the city of Troy.



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Rupert Brooke (1887–1915).

The message of *Philoctetes* is interesting to consider, given that the play was produced while the war was still raging. The lesson the Athenians derived from the play was to stay the course in Troy. *Philoctetes* also had an immediate political message, a plea for the recall of Alcibiades, the son of Pericles. Alcibiades had been raised with every advantage of education. Unlike Pericles, however, he was determined to make himself dictator of Athens. Alcibiades had convinced the Athenian people to undertake a preemptive war in Sicily. At the moment when Sicily seemed on the verge of falling, the political enemies of Alcibiades brought trumped-up charges against him and he fled into exile. Alcibiades went to Sparta, giving the Athenians' enemies the advice they needed for victory. He then fled to Persia to advise the Persian king to let both Athens and Sparta exhaust themselves. In 409, however, the Athenians desperately needed victory and wanted to bring Alcibiades back. Sophocles intended his character Philoctetes to echo this plea. Alcibiades was like Philoctetes, the play implied: wrongly accused and capable of returning to bring victory to Athens. In 407, Alcibiades lost one

battle and was exiled again. The Athenians remained in the war until their final defeat in 404. Alcibiades died in exile.

It seems ironic that three millennia later, the young men who marched off to war in 1914 were among the best educated in the classics of any generation that had ever lived. The brilliant young writer Rupert Brooke was chosen to be part of the expeditionary force that would land at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles, where Troy had once been. There, Brooke died of blood poisoning caused by a blister on his foot. The love of country lured these young men on the great adventure that was war, and that adventure still seduces us. Ask yourself: If the Greeks had never sailed to Troy, would we still lecture about them thousands of years later? ■

Suggested Reading

Fears, *Famous Greeks*, Lectures 12 to 19.

Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*.

Sophocles, *Philoctetes*.

Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Athenians closely connected political rights with the obligation to serve in the military. Do you believe that this is why women were not allowed to vote?

2. Is *Philoctetes* a "pacifist play"?

The Song of Roland—Chivalric Adventure

Lecture 21

He said that the true meaning of life emerges when we are faced with the infinite and the omnipotent. Some of our earliest reflections in literature come from this question of how do we deal with the infinite and the omnipotent. The "infinite" being life itself and the question of [whether] there is a deeper meaning to life, and what is the meaning of the good things and the evil things that fall upon us?

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of the life lessons that we learn from great books, with the focus, in this section, continuing with adventure. Some of our earliest reflections in literature come from the question of how we deal with the infinite and the omnipotent. The infinite comes from the omnipotent, the gods or God. If God is all-powerful, why must we suffer evil, death, and war? Does fate exist? Is there a pattern in life, or do things happen simply by chance? The attempt to understand the omnipotent and the infinite lies at the heart of epic poetry, as well as Greek tragedy.

The same heroic age that we find in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* meets us in *The Song of Roland*, one of the poems of glorious deeds that was typical of the Middle Ages. Of all the epic poems, *The Song of Roland* ranks as one of the greatest. *The Song of Roland* is based on real history. It centers on the historical figure of Charlemagne, who played a major role in deciding whether Western Europe would adopt Latin Christianity or Islam. The Muslim armies in Spain were a constant threat to the borders of the new empire that Charlemagne had created with his Frankish army.

Charlemagne received a deputation from several Muslim emirs in Spain asking for his help in a political and military struggle. He won several battles but pulled out of Spain to face incursions from the Saxons on the eastern frontiers. As Charlemagne's army was leaving, a rearguard was attacked by Basques at Roncevaux. The slaughter of French knights was extensive, and we are told in the chronicles that among those killed was Roland, count of the march of Brittany.

For some years, the story of the defeat at Roncevaux went underground, but it reemerged in the middle of the 11th century, the time of the First Crusade. *The Song of Roland* played a part in the revival of a sense of the Muslim menace. The author is not known, but Turoldus is mentioned at the end of the poem as the name of the person who recited it. In this version of the poem, Charlemagne has changed from a man of about 38 years of age to 200, and the rearguard action has turned into a titanic struggle between Christianity and the world of Islam. The Muslim emir of Spain, Marsilion, is weary of the war and asks his knights for advice on how to end it. Blancandrin, the emir's wisest adviser, suggests that a timetable for withdrawal be set and that gifts and a promise of conversion to Christianity be sent to Charlemagne. This will be a deception, but Blancandrin reasons that Charlemagne will be too weary to return to fight.

In this version of the poem, Charlemagne has changed from a man of about 38 years of age to 200, and the rearguard action has turned into a titanic struggle between Christianity and the world of Islam.

Charlemagne's council advises him to send an emissary to Spain to determine whether the emir's motives are genuine. Roland volunteers to go but is turned down, and his stepfather, Ganelon, is sent. The outraged and dishonored Ganelon conspires with Blancandrin to have Charlemagne and his knights destroyed. The plan is carried out: Charlemagne returns to France and a rearguard led by Roland is attacked. Roland refuses to call for Charlemagne's help, insisting that the smaller French force can defeat the advancing Muslim army. Roland's force is crushed, leaving only Roland and the Archbishop Turpin alive by twilight. Roland finally blows his oliphant to call for help, blowing so hard that he kills himself in the process. Charlemagne arrives and finds Roland dead. As he rides after the Muslim forces, God makes the Sun stand still so that Charlemagne can destroy them all. The emir of Baghdad arrives with another great army, and Charlemagne fights a final great battle, paving the way for Spain to become Christian.

Ganelon is taken captive but pleads his case and negotiates a battle between two knights, one for the honor of Roland and one for the honor of Ganelon. Thierry, fighting for Roland, wins the battle, which means that Ganelon must die. Charlemagne goes to mass to pray that the wars are finally over. He is visited in his sleep by the angel Gabriel, who tells him that he must return to battle because the Muslim foe is still strong in Spain.

The Song of Roland paints for us the noble characters of epic poetry: Charlemagne, the king who risks his life in service to his country, and Roland, the impetuous but brave knight who lays down his life for his liege lord, his honor, and his faith. Here, too, we find the noble themes of the epic: the eternal struggle for life and the glory that we win when we die. ■

Suggested Reading

Lambdin, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*.

The Song of Roland.

Questions to Consider

1. In the *Iliad*, Homer portrays the enemy Trojans with sympathy. Why is this not true of the portrayal of the Muslims in *The Song of Roland*?

2. The American West plays a role in our history as a source of legends similar to the role played by the Middle Ages in Germany and France. Can you think of an event from the Old West that movies have transformed into a *Song of Roland*? How about the gunfight at the O.K. Corral?

Nibelungenlied—Chivalric Romance

Lecture 22

Knighthood, too, was part of the values of the Middle Ages, and the institutions of knighthood and feudalism arose out of the collapse of the Roman Empire: the collapse of a professional army, the need for local people to have protection, and thus, the rise of a class of mounted warriors.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of life lessons from the great books, concentrating in this section on the theme of adventure. No literary form is more attuned to adventure than the epic poem. The epic poems of Homer reflected the heroic values of Greece in the age of Mycenae. Such epic poems as *The Song of Roland* and the *Nibelungenlied* are the summation of the values of the knights and their fair ladies of the Middle Ages.

The "Middle Ages" is a term worth defining. It is a period that begins with the conversion of Constantine to Christianity (312 A.D.) and the founding of his capital at Constantinople and lasts until the fall of that great city in 1453. Christianity dominated Europe in the Middle Ages. The institutions of knighthood and feudalism are also emblematic of this period of European history.

The *Nibelungenlied* is a poem about vengeance and murder stemming from the desire to maintain one's honor. The poem begins with the defeat of the Nibelungs, a race of giants that lived along the Rhine, by the gallant knight Siegfried. As Siegfried divides the wealth of the Nibelungs, a quarrel develops and he kills all but Alberich, who becomes Siegfried's guardian. Alberich gives Siegfried a cloak of invisibility as homage. Siegfried rides off in search of a wife and catches the eye of Kriemhild, sister of King Gunther. King Gunther wishes to marry the queen of Iceland and asks Siegfried for his assistance with the many trials required to win her hand. Siegfried agrees to help but asks to marry Kriemhild as payment.

Siegfried, with the aid of his invisible cloak, helps Gunther to win the hand of Brunhilda (the queen of Iceland). Brunhilda vows never to sleep with Gunther and ties him to the ceiling each night. Siegfried again helps Gunther but sleeps with Brunhilda, as well. Siegfried marries Kriemhild, but Kriemhild refuses to honor Brunhilda because she knows that Siegfried has slept with her. Brunhilda, seeking vengeance, enlists the help of the king's most trusted adviser, Hagen, to kill Siegfried. Hagen learns of Siegfried's one weak spot and has him murdered. Kriemhild is outraged and wants vengeance but is unable to punish Hagen immediately because of his status and the potential for civil war that would follow his death.

The heroic code of honor is something alien to our own age. Few of us can afford honor, particularly in a bureaucratic society.

Kriemhild plots her revenge as the years pass. She marries Etzel, king of Hungary (Attila the Hun), and invites the members of her former court to a large banquet. Though Hagen and Gunther are hesitant at first, they agree to attend. Gunther, along with Hagen and his knights, are told by river fairies that if they cross the Danube, they will die at the court of Etzel. Gunther and his entourage are greeted by Kriemhild in Hungary with gifts and a lavish feast. Kriemhild tells them that she is now so happy that she has forgiven them for the murder of Siegfried. Kriemhild asks for the treasure of the Nibelungs that belonged to her former husband but is told she cannot have it. A battle ensues in which all are killed except Gunther, Hagen, and Kriemhild. Kriemhild kills her brother. When Hagen refuses to divulge the location of Siegfried's treasure, he is killed, as well. The tale comes to an end, once again showing us glory and honor purchased at a very high price.

The heroic code of honor is something alien to our own age. Few of us can afford honor, particularly in a bureaucratic society. Honor is a term that once played a great role in our country. Our own of equivalent of *The Song of Roland* or the *Nibelungenlied* is the story of the Alamo. ■

Suggested Reading

Lambdin, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*.

The Nibelungenlied: Prose Translation.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think that honor and treachery are so often joined in medieval works, such as *Tristan and Isolde* and the *Nibelungenlied?*

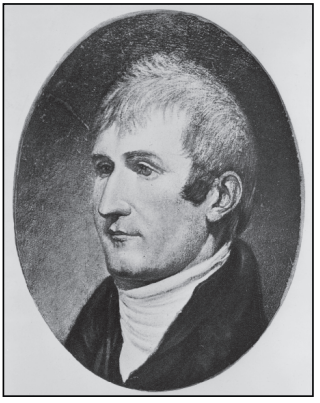
2. Why do you think Richard Wagner and his age found such inspiration in the world of the *Nibelungenlied?*

Lewis and Clark—*Journals*

Lecture 23

Our own country has one of the most splendid examples of adventure in the expedition of William Clark and Meriwether Lewis that, from 1803 to 1806, opened up an entire new world, opened up the world of the Great Plains of our country and gave us a claim all the way out to the Pacific Ocean. It was an expedition that was one of the most successful things our country has ever done.

In this lecture, we continue with the theme of adventure in our exploration of life lessons from the great books. One of the most splendid adventures in American history is the expedition of William Clark (1770–1838) and Meriwether Lewis (1774–1809) to explore the Louisiana Purchase. This adventure, however, begins with Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826).



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Meriwether Lewis (1774–1809).

Four qualities distinguish a statesman from a politician: A statesman must have a bedrock of principles, a moral compass, a vision, and must be able to build a consensus to achieve that vision. Thomas Jefferson embodied ideal qualities of a statesman, as evidenced in his orchestration of the Louisiana Purchase. Though Jefferson faced great opposition both at home and abroad, he deftly built the consensus needed to justify the purchase of what many considered to be a wasteland. The ability to delegate authority, to choose the right people for a particular job, is also essential for a statesman. Jefferson demonstrated this ability when he chose Meriwether Lewis to lead an expedition through the country's newly acquired land and to find a passage to the Pacific Ocean. Jefferson saw to it that Lewis received instruction in diplomacy, cartography, science, and medicine before the expedition was undertaken. Lewis chose

William Clark, under whom Lewis had served briefly in the military, to be his partner in the expedition. Though the military refused to appoint Clark to the position of captain, he agreed to accompany Lewis.

One lesson to be learned from life is the importance of a good friend. Lewis and Clark became true friends, never quarreling as they undertook their journey. After selecting a group of men for the expedition, Lewis and Clark set out in 1804. Lewis and Clark carefully recorded their progress in journals that still speak to us today. The expedition was partly diplomatic in nature, and both Lewis and Clark proved to be adept at communicating with the Native Americans they met along the way. Stopping for the winter, the group met a French fur trader named Charbonneau and his wife, Sacagawea, whom they agreed to hire as translators. The expedition resumed in the spring and eventually reached the Continental Divide, which marked the end of the Louisiana Territory. Lewis and Clark needed to reach the Pacific before winter and relied on Charbonneau and Sacagawea to negotiate with a Shoshone chief to obtain horses for the final leg of the journey. During the course of the negotiations, Sacagawea and the chief realized they were long-lost brother and sister, at which time he freely traded for the horses.

As we draw our life lessons, we understand that Lewis was a man of destiny, a man chosen for one mission.

The expedition continued until finally, in November, Clark wrote in the journal, "Ocean in view, oh great joy." The members of the expedition wintered at Fort Clatsop before making their way back to St. Louis. On September 23, 1806, the bells of St. Louis began to toll as the men returned.

Jefferson appointed Meriwether Lewis governor of the new territory, and William Clark was chosen to be superintendent for Indian Affairs. Lewis was reluctant to return to St. Louis to take up his new position, and it soon became clear that he was a poor administrator. Conspired against by his second in command in St. Louis, his journals still unpublished, and dishonored by the new administration's refusal to pay the debts that Jefferson had allowed him to incur for the expedition, Meriwether Lewis resolved to return to

Washington to regain his reputation. In the fall of 1809, Lewis killed himself in the small town of Nashville. As we draw our life lessons, we understand that Lewis was a man of destiny, a man chosen for one mission. What he did before was meaningless and what he did afterward was a failure, but in seizing his moment of destiny, he gained immortal fame. ■

Suggested Reading

Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*.

Lewis and Clark, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*.

Questions to Consider

1. Lewis had the failing of many men and women of destiny: He did not know his limits. Clark knew his limits and lived to a ripe old age with a successful career as an administrator. What do you think?

2. Can you name a woman or man of destiny whom you have known personally?

T. E. Lawrence—*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

Lecture 24

Already, the Middle East had become profoundly important to the British. First of all, it was their key to India, and in those days before World War I, India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, a vast empire in itself, and the British king was the emperor of India.

In this lecture, we turn now to another adventurer who found his destiny: T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935). Lawrence was a bright boy but hated school, though he managed to study at Oxford. He read for a degree in history but declined to write a thesis, instead setting out for Syria to study the Crusader castles there. Lawrence was mentored by D. G. Hogarth, a British archaeologist who was also an intelligence agent. Lawrence was at work on an archaeological survey when the Great War broke out in 1914. He later gave a brutal account of the oppressive quality of Turkish rule in the Arabian Peninsula. He enlisted in the army and served as a lieutenant in the intelligence branch in Cairo. He developed a rapport with the Arabs, learning their language and customs.

In 1916, a revolt took place in the Arabian Peninsula. Sharif Hussein broke with the Ottoman Empire and proclaimed the independence of Arab tribes. Lawrence was dispatched as part of a small group to gauge whether or not it would be useful for the British to send troops to aid Hussein in the revolt. Lawrence met with Hussein and his son Faisal. He pledged to Faisal that he would explain to the British high command that it should sponsor the revolt but not send troops. Lawrence requested that he be the sole British operative in the revolt and was granted this request by the British high command. Lawrence endeared himself to Hussein and Faisal and learned and adopted the customs of the local people. He saw that the Arab revolt could become the key to distracting the Turks and enabling the British to win the kind of victory that was desperately needed to keep British voters interested in the war. After the battles of Verdun and the Somme, the British were disgusted and tired of the war. Lawrence saw his opportunity and began to organize Arab troops into effective strike forces, attacking along the Hejaz Railway.

Lawrence's guerrilla forces were so effective that he was able to capture the key city of Aqaba in 1917. In an attempt to secure British reinforcements, Lawrence crossed the Sinai Desert, reaching the British garrison at the Suez Canal. General Sir Edmund Allenby took a deep liking to Lawrence and agreed to help him if Lawrence would distract the Turks while Allenby captured Jerusalem. Lawrence successfully held down the flank as Allenby's forces took Jerusalem. The two men then went on to liberate the city of Damascus.

In 1921, Winston Churchill consulted Lawrence regarding the situation in the Middle East. At Lawrence's suggestion, Iraq was made an independent nation, with Faisal as king.

In the course of the revolt, the British government had promised the Arabs that they would have an independent nation. As Lawrence had feared, the British and French backtracked on this promise in 1919, and Lawrence returned home in disgust. Lawrence resigned his commission despite many requests for him to remain in the army. In 1921, Winston Churchill consulted Lawrence regarding the situation in the Middle East. At Lawrence's suggestion, Iraq was made an independent nation, with Faisal as king. Though Lawrence later joined the air force as a private, he was forced out by the constant media attention he garnered. Lawrence finished *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and eventually found some degree of the anonymity he sought back in England. He was killed in a motorbike accident in 1935. ■

Suggested Reading

Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does T. E. Lawrence compare with some of the earlier adventurers we have read about in terms of such values as honor and courage?

2. What lessons did Lawrence learn from his dealings with Arabs that could be passed on to Middle East negotiators today?

Aristophanes—Comedies

Lecture 25

One of our follies of today is the idea that democracies are peaceful neighbors and that if you can just set up enough democracies around the world, there will never be another war. History teaches us very differently.

In this lecture, we turn to a new theme: laughter and irony. Laughter and irony are natural extensions of emotions that enable us to deal with both good and bad situations in life. We begin, as we always should, with the Greeks, in this case, with Aristophanes (c. 450–c. 388 B.C.). Aristophanes, an Athenian citizen, was the great comedian of the Athenian democracy. As it had been for the Athenian writers of tragedy, the war with Sparta was one of the central themes of the work of Aristophanes. In 431 B.C., Pericles convinced Athens to undertake a preemptive war against the democracy of Sparta. Pericles also gave the Athenians the strategy by which they could win the war: Stay inside the walls of Athens and avoid outright confrontation with Sparta's superior infantry forces. Despite the ravages of a plague, Pericles persuaded the Athenians to continue the war. After Pericles died of the plague, a new kind of politician came to prominence in Athens—one who did not lead by moral authority but, rather, by pandering to the people. It was against these kinds of politicians that Aristophanes directed his satirical wit.

Aristophanes begins *Acharnian*s with a statement that he is not afraid to speak the truth. His task is to teach the Athenians that they are making a tragic mistake by continuing the war. The action begins with the hero of the play, Dicaeopolis, waiting for the assembly of the Athenians to convene. Dicaeopolis tries repeatedly to address the assembly and to protest the war but is thwarted by other important speakers. When Dicaeopolis is finally allowed to speak, he tells the chorus that the war with Sparta was actually started by Pericles to cover up the fact that his mistress, Aspasia, orchestrated a raid in Megara to capture women for her brothel. Dicaeopolis decides to make his own peace with Sparta and to begin importing embargoed goods. One by one, people approach Dicaeopolis to buy his goods, but he sells them only on the condition that his customers make peace with Sparta.

In the play *Peace* by Aristophanes, we learn that the god of war has stolen peace from the Earth. He has taken all of the nations of Greece, placed them in a mortar, and ground them together to continue the war. Aristophanes requested that the Athenians bring peace back to Earth, and in 421, a peace treaty was signed. By 415, however, the war had begun again. This time, the Spartans were determined to fight to the end, convinced that Athens desired tyranny over all of Greece.

Aristophanes constantly portrayed women as foolish and treacherous.

The last peace play by Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, is generally seen as one more plea to end the war. The main spokesperson for peace in this play is a woman named Lysistrata. Lysistrata gathers all the women of Athens together, and they agree to forgo sexual relations with their husbands until peace is made with Sparta. The women occupy the Acropolis to seize the treasure of Athens. The men of Sparta and Athens become so desperate that they eventually sign a peace treaty.

Interpreters in the 20th century have read the comedy *Lysistrata* as a plea for peace, but the Athenians of Aristophanes's time would have derived a different message. Aristophanes constantly portrayed women as foolish and treacherous. By the time *Lysistrata* was produced, Aristophanes had become convinced that Athens should continue the war. To attempt another peace treaty with Sparta would be to act as foolishly as women. Aristophanes would live to see his beloved Athens defeated and dominated by the Spartans. But throughout his career, he would remain what he claimed to be: a teacher. Aristophanes taught through comedy that one should laugh despite disasters and find truth in laughter. ■

Suggested Reading

Aristophanes, *The Complete Plays*.

Fears, *Famous Greeks*, Lectures 12 through 20.

Hanson, *A War Like No Other*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why can it be misleading to read Athenian comedy and tragedy through spectacles tinted with the values of the 21st century?

2. If an observer from the 46th century saw a political satire from our own day, how accurate would be that observer's assessment of the politics of America?

Menander—*The Grouch*

Lecture 26

In the course of that great war between Athens and Sparta, there was more than the loss of life and treasure. Something snapped in the minds of ordinary Greeks in the same way that during World War I, something snapped in the minds of ordinary Europeans.

In this lecture, we continue our focus on laughter in the exploration of life lessons from great books. One crucial lesson we have learned from such works as *Hamlet* and *The Sufferings of Young Werther* is to move on, and the first step in moving on is to laugh at oneself. Menander (c. 342–c. 292 B.C.) was probably the most influential comedian ever to write. His world was 4th-century Athens, a very different place than that great warlike democracy that Aristophanes knew. The war between Athens and Sparta had destroyed Athens and much of the Greek world economically. The war had brought in its wake terrible plagues and cost the lives of one out of every four Athenians of military age and one out of every two Spartans. The only losses comparable in American history took place during the Civil War. After the war, both Athenians and Spartans abandoned the idea that to die for one's country is the noblest act. Athens regained its empire within only a few years of its defeat by Sparta and became again a great military and economic power. The new Athens employed a paid standing army and was run by professional politicians. These officials realized that the public preferred a balanced budget and tax rebates to glory.

The philosophy of 4th-century Athens was focused entirely on the individual. The Stoics and Epicureans emerged at this time. The Epicureans taught that the greatest evil for humans was to be involved in political life; it was the responsibility of each individual to pursue pleasure. The art of this new age celebrated the individual, not the city of Athens. Much of the art tugged at the viewers' heartstrings rather than stimulated their intellect. In his work, Menander replaced politics and satire with the comedy of ordinary, simple, human situations.

Scholars had known for centuries that Menander was an influential writer, but none of his works were thought to be extant. In 1959, however, a papyrus was found containing almost an entire play by Menander, and it has enabled us to understand more clearly the brilliance of this writer. The play is called the *Dyskolos*, which might be translated as *The Grouch*. The play is set in Athens and begins with the god Pan, who describes the many festivals people enjoy at his cave. But one man, named Knemon, never enjoys himself. Knemon desires only to live by himself, shunning all social contact.

The Epicureans taught that the greatest evil for humans was to be involved in political life; it was the responsibility of each individual to pursue pleasure.

Sostratos, a love-struck youth, desires to marry Knemon's daughter, but his friend attempts to dissuade him because the girl is not from a high-born family. Sostratos sends his servant Pyrrhias to speak with the girl's father, but he is chased off. Sostratos, too, is chased off by the father but encounters the girl's brother, Gorgias. Gorgias tells Sostratos that working on the family farm might help his chances of marrying the sister. At this point, the action of the play is interrupted by a subplot, which seems to be common in Menander's work. A chef preparing a banquet also has an unpleasant encounter with Knemon, the grouch. Sostratos asks the chef if he can invite his beloved, along with her brother and father, to the banquet. When Sostratos goes to invite the girl, he ends up rescuing Gorgias and Knemon from drowning in a well.

Knemon has a change of heart, endears himself once again to his family, and gives his permission for Sostratos to marry his daughter. Gorgias falls in love with Sostratos's sister, and though Sostratos's father initially refuses to permit either marriage, the play ends with a joint wedding for the two young couples.

Menander's play influenced comedy for generations. *The Grouch* is essentially a situation comedy; its basic elements can be seen nightly on television. Just as the tragedy was the characteristic cultural statement of the Athenian democracy, the situation comedy is a characteristic cultural

statement of our country and our democracy. In such comedies, we learn that no problem is so serious that it cannot be solved. Situation comedies can also teach good moral values. In *The Grouch*, Knemon goes through a transformation that has been brought about by love. He realizes he has wasted his life and determines to make up for all the misery he has caused. ■

Suggested Reading

Lape, *Reproducing Athens*.

Menander, *Plays and Fragments*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is it fair to label situation comedies "escapist"?

2. What homey values are conveyed by situation comedies? Are all such values healthy?

Machiavelli—*La Mandragola*

Lecture 27

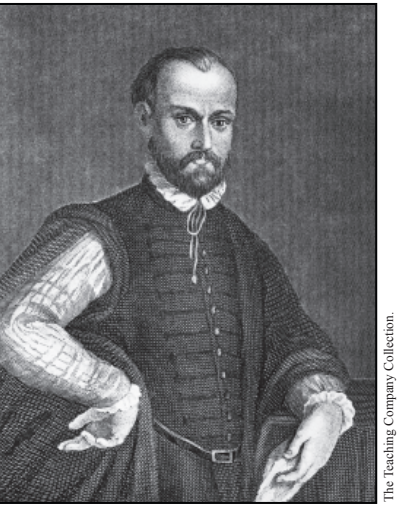
Morality plays no role whatsoever in the successful leader. In fact, the successful leader must be able to lie, steal, and kill. He must be cruel and stingy and utterly treacherous, all the while, however, presenting a face of benevolence to the world.

In this lecture, we look at what has been considered the greatest comedy ever written in the Italian language: *La Mandragola* (*The Mandrake*) by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). In many ways, the play reminds us of *The Grouch* by Menander, who was influential in the age of the Renaissance. Machiavelli would have known Menander through the plays of Terence and Plautus. Machiavelli was the very essence of a Renaissance man. He was born in the creative center of the Renaissance: Florence. He wrote and spoke Latin fluently, and though he always longed for political power, he played his role largely behind the scenes. Florence was a republic and was torn by partisan politics. Machiavelli made his way through the partisan strife, winning the trust of the council that governed the Republic of Florence. He was sent on expeditions abroad and spent some time at the court of the pope. In 1512, the Medici family came back into power, and Machiavelli was banished from Florence. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* while in exile, and though he hoped the work would win him the favor of the Medicis, it failed in that regard, and he never regained his earlier influence.

One of our life lessons may be that evil sometimes wins out in the end and that even those who seem good and virtuous will perform evil, destructive deeds if it is convenient and expedient for them to do so.

Machiavelli supported himself in part by writing plays. Italy was absolutely enraptured by his comedy *La Mandragola*. *La Mandragola* was written in Italian and set in Florence. The play begins with its hero, Callimaco, telling his servant Siro that he has fallen in love with Madonna Lucrezia, who is married. Callimaco consults with his friend

Ligurio to devise a way for Callimaco to sleep with Lucrezia. Ligurio decides that Callimaco should tell Nicia—Lucrezia's husband—that he is a distinguished medical doctor and that he can provide a cure for the couple's infertility. Callimaco, disguised as a doctor, tells Nicia that the infertility can be cured if Lucrezia drinks a potion made of mandrake root. However, Nicia must find someone else to sleep with his wife because the first to do so after she drinks the potion will die. Callimaco, Nicia, and Ligurio go to church and bribe Friar Timoteo to persuade Lucrezia to go along with the plan. After Lucrezia agrees, Nicia captures Callimaco (who is disguised as a drunken student), takes him home, and the task is done. Callimaco explains to Lucrezia who he really is, and she welcomes his embrace. She is so taken with him that she convinces her husband to give Callimaco a key to the house so that he can come by whenever he wants.



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Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527).

Given the definition we have already established, can we say that *La Mandragola* is a great book? The language of Machiavelli is beautiful, and the theme of the play, while not noble, certainly speaks across the ages. But can a person with an evil mind write a truly great book? We come back to the ideas Machiavelli espoused in *The Prince*: There is no right and no wrong, and all that matters is expediency and success. One of our life lessons may be that evil sometimes wins out in the end, and that even those who seem good and virtuous will perform evil, destructive deeds if it is convenient and expedient for them to do so. ■

Suggested Reading

Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*.

Fears, *Books That Have Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life*, Lecture 24.

Machiavelli, *The Comedies of Machiavelli*.

Questions to Consider

1. Is *La Mandragola* a play about deception or self-deception?

2. Can a morally bad person write a great book?

Erasmus—*In Praise of Folly*

Lecture 28

Humanism was the very essence of the Renaissance. The Renaissance meant "rebirth," and it was the rebirth of an understanding of classical antiquity. It was a breaking with the forms of the Middle Ages.

We continue our exploration of the theme of irony, satire, and laughter with *In Praise of Folly* by Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536). The work is a panegyric speech of praise in honor of this very theme. Humanism was the essence of the Renaissance. The age of the Renaissance saw a rebirth in understanding of classical antiquity and a breaking away from the forms of the Middle Ages. Artists studied the use of perspective to gain an understanding of what Greek and Roman art had been able to achieve. In the 14th century, with the demise of the Byzantine Empire, some Greek scholars made their way to Italy. This contact provided an opportunity for Humanists, such as Petrarch, to learn the Greek language.

Erasmus was one of the greatest Humanists. He was born in Rotterdam, probably the son of a priest who had an illicit relationship. When his parents died of the plague, Erasmus was sent to study at the school of the Brethren of the Common Life. Erasmus went on to study at some of the great universities of Europe. His book *Adages* was well received and earned a large sum of money. Erasmus had the idea to write a book on folly while traveling across the Alps. He spent some time with the English Humanist Thomas More, who was at the time considering putting aside scholarly matters to serve King Henry.

At More's home in England, Erasmus tried to convince More to continue writing and stay out of politics. Erasmus began *In Praise of Folly* (the title in Greek is a play on More's name) while staying with More. The work begins with Folly, dressed as a clown, explaining her significance and power to a group of intellectuals, politicians, and literary figures. Part of Humanist learning was the ability to give a speech in honor of a public figure or at a funeral or christening. No one had yet given a speech in honor of Folly. Folly explains that she is responsible for the very existence of humanity.

She describes her instrumental role in the creation of government and the organized exploitation of people. She tells us that she is responsible for the existence of lawyers, soldiers, professors, scientists, and theologians. Hobbies, as well, are the creations of Folly. Folly concludes by saying that she should be welcomed and even worshiped because she has made human life possible. When the work was published, it outraged many in the professions mentioned, but none more so than theologians.

Erasmus's great contribution to the world of learning was his Greek New Testament. Erasmus was convinced that God had chosen him to learn Greek so that he could discover what the original versions of the New Testament actually said. In 1516, the Greek New Testament and its corresponding Latin translation were produced. Humanists hailed the work, especially those in northern Europe, where Humanism was deeply connected to the church and Christianity. One of the first readers of this New Testament in Greek was Martin Luther. Tasked with teaching a course on Paul's Letter to the Romans, Luther sat down with Erasmus's New Testament and began to puzzle over the question of grace versus works, faith versus deeds.

Moderation may be the height of true wisdom.

The questions inspired by Erasmus's New Testament eventually led Martin Luther to tack his Ninety-five Theses to the door of a chapel in Wittenberg. When the Reformation began, Luther thought Erasmus would join him, but Erasmus refused in favor of maintaining order in society. Erasmus moved from town to town through the tumult of the Reformation, winning fans and friends. He died in the city of Basel, called the "fountainhead of the heresy" by many in the Catholic Church, and with many on the Protestant side claiming he was a coward and a turncoat. The life of Erasmus gives us one more good lesson: Tell the truth, and when the fanatics begin to fight, step back and be a force for moderation. Moderation may be the height of true wisdom. ■

Suggested Reading

Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*.

McConica, *Erasmus*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you write *In Praise of My Own Follies*?

2. Is Erasmus's New Testament in Greek proof that scholarly ideas can change history?

Thomas More—*Utopia*

Lecture 29

"[Kings] don't really want advice; they want yes-men" ([and] yes-women, we would say today) "who will tell them what they want to hear and then find a way to do it no matter how disreputable the idea of the king is.

Continuing with our theme of laughter and irony, we look now at the second of two great Renaissance satires: *Utopia* of Thomas More (1478–1535). More was born in London. His father was a prominent and wealthy attorney who was determined that young Thomas would follow in his footsteps. More learned Latin at age six and was sent for a period to the court of the archbishop of Canterbury, John Morton. Morton was also lord high chancellor of England under Henry VII. In addition to advanced Latin and Greek, More learned how to handle administrative duties during his tenure at Morton's court. He was then sent to Oxford, where he studied the classics and the history of Greece and Rome. More believed that the study of Greek and Latin could open new worlds for humanity. His father, however, was determined that More would not be a professor and sent him to law school in London. More met Erasmus at the lord mayor of London's residence, and the two formed a fast friendship. More loved learning, but he was also attracted to politics and power. He came to the attention of King Henry VIII, who surrounded himself with men who knew Greek and Latin because he believed they understood the practical applications of lessons from the classical past. More rose rapidly in King Henry's court and was sent on numerous sensitive diplomatic missions.

More began to write *Utopia* while staying in the Low Countries after concluding negotiations with the Holy Roman Emperor. The work begins with a factual statement: While staying with Peter Giles, a friend in Antwerp, More meets a man named Raphael Hythloday. Giles introduces Hythloday as the most interesting man he knows and asks him to spend the morning speaking about the things he has seen. Hythloday describes a voyage with Amerigo Vespucci and his encounter with a land called Utopia. More

asks Hythloday if he has considered becoming an adviser to the king, and Hythloday explains how foolish it would be to do so. He claims that he would advise the king to get rid of all private property because greed and money are the roots of all evil. Hythloday says that he once tried to persuade Lord Morton to accept his views regarding property and social justice. He tells More that he got his ideas from living among the Utopians.

After continually refusing to swear an oath of allegiance acknowledging the king as head of the church, More was imprisoned and executed.

Hythloday (whose name means "purveyor of nonsense") claims that Utopia is a real place. It is a large island that was settled almost 2,000 years ago by King Utopos. Utopos understood that monarchy was not a good form of government; thus, almost from the outset, Utopia is organized into 54 democratically governed cities. All political meetings in Utopia are held publicly, and every citizen has a voice in discussing issues. Each city is divided into two major parts; one part is farmland and the other is the land within the city. Farming is done voluntarily, and so much food is produced that no one has to pay for it. Households move every 10 years, and all goods are provided free of charge. Daily schedules are loose; citizens work six hours a day. Every citizen learns a trade that produces some type of item, and citizens have the freedom to learn new trades at will. The citizens of Utopia believe in one God and the immortality of the soul. They also believe in an afterlife that rewards good deeds and punishes evil deeds. No one, however, is forced to believe anything. Utopia has very little crime, and punishment is gentle and geared toward learning and rehabilitation. Having listened to Hythloday, More claims that he would love to see such things in his own land but does not believe it is possible.

More sent *Utopia* to Erasmus, who saw to its publication in 1516. King Henry was so delighted with the work that he offered More the position of speaker of Parliament, which he accepted despite the warnings of Erasmus. More helped King Henry gain power in Europe, win recognition from the pope, and persecute heretics. On the condition that he help King Henry win an annulment of his marriage, More assumed the title of lord high chancellor

of the king of England. By 1532, it was clear that More could not achieve Henry's annulment on the terms he wanted. After continually refusing to swear an oath of allegiance acknowledging the king as head of the church, More was imprisoned and executed. ■

Suggested Reading

Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More*.

More, *Utopia*.

Questions to Consider

1. More argues that criminality is the fault of society, not the individual criminal. Do you agree?

2. The true objection to communism is that it is the violation of the right of property, which is as much an absolute right as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Do you agree?

George Orwell—*Animal Farm*

Lecture 30

Cicero, in his *De Officiis*—his book *On Moral Duties*—believed that private property and respect for private property [were] the very foundations of justice and that no morality could exist without private property.

We come to the last of our lectures on the theme of laughter and irony. Our last novel in this section is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which addresses questions regarding injustice in general and the role of private property in the existence of injustice. Plato believed that private property is the cause of much of the absence of morality in the world. He constructed his ideal commonwealth on the absence of private property. According to Plato, the key to ridding the world of private property was to educate young people so that they would enjoy all things in common. The greatest single experiment in holding private property in common was the Soviet Union, and Orwell explores this system in his book *Animal Farm*.

Orwell (1903–1950) was born Eric Arthur Blair into what he described as a "lower upper-middle class" family. Orwell's father was a civil servant in India, and the family was determined that he would have a good education. Orwell was educated at Eton but failed to get a scholarship to Oxford, and his family could not afford to send him. Orwell joined the Indian police force but found it miserable and resigned after a few years. He had a deep suspicion of bureaucracy and wanted to become a novelist. He had difficulty publishing his material and endured financial hardship while living in London and Paris. Orwell was in his mid-30s when the Spanish Civil War broke out. He considered the war to be an embodiment of the struggle between the forces of good and the forces of totalitarian government.

Like many intellectuals of the time, Orwell was blind to the true nature of the Soviet government. Throughout the 19th century, socialist thinkers had debated the question of how to get rid of private property; thus, the Soviet government began in a great burst of hope. The works of Karl Marx and his communist view took on the force of a religion. In 1917, the dream of a

communist government became a reality when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. By the time the Soviet government began to coalesce and emerge as a power in 1922, liberal intellectuals around the world looked on the establishment of communism as the dawning of a new age. The revolutionary leader Lenin died in 1924; a struggle for his legacy began between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. By 1927, Stalin had carefully consolidated power, and Trotsky was exiled, first to Siberia, then to Mexico. Stalin became absolute master of the Soviet Empire, and a new generation was educated in the principles and practices of communism. In 1941, invaded by Hitler, Stalin proved strong enough to win the Great Patriotic War.

The farm is renamed "Animal Farm," and a provisional government is established under the leadership of the pigs Snowball and Napoleon.

Orwell published *Animal Farm* in 1945, while Stalin stood at the absolute peak of his power. Orwell dedicated his writing to exposing the evils of totalitarianism. Orwell had joined the republican forces during the Spanish Civil War, thinking that he was fighting against fascism. There, he learned from communist troops that Stalin and Hitler were simply two sides of the same coin, both devoted only to power. *Animal Farm* is about the brave hopes that had been raised with the abolition of private property or, in this case, the tyranny of man.

The story begins at Manor Farm in England. The animals have gathered to listen to old Major, a pig, describe a vision he has had in which the farm is taken over by the animals. Major describes the exploitation the animals regularly experience at the hands of Mr. Jones, the farmer. Though Major knows he is close to death, he entreats the other animals to pursue his dream. The dream is kept alive after Major's death, and the animals work to realize it. The pigs begin to develop a doctrine called Animalism, which scientifically proves that animals are smarter than humans. They assert that when human order collapses, the animals will establish a great cooperative state. The animals develop a series of commandments based ultimately on the idea that all animals are equal and are superior to humans. Eventually, the animals riot and the humans are driven from the farm. The farm is renamed "Animal

Farm," and a provisional government is established under the leadership of the pigs Snowball and Napoleon. The animals learn to read and write and form committees to solve the farm's problems. When it becomes clear the Animal Farm is not on the verge of collapse, the local farmers attack. The animals win the battle, and the farm is left alone.

The animals continue to live in relative harmony, until the pig Napoleon suddenly seizes power from Snowball with a pack of dogs he has raised. Napoleon assumes complete control. Napoleon begins to rewrite history (as was done in the old Soviet Union) when he insists on the construction of a windmill that had been proposed by Snowball. Napoleon now claims that Snowball had been opposed to the idea but that he is in favor of it. When the windmill collapses, Napoleon blames Snowball and his collaborationists. The collaborationists are killed, as is an animal who calls attention to the fact that Napoleon has now violated one of the most important commandments established by the animals. Napoleon continues to revise the commandments in favor of the pigs. Ultimately, he plans to turn the farm into a capitalist venture, and the other animals suffer as a result.

The animals eventually witness the pigs and humans consorting around a table, drinking and playing cards. They can no longer distinguish between the two species. Napoleon proclaims that "Animal Farm" has been and always will be "Manor Farm." The animals return to the barn to find all of their commandments altered, most significantly the last one. What had once read, "All animals are equal," now includes the addendum "but some animals are more equal than others." ■

Suggested Reading

Bloom, *George Orwell*.

Hammond, *An Orwell Companion*.

Orwell, *Animal Farm*.

Questions to Consider

1. The chief pig is named Napoleon. Does this suggest that the Russian Revolution is not the only revolution to end badly?

2. Does *Animal Farm* reflect any of your personal experience in reform movements?

Josephus—*History of the Jewish War*

Lecture 31

The Athenian view of patriotism was also captured by one of the epigrams written on those boys who had died for Athens and its far-flung wars of empire: "These are they who laid down their young lives beside the river Eurymedon; on land and on swift sailing ships alike, they fought with their spears against the foremost of the bow-bearing Persians. They are no more, but they have left behind the fairest memorial to their valor, the freedom of their native land."

We turn now to the theme of patriotism. Patriotism is one of the most important themes to come to us through the great books tradition, yet today, we might ponder our own definition of patriotism and its relevance to our society. The Founders of the United States looked for their great models of patriotism in history and, above all, in the history of the classical world. Patriotism in the age of the Athenian democracy was defined quite simply as the belief that the noblest thing one can do is to die for one's country. In his Funeral Oration, Pericles speaks about the young men who died in the first year of the war between Athens and Sparta. He speaks of the country for which they died and of a citizen's duty to make that ultimate sacrifice. The Greek historian Polybius also spoke of the nobility of fighting for one's country when he explained how Rome had become absolute master of the world in one generation.

This same view is expressed by Flavius Josephus (37/38–100 A.D.) in his history of the great war between the Romans and the Jews, which for the Founders of the United States, took its place alongside Thucydides and Herodotus as a fundamental source of lessons for patriots in a new country and new world. Flavius Josephus was born Jewish and raised to be a Pharisee. He was carefully educated and became learned in the law. The Roman Emperor Augustus believed that limits should be set on the expansion of Rome and had refrained from annexing the territory of Judaea. Augustus faced a difficult decision when a group of leading citizens of Judaea asked that their land be formally annexed. He was reluctant, partly because Romans in general were perplexed by the complicated relationships

of people in the Middle East. Augustus understood the potential for a Jewish revolt but also recognized the enormous strategic, economic, and military importance of Judaea. He saw that Judaea must be kept firmly in the Roman camp to prevent an Iranian invasion; thus, the decision for annexation was made. The Romans had great respect for the Jewish people, and the annexation treaty ensured basic recognition of Jewish traditions. The Middle East remained forever outside the comprehension of the Romans. They were baffled by the deep hatred between Greeks and Jews who, despite cultural intermingling, maintained a mutual sense of disrespect.

Before the Romans could enter the fortress, each Jewish father slew his own family and was, in turn, killed by one of 10 men chosen to carry out the last executions.

In the period before 60 A.D., a number of Jewish prophets proclaimed the fall of Roman rule and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Jews, it was said, must never have an earthly king; they must be a theocracy ruled by God directly. To the Romans, this was treason. The idea that the kingdom of God had to be established through violence gave rise to a group of revolutionaries who considered themselves to be patriots. These revolutionaries attacked Roman troops in an effort to force the Romans to react ferociously and immoderately, spurring an uprising among the Jewish people. The failed policies of Emperor Nero and the power vacuum left in the wake of his overthrow fed the desire of many patriotic Jews to see their nation reestablished as a free power.

Josephus was at the heart of the revolution when it broke out. At age 37, he was made a general and sent to Galilee to organize resistance against the Romans. There, he found himself in the midst of a civil war. At about the same time, Rome found a capable general in Flavius Vespasian. He reduced large portions of Judaea and captured Josephus. Imprisoned, Josephus told the Roman guards that he had had a vision in which he saw Flavius Vespasian as master of the world. Vespasian told Josephus that he would be well rewarded if his prophecy came true. When Vespasian eventually became emperor, he released Josephus, gave him a large stipend, and told him to write about the war.

In 70 A.D., the Roman general Titus undertook the suppression of the Jewish revolt by laying siege to Jerusalem. Josephus writes in terrifying terms of the brutality and cruelty of war. On more than one occasion, he was sent by Titus to convince the Jewish freedom fighters to surrender, but they would not. Jerusalem finally fell to Titus in 70 A.D., and he returned to Rome triumphantly with thousands of Jewish prisoners. Refusing to accept Vespasian as their lord, the Jews were brutally executed, and the Temple was destroyed.

For one brave band of freedom fighters, the war was still not over. They took up their defense at the fortress of Masada. The Roman general and governor Flavius Silva was sent by Vespasian to lay siege to the fortress and put down the last of the rebellion. The Jewish force at Masada was determined to fight to the death. After a massive siege, it became clear to the freedom fighters that the fortress would be captured. Eleazar, the leader of the Jewish force, decided that the revolutionaries must die in freedom, along with their wives and children. Before the Romans could enter the fortress, each Jewish father slew his own family and was, in turn, killed by one of 10 men chosen to carry out the last executions. The 10 remaining men then killed themselves. Though the modern reader would consider the scene one of horror, the Romans saw it as a statement of absolute bravery. Troops enlisting in the Israeli army still take an oath of allegiance saluting these warriors for freedom. It is this same tradition—the Jewish people fighting and dying for their freedom—that led President Harry Truman to proclaim that America would always defend the brave nation of Israel. ■

Suggested Reading

Josephus, *The Jewish War*.

Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you believe that by going over to the Romans, Josephus was a realist, a traitor, or a patriot?

2. What insight into the modern Middle East do you gain from studying *The Jewish War*?

Joseph Addison—*Cato*

Lecture 32

Patriotism is the love of freedom, love of your country, the willingness to die for your country, but based on the assumption that your country is right. That frequently makes patriotism a difficult matter to decide, because one person's patriot may be another person's terrorist.

In this lecture, we continue our discussion of the theme of patriotism in the great books. Cicero believed that any free individual must also be a patriot, but he also believed that patriotism must be shaped by the four fundamental principles of wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. Patriotism is the love of freedom and love of country and the willingness to die for one's country based on the assumption that its values and system of governance are right. The subjectivity inherent in that assumption frequently makes patriotism a difficult matter to decide. The Founders of our country were also faced with the question: What is patriotism? Had they been defeated, they would have been put to death as traitors under English law. We can find no sterner symbol of patriotism in the great books than Marcus Porcius Cato.

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Joseph Addison (1672–1719).

Cato understood Caesar's belief that he could revitalize Rome and preserve its empire. However, he also understood that the cost of such revitalization would be the loss of Roman liberty. Rome without liberty, no matter how grand its empire, would be nothing but an empty shell. Cato, with few allies, fought Caesar every step of the way. He hated Caesar for his political and personal corruption. Cato suspected Caesar of conspiring with those who wanted to overthrow the free republic. By 48 B.C., it was clear that the people of Rome must make the choice between the liberty offered by Cato and the peace and

prosperity promised by Caesar. When the great civil war began, Cato cast his lot with Pompey. Defeated by Caesar at Pharsalus, Cato took his forces to Africa rather than seek amnesty from Caesar. Although Caesar repeatedly defeated Cato's forces and offered him amnesty on generous terms, Cato ultimately chose death rather than accept Caesar's new order.

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The U.S. Founders were inspired as much by Joseph Addison's (1672–1719) play *Cato* as they were by older accounts of Cato's life. Addison's *Cato* was one of the most influential literary and intellectual models for the American Revolution. Addison was a deep believer in liberty. He had a distinguished career as a student of Oxford and had gained fame in Britain for his poem "The Campaign." Addison's play *Cato* was first performed in London in 1713. It was meant as a warning to his fellow Whigs, as well as to the Tories, who supported a strong king and higher church. The play is set in Utica, where Cato has already been defeated, and begins with his two sons, Marcus and Porcius. Both sons are in love with Lucia, the wife of Senator Lucius, but Porcius says they must put such matters aside and serve only their father and the cause of Rome. Despite attempts by a number of important individuals to persuade Cato to reconcile with Caesar, Cato will not do so.

The Roman Sempronius attempts to steal away Cato's daughter and is killed. The Numidian prince Juba also wishes to marry Cato's daughter and is told that it is untimely to think of anything but freedom and liberty. Cato learns that his son Marcus has been killed defending Rome; he vows never to disgrace his son's memory and never to agree to amnesty with Caesar. Cato contemplates suicide despite the entreaties of his son Porcius to live and accept peace with Caesar. In the final moments of the play, Cato drives his sword into himself. Before he dies, he permits Juba to marry his daughter and allows his son to marry Lucia. His body is carried to Caesar.

The power of Addison's *Cato* is echoed in speeches by Patrick Henry and in the final words of such patriots as Nathan Hale. In 1777–1778, the patriot cause seemed almost on the verge of extinction. For example, to raise morale at Valley Forge, George Washington organized a performance of his favorite play: *Cato*. ■

Suggested Reading

Addison, *Cato: A Tragedy and Selected Essays.*

Fears, *Famous Romans*, Lecture 12.

Plutarch, *Life of Cato*.

Questions to Consider

1. The Founders of our country admired Cato much more than Caesar. Today, it is the reverse. Why?

2. Cato was a Stoic like Seneca. Both believed in suicide before a compromise of fundamental principles. Do you agree?

George Washington—Farewell Address

Lecture 33

We should always remember that France was our first ally and that the military and financial aid of France was absolutely crucial to winning the Revolutionary War.

We continue our exploration of life lessons that we learn from great books with a focus on the ideal of patriotism. In this lecture, we turn to an individual who represents the very embodiment of patriotism from an American perspective: George Washington (1732–1799). In 1781, Washington received information that the French fleet had sailed from the West Indies and was approaching the bay off Yorktown, Virginia. Washington decided to quickly move the combined French and American troops to Yorktown to prevent the British fleet from arriving to supply British General Cornwallis. Cornwallis was cut off from supplies by sea when the French fleet triumphed over the British. Washington and his French allies began their formal siege of Yorktown, and Cornwallis was forced to surrender. King George, hearing the news and facing a new British government, was forced to discontinue the war, ending the American Revolution.

Washington's achievement as a general was stunning. He created an army, found the funding for it, and devised a strategy to defeat the greatest empire of the day. As negotiations went on in Paris, the troops who had served Washington could not be dismissed and had not been paid for their service. Washington learned of a letter circulating among his officers that suggested he assume the position of king to prevent the collapse of the new country. Washington refused and promised the men that they would be paid. When the peace treaty was finally signed, Washington's men were paid, and the general surrendered his commission to the Continental Congress. But the country was in danger of fragmenting. James Madison and others wrote to Washington asking him to take part in a convention to revise the Articles of Confederation. Washington repeatedly refused to return to public service, but he eventually acquiesced and traveled to Philadelphia to

assume the chairmanship of the convention. Washington was unanimously elected president.

When Washington assumed the presidency, the country was bankrupt. The United States could not protect its frontiers from attacks by Native Americans or enforce the terms of the treaty with the British. Washington appointed a superb cabinet—another example of his intelligence—and, with his advisers, hammered out the future of the nation. The potential for power existed in the office of the presidency, but Washington made it a reality. An insurgency broke out in Pennsylvania, and Washington himself commanded the troops that put down the insurrection. Order was restored with no real bloodshed, and the authority of the federal government was made clear. Washington delegated authority to a trusted general to bring peace to the embattled Ohio Valley. Alexander Hamilton skillfully organized the finances. His efforts were so successful that when the French Revolution broke out and investment opportunities in France dried up, Europeans began to pour money into the United States. Washington delicately led the country between the dangers of intervention on the side of France or Britain when a war broke out between the two countries. Many imagined that Washington would stay on for a third term as president, but he did not.

Washington's achievement as a general was stunning. He created an army, found the funding for it, and devised a strategy to defeat the greatest empire of the day.

On September 19, 1797, a letter from George Washington was published in the *Philadelphia American Daily Advertiser*. It is known today as Washington's Farewell Address. Washington explained his reasons for returning to private life rather than staying on as president, pointing out that the country was now well established. He boasted that the Constitution supported union, which was the country's strongest bond and the best foundation for freedom. Washington pointed out that in guarding the Constitution, Americans must be aware of the encroachments of power. He also advised Americans about the danger inherent in partisan strife. Liberty, he said, must be guarded by morality and religion. He suggested that no nation will endure if it is immoral; it must have a moral citizen body

that operates on the virtues of patriotism, frugality, honesty, and justice. Finally, Washington advised against "foreign entanglements." He advocated commerce but with fiscal responsibility, and suggested that we should trade with other nations but avoid alliances.

Washington, recognized even by former foes as the greatest man of his day, retired to Mount Vernon. When he died, the ships of Britain and France, though they were poised to go into battle, both lowered their flags as a sign of respect for the passing of this great man. ■

Suggested Reading

Ellis, *His Excellency, George Washington*.

Spalding and Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens.*

Questions to Consider

1. What portions of George Washington's advice are the most disregarded by us today?

2. Do you accept the judgment that George Washington is the greatest American?

Abraham Lincoln, George Patton—War

Lecture 34

The letter to Mrs. Bixby is a profound statement of the American ideal of patriotism. It was used as an important element in a movie—if we made movies into great books and called them great books, *Saving Private Ryan* would rank right up there—to explain, again, the loss, in this case of three sons, to one mother and the effort of the army to save the fourth from perishing.

Patriotism is a fundamental human value, and it has been fundamental to our own American experience. Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) captured the deep meaning of patriotism in a letter written to a Mrs. Bixby of Boston, Massachusetts. Mrs. Bixby had lost five sons on the field of battle. Lincoln wrote to express his sorrow, as well as his admiration and respect, for a woman who had laid "so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom." This profound statement came from a great president who hated war and had, in fact, voted against the Mexican War. Nonetheless, Lincoln led his country into the great struggle that was the Civil War and came to feel that the war was a punishment sent for the moral wrong of slavery. Lincoln's words carry us back to John 3:16. The everlasting life of the country, in the mind of Lincoln, was bought with the blood of such men as Mrs. Bixby's sons.

The generation of Americans who fought World War II had its most significant embodiment in the life of General George S. Patton (1885–1945). Patton exemplifies a true patriot and man of destiny who was also a mighty warrior. Patton came from a long line of military men in Virginia. One of his ancestors was a Revolutionary War general, and his father and uncle had served in the Confederate Army. From his earliest days, Patton wanted to be a soldier. He attended VMI, then West Point. After graduating, Patton served in the U.S. Cavalry and was chosen by the army to compete in the Olympic pentathlon. Patton went into the tank corps during the First World War and was wounded in action. He formed a fast friendship with Dwight Eisenhower after the war.

When World War II broke out, Patton was chosen to be one of the commanders of the North Africa division. Patton showed good diplomatic skills in dealing with the French government in Morocco and assumed command of the Seventh Army. He was so successful as a commander that he was chosen to lead the next great Allied expedition into Sicily. Though Patton made some controversial decisions, by August of 1943, he was the most celebrated fighting general in the U.S. Army. He was adept at the skills that make a great general—strategy, tactics, battlefield command, and logistics. Patton's passionate dedication to his men and to the tenets of the army nearly cost him his position when word got out that he had threatened to shoot a man in a hospital for cowardice.

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Eisenhower stuck by Patton, partly out of friendship and partly because he was useful. Patton was sent to the north of England on a sort of nonsense task to organize and command a nonexistent army. Patton's presence in northern England helped to convince the Germans that the invasion of Normandy would come at Calais. Patton had served his purpose but was commanded to keep his mouth shut. The invasion of Normandy was a success, but the American and British troops were tied down in the aftermath. Patton assumed command of the Third American Army and led one of the boldest attacks in history to drive the Germans from their positions. By December 16, 1944, the Allied high command was convinced that the Germans were finished; only Patton doubted this assumption. When the Battle of the Bulge began, Patton and his Third Army carried out one of the greatest winter marches in all of military history to rescue the 101st Airborne.

Though Patton was a tremendous success, he was considered dangerous. To keep him occupied, he was appointed military governor of Bavaria, a job for which he was not particularly well-suited. Patton's comment that the Nazis were similar to the Republicans and Democrats made national news and essentially ended his career. Patton was put in charge of the military unit

writing the history of the war. The great general was killed in a car accident in December 1945. His wife thought he should be buried in Arlington Cemetery, but he was too controversial. Instead, he was buried alongside his men in a military cemetery at Luxembourg. ■

Suggested Reading

D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*.

Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*.

Patton, *War As I Knew It*.

Questions to Consider

1. Does it matter that Lincoln was misinformed about the number of sons Mrs. Bixby actually lost in the Civil War?

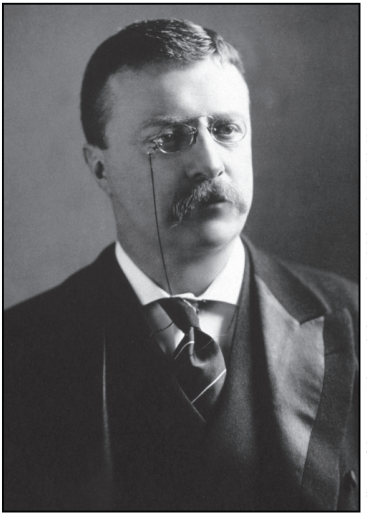
2. Was Patton a man of destiny?

Theodore Roosevelt—*An Autobiography*

Lecture 35

George Patton is the prime example of a man who identified with his country, who loved it deeply, but who also found his greatest meaning in war.

In this lecture, we continue our exploration of the theme of patriotism in the great books. Is patriotism still for us today what it was at the time of the American Revolution, the American Civil War, or World War II? Like George Patton and George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) was another great American who believed in the nobility of dying for one's country. Roosevelt was one of the most successful presidents in our country's history, one of the greatest patriots, and one of the best authors. His autobiography is a testament to his talent. Roosevelt was born into a wealthy New York family. His father devoted much of his time to charitable works. Roosevelt took a broad view of our nation, had a deep respect for ordinary Americans, and above all, believed that the course of our country's history was unique. Roosevelt graduated from Harvard and considered studying law but was troubled by the moral implications of an attorney's work. Instead he decided to go into politics and rose rapidly. The death of his young wife was a terrible blow to Roosevelt. He left his daughter to be cared for by his sister because having the child near him was too painful. Roosevelt then traveled west to the Dakota Territory, where he ran a cattle ranch. There, he came to the realization that it is ordinary Americans who make our country special, not the law firms or businesses of New York.



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Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919).

By 1889, Roosevelt was ready to return. He went back to New York, where he became police commissioner, was appointed by two presidents to serve on the Civil Service Commission, and was instrumental in instituting a civil service exam system in an effort to eliminate cronyism. Roosevelt ran for governor and lost but was appointed assistant secretary of the navy. The Spanish-American War was, in Roosevelt's eyes, a just war. He asked for and received permission to form a U.S. volunteer cavalry unit to assist in the effort. On July 1, 1898, Roosevelt led the charge up San Juan Hill. Despite being outgunned, Roosevelt's cavalry unit captured the hill. Like Winston Churchill, Roosevelt believed that there was a glory to war that could never be made totally sordid.

In 1906, Roosevelt negotiated a peace treaty that ended the Russo-Japanese War. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace and, posthumously, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Roosevelt became a national hero and was swept into office as the governor of New York. He believed deeply in progressive politics; and in many ways, he was a Democrat in the Republican Party. In 1900, some members of the Republican Party decided that the best way to keep Roosevelt quiet (and, perhaps, ruin him) was to make him vice president. Roosevelt accepted the vice presidency under McKinley and quickly assumed the presidency after McKinley's assassination. He launched a bold political program that would enable him to accomplish more in office than almost any other American president. Under the Square Deal, Roosevelt was one of the first presidents to examine healthcare, Social Security, and welfare benefits. He also believed in a strong foreign policy. Roosevelt transformed the U.S. Navy into one of the strongest forces in the world. He believed that war was coming and that the United States would probably have to fight against enemies in Europe and Japan. Though various companies had tried to build a Panama Canal for years, Roosevelt got it done. In 1906, Roosevelt negotiated a peace treaty that ended the Russo-Japanese War. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace and, posthumously, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

At the height of his popularity, Roosevelt declared he would not run again for president. He had given his word and stepped down but saw to the nomination of his successor, Taft, whom he thought would continue his programs. Taft proved a disappointment in this regard, and by 1912, Roosevelt was beside himself, having seen much of what he had gained squandered. In addition to the loss of Square Deal programs, the country was unprepared for war. Roosevelt campaigned for the presidency again but lost to Woodrow Wilson, a man Roosevelt considered a hypocrite. As the Great War came, Roosevelt urged America to side with Britain and France. The articles he wrote at the time are virulent in their attacks on Wilson. In 1918, Roosevelt received word that his son had been killed in action. He never fully recovered from the loss and died in 1919, at the age of 60.

In Roosevelt's autobiography and essays, he leaves us a definition of patriotism that, like Washington's, still guides us today. He believed that Americans should put the country first and party politics second. He epitomized his philosophy of life when he said, "Life is like a football game. Hit the line hard. Hit it fair, but hit it hard." ■

Suggested Reading

Roosevelt, *American Ideals*.

———, *An Autobiography*.

Questions to Consider

1. How do you feel about Roosevelt's assertion that patriotism should come before partisanship?

2. Roosevelt emphasized the uniqueness of America as a country. What qualities do you think make Americans and America unique?

The Wisdom of Great Books

Lecture 36

Winston Churchill thought it was the greatest mistake in the world to have ordinary grade school and high school students read the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. "All that will do is make them hate it, and they'll never go back to it. Let people come to these directly by reading books that they like."

We come to the last of our lectures exploring the life lessons that we glean from great books, and we reflect on what we have learned. One of our guides in defining a great book is the Medal of Honor winner and president we looked at in the last lecture, Theodore Roosevelt. The idea of a five-foot shelf of classics that every educated person should read was popular in Roosevelt's time. But Roosevelt believed that people should read whatever appeals to them. The first step in loving great books is to pick the books that appeal to you. There is no such thing as a universal canon.

We have set up criteria for marking the great books worthy of our attention. A great book should have a great theme, a theme that is noble in itself and will help inform decisions in life. A great book should be written in noble language. It can be clear and forceful, lyrical, or intense, but it should be language that elevates the soul. A great book should speak across the ages. The historical circumstances in which authors write are also important. As readers, we should seek to know the history, know the author, and know the tradition.

Ultimately, we read the great books because they exemplify principles by which we should live our lives: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. These fundamental principles make up the essence of the tradition of the humanities. In our world today, we are overwhelmed by information, but true wisdom is lacking. Ultimately, wisdom comes from using information and knowledge to make the important decisions in our lives. We might define justice as how we deal with other people, and we have seen the foundational statement of justice running from the Gospel of John through

Theodore Roosevelt and George Patton: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Courage is found in knowing what is right and defending it, leaving the world a better place because you stood by your principles. Our lives must also be tempered by moderation, and with wisdom and courage, we will know for ourselves whether our actions are immoderate.

We study the great books in this Humanistic tradition because they make us better as individuals and as citizens. Perhaps many global mistakes could be avoided if our leaders read and pondered great books. Lawrence of Arabia, for example, believed that the West would never understand the Middle East because we refused to study Islam or Judaism and accept the intensity that religion has always had in that part of the world. Many of the themes that we saw in the political satire of the Athenian democracy can be seen in our society. We should learn from them before they become contemporary tragedies. One of the wisest lessons to be learned from the great books is to look at ourselves through the eyes of others.

Perhaps the most important lesson of the great books is about freedom: freedom to make decisions, freedom to suffer, and freedom to gain wisdom.

The great books also teach us how to make life choices. Many of us might be tempted to follow the path of Thomas More, climbing up the career ladder but knowing, ultimately, that success is impossible. As we saw with More, that temptation can be fatal. And how will we deal with adversity when it comes to us? We can only hope to meet it with the courage that Thomas More did when he recognized his mistakes. It is also important to try to find our destinies. We should not become complacent or let adversity rob us of our ability to create or to act.

Finally, the great books show us that our own country is unique. Perhaps the most important lesson of the great books is about freedom: freedom to make decisions, freedom to suffer, and freedom to gain wisdom. The great books are an inspiration and a guide to how to live our lives so that the world will be a better place. ■

Suggested Reading

Adler, *How to Think About the Great Ideas*.

Denby, *Great Books*.

Fears, *Books That Have Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life*.

Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, pp. 323–325.

Questions to Consider

1. What is your definition of wisdom?

2. Is the unchecked flow of information over the Internet the friend or foe of wisdom?

Timeline

B.C.

3000	Emergence of the first literate, complex civilizations, including literature. This takes place in Egypt and the modern land of Iraq (Mesopotamia).
2500	Great Pyramids of Egypt.
1250–1240	Trojan War.
1230	Possible date for the Exodus of the Jewish people out of Egypt.
c. 725	*Odyssey* composed.
490–404	Golden age of Athenian democracy.
336–323	Reign of Alexander the Great.
218–146	Rise of the Roman Empire.
48–31	Julius Caesar and Augustus establish monarchy at Rome.

A.D.

31 B.C.–A.D. 180	Golden age of the Roman Empire.
c. 6–36	Life of Jesus.
312–1453	Middle Ages.

476..... Fall of the Roman Empire.

570–632..... Life of Muhammad.

c. 742–814..... Life of Charlemagne.

c. 1096–1099..... First Crusade.

c. 1304–1527..... Renaissance.

1509–1547..... Reign of King Henry VIII.

1517–1648..... Reformation.

1558–1603..... Reign of Queen Elizabeth of England.

1648–1789..... Age of Enlightenment.

1775–1824..... American Founding.

1789–1815..... French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon (from 1804).

1861–1865..... American Civil War.

1914–1918..... World War I.

1917–1991..... Russian Revolution and the rise and fall of the Soviet Union.

1933–1945..... Hitler rules Germany.

1939–1945..... World War II.

1945..... Scientific and technological revolution.

1948..... Birth of Israel.

Glossary

Argonauts: In Greek mythology, the Argonauts were the heroes who sailed with Jason on the ship *Argo* to capture the Golden Fleece.

chivalry: The medieval complex of ideals that was to govern the conduct of a knight, including honor, courage, loyalty, and compassion for the weak.

classical antiquity: The historical period from roughly the rise of Greek civilization in the 2nd millennium B.C. to the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in 312 A.D.

classics: Conventional term to describe the study of classical antiquity. It is now used to describe all great books from all civilizations and time periods.

communism: The idea that society should be constituted so that the means of production and subsistence should be held in common and labor organized for the common benefit. Communism was taught by Plato and by Thomas More in his *Utopia*, but Karl Marx is the intellectual father of modern communism in modern times. The political system of modern communism has been marked by the creation of a totalitarian state and party apparatus to subordinate all aspects of life to the state.

courtly love: The late medieval ideal of love between a married woman and her gallant paramour. Strict conditions were imposed on how the affair could be conducted. But courtly love was not platonic. The themes and ideals of courtly love inspired poetry and prose romance novels.

Crusades: Military expeditions by Western Europeans of various nationalities to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim rule. There are generally said to have been eight Crusades, launched from 1096–1272.

Enlightenment: Conventional historical term to describe the period in European history from 1648 (the end of the Wars of Religion) to 1789 (the beginning of the French Revolution). The thought of the Enlightenment was

marked by a belief in progress, science, and reason. The American Founding can be viewed as an event of the Enlightenment.

epic poetry: Long narrative poetry, dealing with great events, such as the *Odyssey*, *The Song of Roland*, and the *Nibelungenlied*.

feudalism: Political, social, and economic system of medieval Europe, resting upon the possession of land by a warrior nobility in exchange for their military service to a ruler or lord.

Founding Fathers, the: Conventional terms to describe the political leaders who shaped the American Revolution and Constitution. The Founding can be considered to have lasted from 1775 (the Battle of Lexington) to 1826 (the deaths of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson).

Humanism: The intellectual currents of Renaissance and Reformation Europe, based on the intense study of the classics as the models for literature, art, architecture, philosophy, and even politics. The classics focus on human knowledge as opposed to theology, hence the term "Humanism." However, the desire to use Greek and Latin to better understand and to reform Christianity was fundamental to many Humanists, including Erasmus and Thomas More.

Middle Ages: The period in European history from the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 312 A.D. to the fall of his city of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453.

Nazis: Followers of Adolf Hitler and his doctrine of National Socialism, which was the foundation of the German Third Reich (1933–1945). National Socialism was based on pseudo-scientific racism, socialism, and nationalism. It advocated the complete subordination of the individual to the goals of the state, which was identical with the German race. Fundamental to Hitler's goals was the destruction of the Jewish people.

Ottoman Empire: The dominant political structure of the Middle East from 1453 (the conquest of Constantinople) to 1918. The founder of the empire was Othman, hence the name "Ottomans." The Ottomans were Turkic

people, originally from Central Asia. At the height of its power, the Ottoman Empire reached from Iraq to Vienna to Morocco.

Peloponnesian War: War between Athens and Sparta from 431–404 B.C., ending in total victory for Sparta.

Pharisees: Members of an influential Jewish group in the time of Jesus. Pharisees were professors of the Jewish law, who wielded enormous religious, cultural, and even political influence.

rabbi: A Jewish scholar and teacher, who may be the spiritual leader of a congregation.

Reformation: The attempt to reform the Catholic Church, leading to the rise of the religious beliefs of the Protestant faiths, including the denial of the supremacy of the pope. Conventional dates are from Martin Luther in 1517 to the end of the religious wars between Protestants and Catholics by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

Renaissance: The conventional term for the historical period from the end of the Middle Ages to the Reformation. It was marked by a renaissance—a "rebirth"—of knowledge of classical antiquity and the application of the models of classical culture to literature, philosophy, art and architecture, and even politics. Convenient dates are from the influential Italian poet Petrarch (1304–1374), who revived the love of classics, to the beginning of the Reformation under Martin Luther.

Roman Empire: The political system that ruled the Mediterranean world and Western Europe from 48 B.C.–476 A.D. This is the empire of the Caesars, from Julius Caesar to the last Roman emperor in Italy, Romulus Augustulus, deposed by Germans in 476 A.D. Already in the 3rd century B.C., the Romans, under their republican government, began to acquire an overseas empire. Historians, rather confusingly, speak of the Roman Empire of the Republic. Julius Caesar and Augustus ended the republican form of government and established the military monarchy that governed the empire until its end.

Stoicism: Philosophical and religious beliefs developed in the 4th century B.C. by Zeno at Athens. The name derives from the Greek word *stoa*, which simply signified the covered porch where the philosophers first taught. Stoicism posited a single, all-powerful, all-beneficent God, who created the universe and determined all events. Happiness for the individual lies in accepting the will of God. Stoicism became one of the most powerful intellectual currents of the Roman Empire, culminating with the Roman emperor and Stoic thinker Marcus Aurelius.

synoptic Gospels: Scholarly term for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is derived from Greek "to see things in the same way." The term refers to the fact that these three Gospels have a common narrative, differing from that of the Gospel of John.

Talmud: The Rabbinical commentaries on the Jewish Law of the Old Testament. Compiled over a number of centuries, from the 2nd to the 6th centuries of the Common Era, the Talmud is second only to the Bible as the sacred text of Judaism.

tragedy: The conventional literary term to describe a play that ends sadly.

Trojan War: The 10-year war between the Greeks, led by Agamemnon, and the great city of Troy, which ended in the destruction of Troy. The theme of Homer's *Iliad*, the Trojan War was a real conflict fought around 1250–1240 B.C.

Yiddish: The common language of the Jews living in central and eastern Europe from the later Middle Ages onward. Yiddish is derived from a German dialect. It is written in Hebrew characters. It remains a living language with an extraordinarily creative literature.

Biographical Notes

Attila the Hun (c. 406–453): Conqueror. From war chief of the nomadic Turkic people called the Huns, Attila rose to become the most powerful and feared figure of the waning days of the Roman Empire in the west. A superb administrator, Attila created a multicultural, diverse empire in central Europe that held Rome as a tributary state. The savagery of his military campaigns led Christians to call him the "Wrath of God." Attila planned to conquer the whole of Europe, but he was defeated by Roman and Germanic troops at the Battle of Chalons in 451 and failed in his attempt to conquer Italy. He died suddenly on the night of his wedding to a German princess, leaving behind a reputation that influenced the *Nibelungenlied* and still resonates today.

Caesar, Gaius Julius (100–44 B.C.): Roman politician, military leader, author, and statesman. One of the greatest figures in history, Caesar rose from being an ordinary politician to become the savior of his country. His conquest of Gaul (modern France) from 58–52 B.C. changed the course of Roman and European history. His victory over the armies of Cato in 46 B.C. marked the consolidation of his dictatorship, gained by civil war. He transformed Rome from a republic into a monarchy and instituted reforms that ensured two centuries of peace and prosperity. His assassination in 44 B.C. plunged the Roman world into further civil war, from which his adopted son Octavian (Julius Caesar Octavianus) emerged as ruler. Known to Shakespeare as Caesar and to history as Augustus, Octavian's victory over Antony and Cleopatra in 31 B.C. secured his power and enabled him to continue the work of his father.

Charlemagne (c. 742–814): European statesman. From king of the Germanic tribe of the Franks, Charlemagne rose to become the most powerful political figure of the early Middle Ages. His coronation as Roman Emperor by the pope in 800 marked him as the heir of Julius Caesar and the legacy of the Roman Empire. His military expeditions created a vast empire in Europe. He revitalized culture and spread Christianity. The modern European Union rightly looks upon Charlemagne as one of the founders of its ideals.

Henry VIII (1491–1547): King of England. One of the most influential kings in English history, Henry was a scholar, well-educated in Greek and Latin, and an admirer of the Humanists, including Erasmus and Thomas More. His foreign policy made England a great power. In religion, he broke with Rome over his desire to have an heir to the throne and, hence, to divorce Queen Catherine, who had not produced such a child. Henry promoted and enriched Thomas More, who was his willing servant until the king and Humanist clashed over matters of conscience.

Hitler, Adolf (1889–1945): German dictator. Hitler rose from obscurity to be absolute ruler of one of the best-educated and most industrious nations in the world. As Führer ("leader") of Germany, he established a totalitarian state based on the doctrines of National Socialism. In his book *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), Hitler clearly laid out his plan to begin another world war and to destroy the Jewish people. The world refused to listen, and Hitler began the war in 1939. His determination to destroy the Jews fundamentally shaped his military strategy. He died a cowardly death by suicide in his bunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945, with the blood of 50 million people on his hands.

Luther, Martin (1483–1546): German religious leader and theologian. As a Roman Catholic monk and professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany, Luther applied the knowledge of the Humanist Erasmus to the study of the New Testament. He became convinced that Catholic doctrine was wrong in fundamental questions that affected the salvation of the soul. He challenged the church and was excommunicated. He became the leader of a movement called the Reformation that changed forever the politics and culture of the world.

Stalin, Joseph (1879–1953): Russian dictator. Stalin ranks with Genghis Khan as one of the most successful and bloody-handed tyrants in history. An ethnic Georgian, Stalin became a convinced Marxist early in life. He rose to play a prominent part in the Russian Revolution. After the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin outmaneuvered all his rivals, including Trotsky, to become absolute master of the Soviet Union. His policy of systematic terror killed perhaps 20 million of his fellow citizens. He led the Soviet Union to victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War (World War II). He died in bed, leaving his country master of an empire and a nuclear superpower.

Theodoric (454–526): Germanic war chief and king. Theodoric began his career as war chief of the Germanic tribe of the Ostrogoths, then rose to be called king of Italy and recognized as such by the Roman emperor in Constantinople. He was one of the most powerful and influential figures of the early Middle Ages. From the Italian city of Ravenna, he ruled a multicultural and diverse kingdom of Germans and Romans in Italy. He was a Christian and patron of culture, leaving behind notable works of architecture. He was a law-giver and administrator, who brought a degree of peace and prosperity to Italy. But he was also a bloody tyrant, willing to use terror and murder whenever it suited his purpose.

Tiberius (c. 42 B.C.–c. 31 A.D.): Roman emperor. The adopted son of Augustus, Tiberius succeeded as emperor and absolute ruler of the Roman Empire. A capable soldier and administrator, he was the Roman emperor who most resembles Stalin. He used systematic terror to maintain his complete control of all instruments of power. He was suspicious to the point of paranoia. Like Stalin, he used the charge of treason to destroy any figure he thought might be a threat. He was emperor when Jesus was tried in Jerusalem. The personality and policies of Tiberius played a fundamental role in the decision of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to execute Jesus.

Trotsky, Leon (1879–1940): Russian revolutionary. Trotsky played a fundamental role in bringing about the Bolshevik triumph. He was an intellectual and powerful orator, who proved himself a military leader of remarkable ability in organizing the Red Army and its victory in civil war. As ruthless as Lenin and Stalin, Trotsky lost out to Stalin. Sent into exile, he wrote savage attacks against Stalin and was killed on Stalin's orders in Mexico.

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