

Core UA 400-070 Fall 2019
Texts and Ideas: Objectivity

Professor [Lisa Gitelman](#)
 Lectures Mondays and Wednesdays 12:30-1:45
 12 Waverly Pl. G08

Recitations (Sections 71-77) on Fridays according to registration
Recitation Leaders: [Kim Adams](#), [Athena Pierquet](#), Luisa Minopoli

Course Description

Bias. Spin. Propaganda. Hype. Fake news. These pejoratives are familiar to citizens of the twenty-first century, and by implication they privilege the same alternative: objectivity. Objectivity is a concept—or an ideal—that frames our understanding of pursuits as diverse as politics, journalism, and science, realms in which we hope to be able to discern the right, the true, and the real. But what is objectivity? Whose discernment counts as objective? How can we tell? Questions like these ask us to consider not only *what* we know but also *how* we know it.

The conditions of producing, possessing, and assessing knowledge turn out to be remarkably available to cultural change. In other words, objectivity has a history. This course considers objectivity within and against the Western intellectual tradition. By considering selected episodes in its emergence, both ancient and modern, we will ask how thinkers have thought about knowing: What routes have been available to the pursuit of certainty? What standards exist or have existed for knowledge about the past, about the self or about others, and about the world around us? Is it possible that the twenty-first century will involve new forms of objectivity? We will explore these questions by drawing on works of philosophy, history, criticism and the arts.

Like other Texts and Ideas courses, this one is conceived as a class in intellectual history or the history of ideas. Its foundational role in the curriculum mandates detailed attention in lecture and recitation to the written expression of ideas. It has a more sophisticated intellectual ambition than the chronological Great Books surveys to which it invites comparison. One way to think about Texts and Ideas courses like this one is as an opportunity to read important books, as young people in the company of others and with the support that the college classroom provides. The course is therefore defined by its objects of study—assigned readings in common—and its concern is to hone your skills as a reader, thinker, and writer. Ultimately we seek to cultivate the habits of mind, those habits of critique, prudential judgment, and self-reflection that are particularly important for citizens of a rapidly changing and increasingly global world.

Lisa Gitelman: I'm a professor of English and of Media, Culture, and Communication
 My office is in 239 Greene St., room 720

Visit me during drop-in office hours Thursdays 11:00-12:00 (no appointment necessary) or after class, or—if those times wont work—by appointment.

Required Texts

Four books have been ordered for you at the university bookstore. All are also available through online booksellers should you wish, but please obtain the specified editions in hard copy (not Kindle). A lot of additional readings will be available via Classes or via links on the syllabus below. Please try to bring the assigned reading to class with you as indicated on the schedule below. Hard copy strongly preferred.

- Plato, *Protagoras and Meno*, trans. Adam Beresford (Penguin Classics)
- Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Hammond (Oxford World Classics)
- Bird, *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself* (NYRB)
- Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Mariner; Houghton Mifflin)

I have not ordered Genesis and the Gospel According to St. Matthew (for Week 4) because they are so readily available online and in print. Please obtain a copy of the King James or “Authorized” Version of the Christian Bible, originally published in 1611. You may read the required sections of this work online if you prefer, and I’ve posted a link in NYU Classes. There is an edition that lets you compare modern spelling and 1611 spelling at kingjamesbible.org.

Expectations and Assessment

- (1) Readings are to be completed before class. Lectures provide context for better understanding the texts. You will get a lot more out of the texts and the lectures if you do the reading beforehand. Weekly recitations are an opportunity to work through these texts and related key concepts as a community. The prerequisite for high-quality discussion in recitation is that everyone reads material ahead of time. Come to class prepared to engage. Remember, “skimming” is never enough.
- (2) Engaged participation. We will be looking for knowledge-building contributions that show not only that you are trying to understand the readings but also that you can contribute to the intellectual life of the class. A pre-requisite for active and intelligent participation in discussions is prompt and regular attendance. Plan on attending every class meeting this semester.

As a matter of common courtesy, please refrain from walking in and out of the room while class is in session, and please *silence your phones and put them away*. Please don't be a distraction. Laptops must remain closed unless otherwise instructed for class activities. If you absolutely must use a laptop for note taking during lectures, then you must sit in the front row of the classroom.

- (3) Essay Writing: You will be asked to craft three essays as part of this class (details to follow). These essays are opportunities to demonstrate close engagement with the texts and a synthetic understanding of their themes. This kind of essay writing is a critical skill for thriving in college and beyond, and this class presents an ideal practice environment for honing precisely this kind of expertise. We will discuss the assignments in detail. Please email an electronic copy of each essay to your recitation leader as instructed.

Any plagiarism *no matter how accidental* will result in failure for the course. Remember, it is plagiarism if you use someone else's ideas without attribution or someone else's words

without quotation. The university's [Writing Center](#) is an invaluable resource should you wish to take advantage of it. You are entitled to one-on-one writing tutorials if you plan ahead and make appointments.

(4) Resources: [Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#) If you are entitled to accommodations in light of a documented disability, please be in touch at the beginning of the semester.

(5) Grading policy: Grading will be done by the entire teaching staff working together, including and closely supervised by Professor Gitelman. Recitation leaders will assign participation grades themselves at the end of term during an interview with Professor Gitelman. *Repeated absences from recitation will have a depressing effect on your participation grade.* Semester grades will be tabulated as follows:

a. Participation (includes homework assignments, details to follow)

25%

b. Essays **50%**

Essay 1 10%

Essay 2 20%

Essay 3 20%

c. Examinations **25 %**

i. Midterm 10 %

ii. Final 15 %

Course Schedule (Any necessary changes will be announced in class and/or via Classes.)

1. Required reading
 Wednesday, September 4 Introductions The Ancient World
 Friday, September 6: No recitations. Use this day to read.

2.
 Monday, September 9, Lecture #1 Plato's *Meno* pp. 85-113
 Wednesday, September 11, Lecture #2 Plato's *Meno* pp. 113-134
 Friday, September 13, Recitation I

3.
 Monday, September 16 Lecture #3 Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* pp. 3-73
 Wednesday, September 18 Lecture #4 Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* pp. 74-107
 Friday, September 20, Recitation II

4.
 Monday, September 23, Lecture #5 Genesis 1-36
 Wednesday, September 25 Lecture #6 Gospel According to St. Matthew
 Friday, September 27 Recitation III
 Essay #1 Due by Sunday September 29 at 6 PM
The Early Modern

5.
 Monday, September 30, Lecture #7 Genesis and Gospel of Matthew (continued)

- Wednesday, October 2, Lecture #8
Friday, October 4 Recitation IV
- Alberti, *On Painting*
6.
Monday, October 7, Lecture #9
Wednesday, October 9 Lecture #10
Friday, October 11, Recitation V
- Montaigne, “On Idleness,” “That It is Madness,”
“On Cannibals”
Montaigne, “On Coaches” and [*Phil. Trans. No. 1*](#)
(browse around in the *Phil Trans*)
7.
Tuesday, October 15 Review for the Midterm
Wednesday, October 16 In-class Midterm Exam
Friday, October 18 Recitations Cancelled for today
8.
Monday, October 21 Lecture #11
Wednesday, October 23 Lecture #12
Friday, October 24 Recitation VI
- The Modern World
- Bird, *Sheppard Lee* Books I-II
Bird, *Sheppard Lee* Books V-VI
9.
Monday, October 28 Lecture #13
Wednesday, October 30 Lecture #14
Friday, November 1 Recitation VII
- Bird, *Sheppard Lee* Books VII-VIII
W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, Chs. 1-2, and *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Forethought” and Ch. 1
10.
Monday, November 4 Lecture #15
Wednesday, November 6 Reading Day: Use this time to read ahead
Friday, November 8 Recitation VIII
Essay #2 Due by Saturday, November 9 at 6 PM
- W.E.B. DuBois “The Princess Steel”
We will also screen Morrison’s *The Mesmerist* (15:48)
11.
Monday, November 11 Lecture #16
Wednesday, November 13 Lecture #17
Friday, November 15 Recitation IX
- Freud, “Note on the Mystic Writing Pad”;
Borges, “Funes Memorioso”; rescreening
Morrison’s *The Mesmerist*
Loos, “Ornament and Crime”
12.
Monday, November 18 Lecture #18
Wednesday, November 20 Lecture #19
Friday, November 22 Recitation X
- Agee & Evans, *Let Us Now Praise*, pp. i-106
Agee & Evans, *Let Us Now Praise*, pp. 319-416
13.
Monday, November 25 Lecture #20
- Agee & Evans, *Let Us Now Praise*, pp. 197-224

Thanksgiving Break

14.

Monday, December 2 Lecture #21

Nakazawa, *I Saw It*

Wednesday, December 4, Lecture #22

Bush, "[As We May Think](#)"

Friday, December 6 Recitation XI

15.

Monday, December 9 Lecture Conclusion: Is Google Objective?

Essay #3 Due by 6 PM Monday, December 9

Wednesday, December 11 In-class review for final

Friday, December 13 Collaborative review sessions in lieu of recitation

Final Exam (scheduled by the NYU Registrar) Wednesday, December 18, 12:00-1:50