

IDS 2935: Wisdom and Heroism: Great Books in the Medieval World

Quest 1: The Examined Life

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- 100% In-Person, no GTAs, 35 residential students max
- MAT 0113
- MWF Period 8 (3-3:50)

Instructor

- Prof. David McPherson
- CSE Building 426
- Office hours MWF 2-2:45 pm and by appointment

Course Description

In this course we will pursue the essential question of how we define excellent character, focusing our inquiry on the historical development of character traits deemed most worthy in the Middle Ages: wisdom and heroism. What does it mean to be “heroic,” and “wise,” and is wisdom an aspect of heroism? How did these ideas develop in combination with one another in the medieval period? Many aspects of what we might now consider elements of the “examined life” originated with medieval thinkers, who were motivated by essential questions about the meaning of human existence and its persistence in an afterlife, offering us insights for how we should live now. The twin ideals of heroism and wisdom – whether through knighthood, crusades, courtship, monastic celibacy and poverty, religious martyrdom, or in the intellectual life itself – pervaded epic poetry, music, and philosophy during a time of unprecedented population growth and social development. This multidisciplinary course traverses both the glories and the foibles involved in the medieval ideals of heroism and wisdom, through a study spanning history, philosophy, literature, art, and architecture. Do we see elements from the age of heroic chivalry in our concept of heroism today? Is wisdom necessarily connected to intellectualism and the educated life? We will pursue these questions, measuring contemporary expressions of wisdom and heroism against those developed in Medieval Europe.

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

Required Readings and Works

1. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (Penguin, 1999) – available on reserve
2. University of Chicago *Readings in Western Civilization, Volume 4: Medieval Europe*, eds. Julius Kirshner and Karl F. Morrison (“RWC” in Weekly Schedule)
3. All other readings and works are available in Canvas.
4. Materials and Supplies Fees: n/a

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

1. Active Participation and Class Attendance: 20%
 - a. An exemplar participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens considerately to other discussants. See participation rubric below. (R)
 - b. On-time class attendance, with no more than 2 unexcused absences, is required for this component of the course grade.
 - c. Documentation is required for excused absences, per university policy. Excessive absences (past 6) can result in failure of the course.
2. Reading Questions (5 all term): 20%
 - a. Every other week you will turn in to our Canvas “Discussion” board two questions regarding that week’s readings, quoting the text briefly to identify any confusions, factual questions, or conceptual problems you encountered as you read the text. In your question you will also reflect on how an issue in the reading is connected to issues you encounter in your own life. You will also be required to respond to or build on another student’s question posted in that week’s discussion. Postings must be at least 200 words. See Canvas for details and grading rubric. (R)
 - b. Due weeks 2, 4, 8, 10, 14
3. *Song of Roland* episode (700 words) (creative writing “Experiential Learning Component”): 20%
 - a. See description below. Professor will provide written feedback. See Canvas for more details. (R)
 - b. Due week 6
4. Argument Analysis Paper (min. 1000 words): 20%
 - a. In week 13, you will submit a 1,000-wd essay on “Cultural expressions of heroism.” Incorporating course readings and following up on our discussion of cathedrals as expressive of a cultural heroism and articulating spatially the value of human dignity, you will develop an analytic argument based on your own thesis regarding ways in which the character trait of heroism is expressed in a building or structure in Medieval Europe. How is it different from contemporary expressions of heroism in structures or statues, such as military statues or sports stadiums? Your essay should be driven by a central question related to our course, such as: “If a shrine, statue, or memorial can celebrate a heroic act or person, can a structure confer a sense of general cultural

heroism?" If you choose a structure not included in our course readings or lecture, you must have your choice approved by the professor. In week 12, you will bring the first two pages of your paper to class for a workshop with your peers, which will count as 5% of your essay grade. Professor will provide written feedback at the draft stage and on the final copy. (R)

- b. Deadline: Week 12-13. See Canvas for details and grading rubric.
- 5. Final Exam: 20%
 - a. Monday, December 11, 10 am – 12 pm

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubric (See other rubrics in Canvas)

Participation Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Average	Insufficient	Unsatisfactory
Knowledgeable: Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.					
Thoughtful: Evaluates carefully issues raised in assigned work.					
Considerate: Takes the perspective of others into account and listens attentively.					

III. Annotated Weekly Schedule

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Introduction to Quest, and the Examined Life in the Medieval World • Summary: What is the “examined life,” and how did medieval figures examine the values of their own culture through the concepts of “heroism” and “wisdom”? We begin with the study of St. Augustine, who was arguably the most influential theologian and philosopher in the Middle Ages and wrote around the end of the Roman empire. • Required Readings/Works (42 pages): St. Augustine, selections from <i>Confessions</i> (opening paragraph and Book VIII) and <i>City of God</i> (Book XIV, Chapter 28; Book XV, Chapter 22; Book XIX, Chapters 1-4)
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Consolations of Philosophy • Summary: After studying Augustine, we will turn to study of Boethius’s <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (523 AD), one of the earliest and most significant literary works to inform the themes and methods of the entire medieval intellectual period and consider how it understands the place of philosophy in human life. • Required Readings/Works (44 pages): Boethius, <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> I-II (pp. 3-46) • Assignment: 200-wd reading questions due (R)
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Out of the Ancients • Summary: What is heroic about searching for happiness in the face of injustice and death? How does Boethius offer us a unique defense of the examined life? Is it wise to continue the search for happiness, according to Boethius? • Required Readings/Works (69 pages): Boethius, <i>Consolation</i> III-IV (pp. 47-115)
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Foundations of Church and State • Summary: What was considered wise about the monastic life in the early Middle Ages? Would we consider withdrawal from societal daily life a wise thing to do today? We will look at conflicts between ecclesiastical and political authorities that informed the medieval ideals of wisdom and heroism. Regarding the latter, what role did it play in the conversion of empires? • Required Readings/Works (21 pages): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gregory I’s Account of Benedict’s Life (RWC 8-17) b. Bede, <i>The Lives of the Abbots</i> (RWC 18-26) c. John of Viterbo, <i>On the Government of Cities</i>, 1240s (RWC 102-104) d. Boniface VIII, <i>Clericis Laicos</i> and <i>Unam Sanctam</i> (RWC 380-382) • Assignment: 200-wd reading questions due (R)
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Chivalry and Crusades • Summary: Can we ever consider killing to be heroic? The earliest surviving songs of heroism from medieval France – the <i>Song of Roland</i> (11th c.) enjoyed popular reception by audiences enamored with ideals of chivalry, honor, and heroic sacrifice. How should we assess this song of heroism as essentially glorifying destruction and death? How might we understand the relevance of the crusades to our modern sense of justifications for war? • Required Readings/Works (28 pages):

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Letter of Innocent III to the Crusaders, 1203 (RWC 360-362) a. The Song of Roland (26 pages)
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Twelfth-Century Renaissance • Summary: How can the idea of heroism be applied to the intellectual life? We will analyze 12th-Century approaches to wisdom and heroic sacrifice in the monastic life and forms of spiritual austerity. How did these novel forms advance the ideals of religious heroism? Discussion will focus on the poetic works of Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Hildegard of Bingen, whose music will also be featured. • Required Readings/Works (12 pages): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Anselm of Canterbury, <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> (RWC 174-179) b. Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>On Women, Marriage, and Celibacy</i> (RWC 222-228) c. Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>Letter to Hildegard of Bingen</i> (RWC 236) d. Hildegard of Bingen, <i>Ordo Virtutum</i>, 1150 (18 min. listen) <p>Assignment: <i>Song of Roland</i> original episode due (700 wds): See “Experiential Learning Component” below and see Canvas for details.</p>
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Vows • Summary: How did the rise of religious orders—the Dominicans and the Franciscans—shape the culture’s sense of the examined life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? Were their public vows of poverty seen as heroic in the period? Would we consider their actions as heroic today? • Required Readings/Works (43 pages): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Jordan of Saxony, <i>On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers</i> (RWC 261-279) b. Raymond of Peñafort, <i>Constitutions of the Dominican Order</i>, ca. 1238-40 (RWC 279-281) c. Francis of Assisi, <i>Rule and Testament</i>, 1223, 1226 (RWC 281-289) d. Thomas of Celano, <i>Life of Saint Francis</i> (RWC 289-304)
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Natural and Divine Laws • Summary: Is it important to think of laws as repositories of cultural wisdom? We will examine how concepts of the common good led to philosophical distinctions between human, natural, and divine law as sources of wisdom in the medieval period. Legal reforms changed the nature of the examined life in this period. How did these legal reforms alter the medieval understanding of the relationship between the individual and community? • Required Readings/Works (ca. 50 pages): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. John of Salisbury, <i>Policraticus</i> (RWC 180-214) b. Rogerius, <i>Questions on the Institutes</i> (RWC 215-218) c. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Treatise on Law</i> (selections from the <i>Summa Theologiae</i>) <p>Assignment: 200-wd reading questions due (R)</p>
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Universities • Summary: Do we assume that the role of the university is to confer wisdom? What is a university, and how does our understanding of it bear continuity from medieval

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
	<p>times? What were the early methods, regulations, and debates over the content and character of the medieval <i>universitas</i> as intentional communities dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom? Discussion will be accompanied by in-class viewing of the architecture of Cambridge and other medieval universities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Readings/Works (17 pages): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gregory IX, <i>Papal Regulations for the University of Paris</i>, 1231 (RWC 339-342) b. Thomas Aquinas, <i>On Christian Theology</i> (RWC 343-354) c. <i>Orthodoxy Enforced at Paris, 1272 and Teaching Obligations in the Faculty of Arts, Paris</i>, ca. 1280 (RWC 354-357)
Week 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Aristotelian Revival • Summary: Is religious belief an aspect of wisdom? Why today is religious belief sometimes associated with ignorance, and how does this contrast with societal views in the Middle Ages? Could thinkers then engage in faith and reason in compatible or even complementary ways, as dual approaches in the pursuit of wisdom? How did Aquinas’s interpretation and development of Aristotelian philosophy, which synthesized the rational discourse of Antiquity with the tradition of divine revelation, provide a unique response to these challenges? • Required Readings/Works (ca. 30 pages): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Thomas Aquinas, selections on human happiness and the cardinal and theological virtues from the <i>Summa Theologiae</i> • Assignment: 200-wd reading questions due (R)
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Natural Theology • Summary: Do we have an inherent wisdom about our own actions, or does wisdom come from experience? Were theological sources the primary sources of wisdom in the Middle Ages? We will look at arguments for theological claims based on natural reason as opposed to scripture. How does Anselm of Canterbury’s argument contrast with Thomas Aquinas’s evidence-based approach in the “five ways” (from his <i>Summa Theologiae</i>, 13th c.)? How do both purport to demonstrate the existence of God, and do they succeed? • Required Readings/Works (10 pages): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Anselm of Canterbury, Proslogion (4 pages) b. Thomas Aquinas, The Five Ways (selections from the <i>Summa Theologiae</i>, 6 pages)
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Cathedrals • Summary: Can we consider structures as portraying aspects of heroism? Built as sacred spaces and the crowning glories of medieval cities, cathedrals aspired to the sublime heights in expressing the purpose and possibility of human existence. How was their magnificence criticized by some as decadent and even as contradictory to the spirit of Christianity? Discussion will be accompanied by in-class viewing of the architecture of Chartres Cathedral and other medieval structures. This week will also feature an argument analysis writing workshop. • Required Readings/Works (23 pages):

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adamnan, <i>Arculf's Narrative about the Holy Places</i> (RWC 26-38) b. Abbot Suger, On What Was Done In His Administration, 12th c. (10 pages) c. Bernard of Clairvaux, Apology, 1125 (1 page) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment: Argument Analysis draft workshopped in class on Friday (see Canvas)
Week 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Wisdom in the face of the Black Death • Summary: Is it possible to react heroically and with wisdom to a pandemic? How does art and literature, as reflecting “the examined life,” express the stresses on a society in the face of mass death? The great pandemic in the Middle Ages, the Black Plague killed almost half of Europe’s citizenry in the 14th century. What were medieval reactions to the plague, and how did it inspire the composition of literary works? We will read selections from Boccaccio’s <i>Decameron</i> and Langland’s <i>Piers Plowman</i>: these are both firsthand testimonies about the plague, and also cultural introspection about the need for social reform in the aftermath of devastating catastrophe. We will also read selections from the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich, which were produced during this period. • Required Readings/Works (ca. 50 pages): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Matteo Villani, <i>Description of Plague in Florence</i>, 1348 (RWC 447-451) b. Boccaccio, Decameron, selections (15 pages) c. William Langland, Piers Plowman, selections (15 pages) d. Julian of Norwich, selections from <i>Revelations of Divine Love</i> • Assignment: Argument Analysis paper due (1000 wds).
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Hero’s Journey • Summary: How would we envision a “hero’s journey” today? Does our culture offer a quest or test we might deem heroic? Dante’s <i>Divine Comedy</i> (14th c.) offers an approach to the examined life and recovery of wisdom in the hero’s journey. By studying Dante’s version, which highlights the perils of the soul in the afterlife, a vision of hell, and the pursuit of wisdom within this present life, we can reflect on our own pursuits and paths of heroism. • Required Readings/Works (55 pages): Dante Alighieri, <i>Divine Comedy</i>, selections (Inferno I-III, V, XXXIV; Purgatorio I-II, X, XXX-XXXI; Paradiso I, III, X-XI, XXIV-XXVI, XXXIII) • Assignment: 200-wd reading questions due (R)
Week 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Heroism, chivalry, and courtly love • Summary: Is the pursuit of love a heroic act? We conclude the course with Chaucer’s <i>Canterbury Tales</i> (14th c.) and its complex depictions of heroism through chivalric romance and courtly love (“The Knight’s Tale”). How does Chaucer’s work refer to Boccaccio, Boethius, and other thinkers studied in this course? How might Chaucer’s social critique be construed as an intellectual forerunner of English Reformation in the Renaissance period? • Required Readings/Works (60 pages): Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Knight’s Tale,” from <i>Canterbury Tales</i>, pp. 26-86.

IV. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) learning outcomes as follows:

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential questions about the wisdom and heroism as ideal aspects of character in the medieval world. (Quest 1, H) **Assessments:** Active class discussion, in-class examination, reading questions, argument analysis paper.
- Identify, describe, and explain the historical, philosophical, and literary evidence for the twin ideals of wisdom and heroism as constitutive elements of the examined life in the medieval world, and the interpretive and normative questions that arise in seeking to understand the medieval approach to a life well lived. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** Active class discussion, in-class exam, reading questions, argument analysis paper.

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- Analyze how works across disciplines and genres from the medieval period represent the quest for defining heroism and wisdom amidst great social change. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** In-class examination; argument analysis paper, active class discussion.
- Analyze and evaluate specific accounts of the pursuit of the ideals of wisdom and heroism, across diverse texts and works from a specific historical period, using close reading, critical analysis and group discussion, and personal reflection. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** In-class examination, argument analysis paper, reading questions, active class discussion, *Song of Roland* experiential learning component.

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts, visual and auditory media, and experiential learning activities. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** Argument analysis paper, *Song of Roland* experiential learning component, active class discussion.
- Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on ideals of heroism and wisdom in the quest for the examined life. (Quest 1, H). **Assessments:** In-class examination, active class discussion, argument analysis paper draft workshop, argument analysis paper, *Song of Roland* experiential learning component.

Connection: *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Connect course content with students’ intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond. (Quest 1). **Assessments:** *Song of Roland* experiential learning component, active class discussion, argument analysis paper.
- Reflect on students’ own and others’ experience with the pursuit of the examined life in active class discussion and argument analysis papers. (Quest 1). **Assessments:** *Song of Roland* experiential learning component, argument analysis paper, paper draft workshop, active class discussion.

V. Quest Learning Experiences

1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

After reading the epic poem “The Song of Roland,” you will write your own episode to add to the tale. You must write it in the voice of a character from the tale, such as Queen Bramimonde, the angel Gabriel, the warrior Pinabel, or even “Durendal,” the sword of Roland. This episode must be at least 500 words, and in your episode you must include aspects of heroism as defined or described in our course readings up to this point (week 6). In addition to your episode, you will write a brief analysis of how your addition either intensified the heroic tone of the poem, or detracted from the heroism depicted in the poem. Finally, you will comment on how your modern sense of what counts as “heroic” affected your addition to the tale. Are these traits that you value in your own life, and that serve you well in today’s society? Are these traits evident among the student body at the University of Florida? Why or why not? These last two sections will be at least 200 wds. (700 words total).

2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

Self-reflection is built into many of the assignments, primarily through the reading questions, the analytic essay assignment, and the *Song of Roland* creative writing assignment. In these opportunities for self-reflection offered by specific activities throughout the course, students will reflect on the broader implications of the themes of the course, considering the impact to themselves and/or to a wider community.

VI. Required Policies

Attendance Policy

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting

<https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their

accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF Evaluations Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

The Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

In-Class Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and

delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.