



CS-201, Section 13, Final Exam, 31st May 2004.

2 hours

R.S. Smith

A. *Understanding primary texts.* Explain the meaning, context and significance of two of the following passages. It may be helpful to divide your explanations into three parts: a) immediate meaning or key ideas, b) context (where the passage fits in the story or argument), and c) relation to the work as a whole. After explaining the passage add a fourth part d) comparison with another CS-201 work. Do not write more than 3 sides per question. 15% of final grade each.

1. So virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it. It is a mean between two kinds of vice, one of excess and the other of deficiency; and also for this reason, that whereas these vices fall short of or exceed the right measure in both feelings and actions, virtue discovers the mean and chooses it. Thus from the point of view of its essence and the definition of its real nature, virtue is a mean; but in respect of what is right and best, it is an extreme. (Aristotle, *Ethics*, pp. 101-102)

2. But suppose it is some man of riper years who complains... Would she [Nature] not have every right to protest more vehemently and repulse him in stern tones: 'Away with your tears, old [man]! Have done with your grumbling! You are withering now after tasting all the joys of life. But, because you are always pining for what is not and unappreciative of the things at hand, your life has slipped away unfulfilled and unprized. Death has stolen upon you unawares, before you are ready to retire from life's banquet filled and satisfied. Come now, put away all that is unbecoming to your years and compose your mind to make way for others. You have no choice.' I cannot question but that she would have right on her side; her censure and rebuke would be well merited. The old is always thrust aside to make way for the new, and one thing must be built out of the wreck of others. There is no murky pit of Tartarus [Hell] awaiting anyone. There is need of matter, so that later generations may arise; when they have lived out their span, they will all follow you. Bygone generations have taken your road, and those to come will take it no less. So one thing will never cease to spring from another. To none is life given in freehold; to all on lease. Look back at the eternity that passed before we were born, and mark how utterly it counts to us as nothing. This is a mirror that Nature holds up to us, in which we may see the time that shall be after we are dead. Is there anything terrifying in the sight — anything depressing — anything that is not more restful than the soundest sleep? (Lucretius, pp. 90-1.)

3. [Aeneas is speaking.] 'Now that I was alone, I caught sight of Helen keeping watch on the doors of the temple of Vesta where she was staying quietly in hiding.... The passion flared in my heart and I longed in my anger to avenge my country even as it fell and to exact the penalty for her crimes. "So this woman will live to set eyes on Sparta and her native Mycenae again? ... This will not be. Although there is no fame worth remembering to be won by punishing a woman and such a victory wins no praise, nevertheless I *shall* win praise for blotting out this evil and exacting a punishment which is richly deserved..."

As I ran towards her ranting and raving, my loving mother suddenly appeared before my eyes. I had never before seen her so clearly, shining in perfect radiance through the darkness of the night. She revealed herself as a goddess as the gods in heaven see her, in all her majesty of form and stature. As she caught my right hand and held me back, she opened her rosy lips and spoke to me — "O my son, what bitterness can have been enough to stir this wild anger in you? Why this raging passion? Where is all the love you used to have for me? Will you not first go and see where you have left your father, crippled with age, and find whether your wife Creusa is still alive, and your son Ascanius? (...) It is not the hated beauty of the Spartan woman [Helen] .. that is overthrowing all this wealth and laying low the topmost towers of Troy, nor is it Paris although you all blame him, it is the gods, the cruelty of the gods. Look, for I shall tear away from all around you the dank cloud that veils your eyes and dulls your mortal vision. You are my son, do not be afraid to do what I command you, and do not disobey me.'" (Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book 2)

*B. Comparative essay. Answer one question, drawing a contrast between two or three CS-201 texts. Maximum three sides. 15% of total grade. Organize your thoughts coherently before you start writing.*

4. Is the anger of gods justified? Compare ancient Mesopotamia (The Epic of Gilgamesh), Greece (The Odyssey) and Rome (Lucretius or Virgil).

5. What can you say about the character of relations between men and women from the texts you have read of ancient Mesopotamia, Greece or Rome?

6. What are the special difficulties of understanding the thought of another age and another culture, particularly when read in translation?