

**Big Bang**  
**The Literature of Chaos and Order**  
*(Syllabus subject to change)*

Fall 2016, Rutgers University  
German 01:470:364-01 [index 18711],  
Comparative Literature 01:195:364-01 [index  
22081]  
Mo/We 1:10-2:30pm, CA [Campbell Hall, 617  
George Street, CAC], rm. A3

Prof. Nicholas Rennie  
O. hrs. Mo 3:00pm, & by appointment  
15 Seminary Place, rm. 4124 (CAC)  
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Considering how the world began has always also meant speculating how it might end. In recent centuries, increasingly, it has also involved thinking about the position of human beings in a physical and moral universe whose structures can no longer be taken for granted. This course examines the ways a selection of writers and philosophers from the Renaissance to the present have represented dramatic upheavals in the physical universe as analogies for crisis and revolution in the realms of history, politics, psychology, science, gender, and the arts.

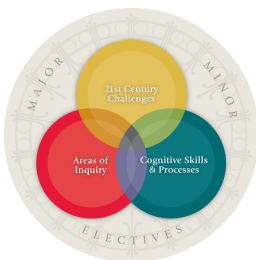
Taught in English. No prerequisites.

### Learning Goals

Learning Outcome Goals for the Course:

- Students will learn to 1) identify and assess critically the different ways in which different cultures and periods have understood the physical universe to be ordered, and the ways in which these cultures have understood this natural order to be linked to – or in more recent times, disconnected from – a moral order; 2) understand how the very idea of evidence-based proof is itself a modern idea, and one whose acceptance could seem absurd to brilliant minds of earlier periods; 3) demonstrate ways in which these problems have been worked out in key work of Western literature and through the use and development of particularly literary techniques. Additionally, students will learn to (4) develop arguments that are clearly structured, that provide evidence for their claims (not least when discussing the history of standards of evidence!), that engage with nuances of the issues at stake, and that do so in the simplest language possible.

Permanent Core Curriculum requirements



- AH [Arts & Humanities]
  - o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.
  - p. Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies.

### Credit in Environmental Studies

This course counts toward the Department of Geography's Minor in Environmental Studies. For more information see <http://geography.rutgers.edu/minor-in-environmental-studies>.

## Required Texts

Available from Rutgers University Store. These titles are indicated in **boldface** within the list of weekly readings below. All other titles are available online as pdf files at the *Resources* page of the course's Sakai website.

1. Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, tr. John Ciardi, intro. Archibald T. MacAllister (New York: Signet, 2009) [9780451531391]
2. John Milton, *Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*, intro. Susanne Woods (New York: Signet, 2010) [9780451531643]
3. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004) [9780743487580]
4. Georg Büchner, *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings*, tr. John Reddick (New York: Penguin, 1993) [9780140445862]
5. Susan A. Clancy, *Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 2007) [9780674024014]

In order for us to discuss the weekly readings (both those available in book version, and those available as pdf-files), *each seminar participant is required to bring his or her copy of the assigned reading(s) to class in order to receive full credit for attendance* (see "Attendance" below). Unless you can both reliably and quickly navigate to the relevant page on an electronic device that you bring to class (and, ideally, have a mark-up feature as well to highlight specific passages or add marginal notes), you will need to print each pdf-file out and bring it in hard copy. In either case, be sure to buy and/or download (and print) all available readings early on, when you still have time to resolve any technical issues that might otherwise prevent your arriving prepared for a particular class.

## Course Website

The website for this course "2016-09 Big Bang: Lit of Chaos & Order" appears at <https://sakai.rutgers.edu>. You will need to access the site regularly: to download texts that are not included in the books required for purchase; to participate in the class online discussions; to submit take-home exams and papers; to consult the online grade book to see how you are doing at any point during the semester; to e-mail or chat with other students in the course; to download a fresh copy of the syllabus; to check assignment deadlines; to see what books are available on reserve for the course at Alexander Library; and to check for any announcements that you may no longer have in your inbox. If you have suggestions about how to make the site better, please let me know.

## Final Grade

Discussion-board posts & responses	20%
Take-home exam 1 (8 pp.)	40%
Take-home exam 2 (8 pp.)	40%

## Grade Distribution

A=90-100%; B+=85-89; B=80-84; C+=75-79; C=70-74; D=65-69; F=64 and below.

## Attendance

All students must attend regularly and arrive prepared; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Those who miss more than two class sessions without a compelling excuse should expect a one-step reduction in the course grade (i.e. an A becomes a B+, a B+ becomes a B). Every additional three absences may entail a further one-step grade-reduction.

Three late arrivals count as one absence. Note: It is the responsibility of students who have been absent (for any reason) to find out what they have missed and obtain materials that may have been handed out.

### **Academic Integrity**

Violations of academic integrity are an extremely serious matter, and can lead to a student's failing the course and being referred to the University's Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action. When referring to ideas other than your own, always acknowledge your sources clearly and completely, whether you are quoting or paraphrasing. Note also that use of online translation services is not permitted as a tool for generating work that you submit for course credit. Please see the University's policies on academic integrity at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>, and discuss with your instructor any questions you may have about this and related issues.

### **Assignments**

- 1) Weekly Discussion-Board Posts and Responses (See the instructions at the Sakai "Discussion and Private Messages" page for additional details.)

You will be required to participate in a weekly online discussion board in order to put in writing some thoughts about that week's assigned reading(s). This is not intended to be busy-work, but rather to provide you a few concrete benefits: 1) Since examples of the questions for the take-home exams will be posted toward the beginning of semester, you can use the discussion board to formulate and refine your ideas for these larger assignments early on and with the help of your peers. If you do this, a good portion of your work for each take-home will already be done before you start writing it. 2) Writing your thoughts down is generally the best way to clarify them – and to clarify as well any particular points that you may not understand. Doing some of this work before class will tend to make class discussion itself much more productive for you and for the rest of us. 3) With the attention they're bringing to bear on the same readings, and with their own backgrounds in reading and thinking about related questions, your peers are in a position to bring a rich and productive range of responses to your thoughts, and you stand to benefit from this. 4) If you carefully follow instructions for the class online discussion, this component of the course can be a fairly straightforward way to boost your overall grade. 5) Research, in literature and philosophy as in other fields, is driven by collaboration. Taking this course involves participating in and learning from this kind of joint effort.

Posts and responses need to be submitted via the course Sakai page under "Discussion and Private Messages." Be sure to read the full instructions for these assignments during the first week of classes at that site and let me know right away of any questions you may have. The basics:

- To receive full credit for a week's online discussion, you will need to post 150-250 words about the week's assigned reading by Monday at 12:00 noon, *and* respond to two other posts by Thursday 11:55pm. (A posting without a follow-up response to two other posts can earn you a maximum of 5 of the 10 points for the week's assignment.)
- Discussion forums are open for 12 weeks of the semester. Your lowest two grades will be dropped. This means that if for some reason you don't participate during a couple of weeks, this won't necessarily affect your grade. I encourage you to participate from the start, however, so that you have a buffer if and when you are sick, or forgetful, or need the extra time. Given the collaborative structure of the assignment, students who fail to participate during a particular week *for any reason* will not be able to make this work up after its original due dates.
- Both your posting and your responses need to engage analytically with the assigned readings. See the instructions at the Sakai "Discussion and Private Messages" page for more detail about my expectations.

## 2) Take-home exams (and papers)

Take-home exams and papers (see below for the latter option) should be submitted as a single PDF file via the course Sakai page under “Assignments.” Each take-home exam will ask you to write essays in response to questions about the assigned readings. Questions may ask you to consider an issue in relation to a single text, or they may ask you instead to compare its significance within two or more readings. Format: 12-point Times or Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1” margins. Length: see above under “Final Grade.”

Your exam essays should not simply repeat back what we’ve already discussed: they should follow the lead of the exam questions in building independently on our discussions. On the other hand, they should also not ignore the material we’ve covered in class. During lecture I will focus us on specific passages that help bring into relief such issues as those that you will be called on to discuss in your exam essays. **Take notes!** You are urged **always to note down these passages – as well as the questions covered in lecture and discussion – to save yourself time on exams and to help yourself respond to the exam questions effectively.**

Prepare your exam essays as you would any paper. Once you’ve thought about the question, work out your thesis statement (which you’ll need to present clearly in a sentence in the opening paragraph of your response). Go back over your class notes and the relevant assigned text(s) to collect material for your argument. Cite or paraphrase relevant passages (and *always* include page numbers, as you would in a paper). Check your quotations for accuracy. Don’t quote just for the sake of quoting; cite just the word or passage that you need to make your specific point, not more. **Note that every assertion you make about a text needs to be supported with evidence from it, and each citation must include the page number(s) from the source text.**

Finally, be sure to proofread your essays to make sure that they’re coherent, that they answer all aspects of the question, and that they’re articulated grammatically and clearly. Poorly written essays will lose points.

Unlike the online discussions for this course, your essays are not collaborative. You are encouraged to build on the ideas you developed collaboratively in the course of weekly online class discussions; and if you wish to use others’ ideas, whether these be suggestions made by another student in the course’s online forum, or arguments developed in an article or book, you may do so as long as you reference them fully, whether in a footnote or in a parenthetical insertion. For instance, you might note: “As observed by Jane Doe in her response to my 9/29 posting, this idea may seem problematic because of [XYZ]. On the other hand...” (Rule of thumb: whatever particular format you use, I as a reader must be able to find easily and quickly the specific words, phrases, or arguments to which you’re referring. Always include page numbers where these are available.) However, the work of planning your argument, organizing material, and writing out your analysis should be yours alone. If you have questions about this or about any matters relating to *academic integrity* (see also the section with this heading above), be sure to let me know in advance, not *after* submitting your assignment.

**Paper option:** Students who have received an A on a take-home assignment have the option of writing a paper of their own in place of the following take-home exam, *but only after receiving my approval for their proposed topic*. If you are eligible and interested, contact me about this option at least two weeks before the next submission deadline, so that we still have time to discuss your topic and its feasibility before you get down to writing. Papers should focus on one or more assigned readings not covered in the previous take-home(s). All other expectations (for instance regarding length and format, or presenting a thesis and supporting it with a clear argument and judicious citations) are the same as those outlined above with regard to take-home exams.

### **Electronic devices in class**

Use of electronic devices in class other than for study of the class topic (e.g. taking notes or consulting an assigned text in pdf form) is strictly forbidden. Those seen using such devices for other purposes will be asked to leave immediately. Their dismissal will count as an absence and may result in a lowering of their overall grade.

## Weekly assignments

(Texts must be read in advance and brought to class on the dates assigned.)

### Sept. 7 Introduction

### Sept. 12 The Book of Nature

- “Book of Nature” [pdf at Sakai Resources page]: short selections from the Bible, Plato, Origen, St. Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Konrad von Meigenberg, Edward Topsell, Thomas Browne.

### Sept. 14 Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)

- *Inferno* (from the *Divine Comedy*), Cantos 1-7, 11-13.

### Sept. 19 Dante

- *Inferno*, Cantos 18-21, 30-34.
- *Paradiso*, Canto 33.

### Sept. 21 Dante; Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)

- Galileo, “The Shape of Dante’s Hell,” *Dante: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Caesar (London: Routledge, 1989) 301-3.
- Galileo, from *The Assayer*, in: *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, tr. and ed. Stillman Drake (Garden City [NY]: Doubleday, 1957) 237-38.
- Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, tr. Stillman Drake (New York: Modern Library, 2001) 1-7, 123-49.

### Sept. 26 Galileo – continued; Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

- Bacon, Francis. Chapter II from “Of the Advancement of Learning,” Book III, *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Edited by James Spedding. Vol. 4. 14 vols. (London: Longmans, 1858) 340-43.

### Sept. 28 John Milton (1608-1674)

- Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I; Argument to Book II.

### Oct. 3 Milton

- Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books III and IV; Arguments to Books V and VI.

### Oct. 5 Milton

- Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books VII and VIII; Arguments to Books IX-XI; Book XII: Argument and lines 466-649.

### Oct. 10 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716); Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

- Leibniz, “The Theodicy: Abridgement,” *Selections*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Scribner, 1951) 509-22.
- Pope, “An Essay on Man,” *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) Epistles I & II, 501-25.

### Oct. 12 Voltaire ([François-Marie Arouet] 1694-1778); Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

- Voltaire, “The Lisbon Earthquake,” *The Portable Voltaire*, ed. Ben Ray Redman (New York: Penguin, 1977) 556-69.
- Goethe, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth (Goethe’s Collected Works*, vol. 4), tr. Robert R. Heitner, ed. Thomas P. Saine and Jeffrey L. Sammons (New York: Suhrkamp, 1987) 34-36.

### Oct. 17 Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811)

- Kleist, *Earthquake in Chile*, tr. Michael Hamburger, in *German Romantic Novellas (The German Library*, vol. 34), ed. Frank g. Ryder and Robert M. Browning (New York: Continuum, 1985) 122-35.

**Oct. 19 Kleist**

- Kleist, *Earthquake in Chile*.

**Friday, Oct. 21: Take-home 1 due via Sakai**  
**“Assignments” page.**

**Oct. 24 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851)**

- *Frankenstein*

**Oct. 26 Shelley**

- *Frankenstein*

**Oct. 31 Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)**

- Leopardi, “History of the Human Race”; “Copernicus”: *The Moral Essays - Operette Morali*, trans. Patrick Creagh (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 33-45, 189-99.

**Nov. 2 Georg Büchner (1813-1837)**

- Büchner, *Danton’s Death: Complete Plays*, 1-73.

**Nov. 7 Büchner**

- Büchner, *Danton’s Death*

**Nov. 9 Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)**

- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality. The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) 390-435.

**Nov. 14 Nietzsche**

- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

**Nov. 16 Nietzsche**

- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

**Nov. 21 Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)**

- Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, tr. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1999) 10-112.

**Nov. 28 Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)**

- Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

**Nov. 30 Freud**

- Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*
- Freud, “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis,” *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol. 17, tr. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1964) 136-44.

**Dec. 5 Freud; Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)**

- Beckett, *Endgame*

**Dec. 7 Beckett; Italo Calvino (1923-1985)**

- Beckett, *Endgame*
- Calvino, “A Sign in Space,” in: *Cosmicomics*, tr. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968) 31-39.

**Dec. 12 Susan A. Clancy ( )**

- *Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens*

**Dec. 14 Clancy**

- *Abducted*
- Hutson, Matthew. “In Defense of Superstition.” *The New York Times* April 8 2012, sec. Sunday Review - The Opinion Pages: SR5.

**Friday, Dec. 16: Take-home 2 due via Sakai**  
**“Assignments” page.**

## **Student-Wellness Services:**

### **Just In Case Web App**

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

### **Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)**

**(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ [www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/](http://www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/)**

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

### **Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)**

**(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / [www.vpva.rutgers.edu/](http://www.vpva.rutgers.edu/)**

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

### **Disability Services**

**(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

### **Scarlet Listeners**

**(732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/>**

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.