



The City University of New York

ENGLISH 2150

AUTHENTICITY AND ASTONISHMENT: A COURSE IN WRITING

What makes something authentic? Is authenticity something to strive for? How does authenticity arrive at the truth? Is authenticity even possible in a world so mired in lies and dishonesty and cover-ups and corruption and violence? If we were to examine the Self, where might we find authenticity—in the mind, in the body, in the interaction with others? Would we be astonished at any of this? In fact, what astonishes us? Is what astonishes us actually astonishing, for example when a person does something that he or she is morally obligated to do but we lionize him or her and make a hero out of he or she? Why is what astonishes us actually astonishing? Answering these questions can help us discover more about ourselves, our world, and the operations and interweaving of both—political systems, cultural ways, relationships, religious beliefs, and ethics. This makes us consider our own as well as our cultural axiology, or the study of value.

While we consider the term *authenticity*, we will also consider the terms honesty, independence and genuineness; similarly, when we examine the term *astonishment*, we will also look at the concepts of wonder, surprise, and bafflement.

Authenticity brings with it a long etymological (origin of words) and philosophical history. We can frame it historically in order to form a contemporary understanding of it—as a term and as a concept. Perhaps the earliest account of authenticity is Socrates' admonition that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Is there anything astonishing about an *unexamined* life? In philosophy of art, "authenticity" describes the perception of art as faithful to the artist's self, rather than conforming to external values such as historical tradition, or commercial worth. The concept of authenticity is often raised in the punk rock, heavy metal, and hip-hop subcultures, in which people or bands are criticized for their purported lack of authenticity by being labeled with the epithet *poseur*.

Likewise, *astonishment* possesses an interesting etymology. It comes from the Latin for "to strike with lightning." Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous American Transcendentalist, wrote the following: "The astonishment of life is the absence of any appearance of reconciliation between the theory and the practice of life." Thus, *astonishment* is the thing that appears and hovers, there, between an idea and actually doing something. We could be astonished at a crime someone else committed or astonished at an Olympic athlete or a violent crime or a hero or a villain. Who is the worst villain and what makes he or she so astonishing?

Aside from the aforementioned, perhaps one of the bigger investigations we will undergo will be answering large questions of self and what it means to be alive/to live, and how to impact that difficult and abstract process. We will also approach other interesting questions, like: How can we develop a real strong sense of self that remains astonished at the world while also remaining authentically that self, and, is every act of astonishment an alteration of the previous sure-footedness of an authentic self?

We will do this by reading a whole host of texts (*all provided by the professor*) and watching film clips, examining memes, listening to songs and looking at social media; through this, we'll investigate topics, like: marriage, post-humanism, virtue, feminism, aesthetics, ethics, mathematics, transcendentalism, anti-racism, and cosmopolitanism. This course is primarily focused on written composition and the enhancing of each student's writing skills and rhetorical communication and argumentation (blog-posting, short essay revising, a research paper with citations). A centrifugal goal here is to prepare students for a myriad of "real world" confrontations—engaging in research, citing information and sources (avoiding plagiarism of any kind), creatively figuring solutions to ideal and practical challenges, and to properly communicating that very thinking process.

This document should be treated as *the class's constitution*; if there is a policy that draws curiosity, the answers can be mostly found here—calculating your own grade, knowing what to read, the professor's e-mail address, room number, what to do, what not to do, etc.

LEARNING GOALS

The English Department at Baruch College stipulates that after completing ENG 2100 and 2150, students should be able to:

- IDENTIFY THE KEY IDEAS AND TECHNIQUES USED IN A VARIETY OF ARTICLES, ESSAYS, AND LITERARY WORKS, AND SUBJECT THESE WORKS TO LOGICAL ANALYSIS;
- UNDERTAKE WRITING AS A PROCESS REQUIRING THE OUTLINING OF IDEAS, MULTIPLE DRAFTING, AND REVISION OF COMPLETE ESSAYS;
- CREATE AN ORIGINAL AND COGENT THESIS AND DEVELOP AN IMAGINATIVE ARGUMENT IN UNIFIED AND COHERENT PARAGRAPHS;
- OBSERVE SENTENCE BOUNDARIES, PUNCTUATE CORRECTLY, VARY SENTENCE STRUCTURES, AND EMPLOY THE CONVENTIONS OF STANDARD ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND USAGE;
- ENGAGE WITH DIFFERENT GENRES OF WRITING, INCLUDING THE SHORT STORY, THE NOVEL, THE ESSAY, POETRY, AND DRAMA, AND COMPREHEND AND USE APPROPRIATE VOCABULARY IN INTERPRETING THE MATERIAL BY PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO LANGUAGE AND STYLE;
- IDENTIFY, ANALYZE, AND SYNTHESIZE MULTIPLE SOURCES AS SUPPORT FOR WRITTEN ARGUMENTS;
- GAUGE THE VALUE OF DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR ARGUMENTATION, INCLUDING THE USE OF COUNTER-ARGUMENTS;
- PRODUCE RESEARCHED ESSAYS THAT INCORPORATE SOURCES AND THAT EFFECTIVELY EVALUATE MULTIPLE (AND EVEN CONFLICTING) POINTS OF VIEW;
- AVOID PLAGIARISM AND UNDERSTAND WHY IT IS UNACCEPTABLE, AT THE SAME TIME LEARNING HOW TO APPROPRIATELY DOCUMENT YOUR RESEARCH AND IDEAS;
- IMAGINE THE NEEDS OF ONE'S READER WHEN WRITING IN DIFFERENT RHETORICAL MODES AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND TAKE AUDIENCE AND OCCASION INTO ACCOUNT WHEN WRITING.

CLASS POLICIES

- *Attendance, Tardiness, Classroom Participation, Notebook Organization, Note-taking, Discussion*

These aspects are the absolute most important. Since the class primarily focuses on writing and lingual communication, we have to be present and talk in order to form the proper ideas and thought-processes in order to perform those tasks. Any student missing **two class sessions** (without properly notifying the professor via e-mail or office message) will see his or her **grade decrease an entire letter**. If a student should miss **three class sessions**, he or she will automatically **fail** the course. Any student who misses a class (or is tardy) must **document the absence with an e-mail** within 24 hours of the class, fully explaining *why* the tardiness or the absence should be excused.

A **tardy** is considered **half an absence**. Being **tardy** means being **more than nine minutes late** to the class's departmentally-deemed start time. You must document tardiness the same as your absences and fully explain why the tardiness occurred.

Each student is required to keep **an organized system of notes, readings, reading notes, essay drafts and essay revisions**. There will be notebook checks at least twice during the semester which will appear in the overall participation grade. Each student should keep a tight, organized and communicable system of notes. Students should **never just copy the professor's notes** (as those will be posted on the class blog) but should develop their own individual methods of keeping, remembering, using and re-reading notes. This is a key practice to being successful in academic comprehension, but also, of retaining more information and making it useable, practical, etc.

➤ *Cellular Phones, iPads, New Media Devices*

Any use of **cellular phones** should be done *only* in emergency situation, *outside* of class. Laptops and iPads should be shown to the professor so that he or she can approve that device for use in class. If a student is seen **texting** (even if you are taking notes) on a cell phone, *that student's participation points will be taken away* for that class period.

➤ *Plagiarism*

Each student must provide proper citation whenever quoting, paraphrasing, kind-of-using, electronically copy-and-pasting, or (even) forgetting the words, ideas, statistics, and artistic product(s) of anyone other than his or her self. If not, the student will be prompted to re-do that improper use of information, material, etc. **Never copy and paste from any web source** without properly citing that web source. We will be using the **MLA system of citation** (see web address below) and paying close attention to the **signal phrase** *** Ex: Author Name, writes in *Publication Source*, " _____ " (#). *** → ((<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>))

➤ *Reading and Writing Completion*

All course readings will be **provided by the professor**, either through **e-mail** or on **the class blog**. All readings will be provided in .PDF or .DOC format and must be **brought to class, always, no excuses**. Any student needing a copy will need to let the professor know *before* the class which that particular reading will be discussed. It is absolutely imperative that each student read these texts and view any multimedia presentations. **All readings should be annotated**—note them, highlight, underline, circle, and question each. No question involving any of the class's texts should go unasked. If students do not read assigned texts, the class will have to take comprehensive quizzes as a consequence of not reading.

We will use [the Purdue OWL](#) system for learning how to improve writing and construct rhetoric and cite sources (MLA) properly.

Grading

<i>Weekly Blog Posts</i> (revisions of comprehensive readings, signal phrases, in-class writing)	36%
<i>Research Essay</i> (with MLA <i>in-text</i> citations + Works Cited page + <i>creative</i> presentation)	46%
<i>Participation</i> (notebook organization, attentiveness, lack of cell phone usage, discussion)	18%

These are the *possible grades* each student can earn: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, F, W, WU.

Tentative Schedule

----- ((Weeks 1 - 3)) -----

Reading: Plato: “The Allegory of the Cave” and “Meno” // Voltaire, excerpts from *Philosophical Dictionary* // Ambrose Bierce, from *The Unabridged Devil’s Dictionary* // Key and Peele and *The Wizard of Oz* video excerpts // Talib Kweli, “Love Language”

((<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRNMZEDOBrM>))

((<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZR64EF3OpA>))

((<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dd7FixvoKBw>))

In-Class Discussion(s): Virtues, The Wizard of Oz and what’s behind the curtain, language’s prominence in understanding // definition, the basics of identity, axiology, ontology, epistemology, ignorance, awareness, light and dark, morality, where we get our meaning from, how we construct meaning for ourselves and for others, origins, the Socratic method, and ***sentence structure tricks***

Assignment: In-class writing (in notebook) // object and abstraction explanatory writing

----- ((Weeks 3 - 5)) -----

Reading: Any continued reading from Week 1 // *The Fragments of Diogenes*, trans. by Guy Davenport

((http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/paul_zak_trust_morality_and_oxytocin.html))

((<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/video/infinity-bigger-9608228>))

In-Class Discussion(s): numbers, representations, Saussurian linguistics and logic, language, rhetoric, ideas about nature and the universe, and ***signal phrases*** how much do we know, theories of infinity, theories of nothingness

Assignment: In-class writings, blog summaries // taking the I out of obj & abs. explanatory essay

----- ((Weeks 5 - 9)) -----

Reading: // Video clips from the film *Groundhog Day* and *The Big Lebowski* // Kwame Anthony Appiah, excerpts from *Cosmopolitanism* and *The Ethics of Identity* // Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning” and “The Myth of Sisyphus”

In-Class Discussion(s): moral abstractions and morality vs. practical and rational needs, i.e. What I believe in and What I particularly want, particular interests, globalization, the cosmos, the body

Assignment: In-class writing, blog summaries, begin research reading // *thesis statement* proposal due end of Week 6 // draft of *introduction to research essay* due at beginning of Week 7

((<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VF5P7qLaEQ>))

----- ((Weeks 9 - 12)) -----

Reading: // a clip from the film *25th Hour* // Malcolm Gladwell, an excerpt from *The Outliers* // TED talk by Malcolm Gladwell about product-quality // “Happiness Revisited,” chapter 1 from *Flow*

In-Class Discussion(s): quality of living, epistemology of fear, the Absurd, the success of the 10,000 hour idea, axiology and systems of value, quality, labor/work, the Marxist critique, hierarchies, Don Juan, success and failure . . .

Assignment: list of 50 search term and search phrases // revised thesis statement and introduction // Full and detailed outline // ** full research essay draft one (8-10 pages) due by end of Week 10 **

((<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7voTVvJ2wdc>))

((http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_on_spaghetti_sauce.html))

((http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zfNlnraFQ&feature=player_detailpage))

----- ((Weeks 13 - 16)) -----

Reading: Stephanie Ericsson, “Ways We Lie” // Rebecca Solnit, “Men Explain Things to Me” // ??? // Songs: Reflection Eternal, “For Women” // Nicolas Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stoopid” // Ellen Ullman, “Programming the Post-Human: Computer Science Redefines Life”

In-Class Discussion(s): relationships, commitment, dedication, re: Green virtues, male and female, self and other, humanity, definitions of life, of existence, nature, labor, meaning, value, self and other, addressing *memes* to enhance critical thinking and examine meaning of images

Assignment: ** research essay draft (in full, revised twice, with Works Cited) due at end of Week 14
** // creative presentation