

## **HUSL 6355.001 Epic and Evolution Fall 2015**

**Frederick Turner**

**Tuesdays 10:00 am-12:45 pm JO 4.708**

**Office: JO 5.522 Office Hours Tuesdays, 4-6 pm**

**Email [frederick.turner@gmail.com](mailto:frederick.turner@gmail.com) Phone (emergencies) 214-213-8581**

There has been a wave of new knowledge about the human being, its mind, brain, nervous system, and body, its neurochemistry and neuroanatomy, its biological evolution, its ability to adapt to the world and reproduce what it learns both biologically and culturally, the developmental stages of its technological and scientific understanding, the elaboration of its moral systems, and the resulting emergence of cultures and civilizations. This knowledge in turn provides the humanistic and literary scholar with a wealth of new interpretative tools. These tools can be both useful and dangerous, but they offer perspectives that many believe to be the future of the humanities.

What is especially striking is that these ways of looking at the human being have in fact been pioneered already by the great sages who composed the world's epics, its grand narratives. Epic is now established as a culturally universal genre, with commonalities all over the globe and throughout humanity's seven thousand years of recorded history, with archeological hints of the epic stories that go much further back in time as well. Epic looks now as if it is humanity's traditional account of its own evolution, told from the inside and using the techniques of fiction, allegory, and metaphor to deliver its meaning.

This class will explore some of the great stories of the world using these new perspectives.

### **Schedule and Assignments**

**Week1** Introduction

**Week 2** The theoretical issues. **READ:** Cosmides and Tooby selection in course book, and Turner: Introduction: "The Monster that Won't Stay Dead" in *Epic: Form, Content, and History*. **QUIZ**

**Week 3** The epic storyteller. **READ:** *Gilgamesh*, Boyd selection in course book, and Turner Chapter 1: "The Epic Storyteller." **QUIZ**

**Week 3** The creation myth. **READ:** The Book of Genesis, Seddon selection in course book, and Turner Chapter 2: "The Creation Myth." **QUIZ**

**Week 4** The Hero. **READ:** *Njal's Saga*, and Turner Chapter 3: "The Hero." **QUIZ**

**Week 5** The Quest. **READ:** *The Odyssey*, Nicolson selections in course book, and Turner Chapter 4: "The Quest." **QUIZ**

**Week 6** Kinship Troubles. **READ:** *The Mwindo Epic*, Fox selection in course book, and Turner Chapter 5: "Kinship Troubles." **QUIZ**

**Week 7** Natural Man and the Fall. **READ:** *Monkey*, and Turner Chapter 6: "Natural Man and the Fall." **REREAD:** *Gilgamesh*, Genesis, Cosmides and Tooby. **QUIZ**

**Week 8** The Descent into the Underworld. **READ:** *The Popol Vuh*, and Turner Chapter 7: "The Descent into the Underworld." **REREAD:** *Gilgamesh*, *Odyssey*, *Mwindo*. **QUIZ**

**Week 9** The Founding of the City. **READ:** *The Mahabharata*, selection from Moore in course book, and Turner Chapter 8: "The Founding of the City." **REREAD:** *Gilgamesh*, *Njal's Saga*, *The Odyssey*, Genesis. **QUIZ**

**Week 10** Nonzerosumness. **READ:** Wright, *Nonzero*. **QUIZ**

**Week 11** The History of the People. **READ:** *The Heike*, and Turner Chapter 9: "The History of the People." **REREAD:** historical sections in all the epics we have read so far. **QUIZ**

**Week 12** Setting an Example. **READ:** Turner, Chapter 10: "Setting an Example." **REREAD:** *The Odyssey*, Genesis, *Njal's Saga*, *The Mahabharata*. **QUIZ**

**Week 13** A New Medium of Communication. **READ:** Lord selection in course book, Turner, Chapter 11: "A New Medium of Communication." **QUIZ**

**Week 14** Epic Form and Epic Content. **READ:** Turner, Chapter 12: "Epic Form and Epic Content."

### **TERM PAPER DUE**

**Week 15** The place of epic studies in the future of the Humanities. Discussion of papers and concluding remarks.

### Term Paper

The paper should discuss at least three of the epics on the syllabus. Select a topic area that connects epic in general with the nature of the human species and its history. Compose your own title and send me by email a short proposal by WEEK 13 (preferably before). On getting my approval, write an essay that proposes a thesis and defends it using evidence from the texts, both primary and secondary. The paper should be 3,000-4,000 words long, Chicago style, due on WEEK 14.

### Class Format

Most of the course will be conducted in the form of a Socratic seminar. After the quiz, which will demand a short open-book essay of about one page on the reading for the week, the quiz question and other questions will be put up for discussion, so you will have a chance to present orally and defend your quiz answer. I will explain the simple rules of the seminar format: essentially I will keep a queue of those who wish to speak and call on each in turn; the queue will also serve me as a reminder of who have been contributing to the discussion. The aim is for a collegial and friendly exploration together of exciting and important works and ideas.

### Grades

Grades will be based 1/3 on the average grade for the regular quizzes on the readings, 1/3 on class discussion participation, and 1/3 on the term paper. More than three missed quizzes will result in an F for the quiz portion of the final grade. Obviously this means that regular attendance and punctuality are essential.

### Textbooks

#### Required:

*The Popol Vuh* (Dennis Tedlock trans., Touchstone)  
Homer: *The Odyssey* (Robert Fitzgerald trans., Farrar, Straus)  
*The New Oxford Bible* **Book of Genesis only**  
*Monkey: Folk Novel of China* (Arthur Waley trans., Evergreen, Grove Weidenfeld)  
*The Gilgamesh Epic* (Stephen Mitchell trans., Atria Books)  
*The Mahabharata* (William Buck trans., U. of California Press)  
*Njal's Saga* (Robert Cook trans., Penguin)  
*The Heike* (Helen McCullough trans., Stanford UP)  
*The Mwindo Epic* from the Banyanga (Daniel Biebuyck trans., U. of California Press)  
Frederick Turner: *Epic: Form, Content, and History*, Transaction  
Robert Wright: *Nonzero*, Vintage

#### Recommended (required course book selections in boldface):

Brian Boyd: *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, Belknap **19-79**  
Leda Cosmides and John Tooby: *The Adapted Mind*, Oxford **24-123**  
Christopher Seddon: *Humans: From the Beginning*, Glanville Pub. **121-196**  
Robin Fox: *The Tribal Imagination*, **Harvard 319-358**  
Adam Nicolson: *Why Homer Matters*, Holt **7-39, 244-246**  
Albert Lord: *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard **13-45, 99-112**  
David Moore: *The Developing Genome: An Introduction to Behavioral Epigenetics*, Oxford **5-43**  
Jonathan Gottschall: *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Mariner  
Kim Stanley Robinson: *Shaman*, Orbit

### UTD Regulations:

Please consult <<http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/studentconduct.html>>