Course Rationale

Nietzsche famously declared that God is dead. His aphorism provides a thumbnail description of the contemporary crisis of Western civilization, which is fundamentally a crisis in belief concerning the metaphysical or supernatural basis of morality and hopes for human salvation. To address this crisis, Nietzsche argues that a “great politics” is necessary. A new breed of philosopher kings must be reared to reestablish civilization on a new standard of values. Only on these new foundations, Nietzsche maintains, can life again be loveable for its adventure and not simply for its comfort and security. In this class, we shall undertake a close reading of Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the philosophical, artistic, and social pathologies of modernity, and will assess his assertion of the “will to power” and the “eternal return.” But we shall also keep in mind that Nietzsche is not alone in deploring the listlessness of the old civilization’s “last men.” So, we shall additionally examine the challenge to Nietzschean atheism present in the adventure and celebration of Christian orthodoxy, as elaborated by G.K. Chesterton and Josef Pieper.

Requirements, Expectations and Grading:

You are to attend every meeting of this class, having read the assigned texts carefully. During class sessions, you will be asked to form small group panels to introduce passages, to raise and to respond to questions, and to write three brief but detailed accounts of what you have learned. These three papers will determine 30% of your final grade, and the in-class panel presentations another 30%. Your contribution to general class discussion will determine 20%, and your citizenship (effort, respect for class mission, and general deportment) another 10%. There will be a comprehensive final exam or final paper determining the remaining 10% of your final grade. Absences may be excused, upon written request made via email by class time of the day of your absence, at your instructor’s sole discretion. In any case, you will be expected to make up any missing work.

You should expect to spend approximately 5 hours each and every week preparing and studying for this class, in addition to your regular attendance. (If you carry a load of fifteen credit hours, and follow this rule of thumb in all your classes, you will still be spending less time developing your own "human capital" than you will spend enlarging your employer's capital after you have graduated! I hope you think you are worth the investment.)

Date Assigned Reading

Week 1 Introductions; Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (Kaufman, trans.) pp.1-3
Week 2 Nietzsche, pp.9-32
Week 3 Nietzsche, pp.35-56
Week 4 Nietzsche, pp.59-76
Week 5 Nietzsche, pp.79-94; pp. 97-118
Week 6 Nietzsche, pp.121-141
Week 7 Nietzsche, pp.145-170
Week 8 Nietzsche, pp.173-198; Midterm Break
Week 9 Nietzsche, pp.201-237; synopsis of Nietzsche
Weeks 10-13 Chesterton, Orthodoxy, chs.1-2; ch.3; ch.4; ch.5; ch.6; ch.7; ch.8-9; Thanksgiving Break
Weeks 14-15 Josef Pieper, In Tune with the World, chs.1-2; chs.3-4; chs.5-6; chs.7-9