GUIDELINES

The first and most important requirement

Reread the guidelines for Paper #1. Everything still applies! Reread the feedback you received from me on Paper #1. It is very important that you respond to all the suggestions there in honing your writing strategies for this second paper.

Because of the importance of using these two sources of guidance carefully, you are required to attach a statement to the front of your paper when handing it in. Papers without this statement will not be accepted as on time. In this statement, summarize how the structure and methods of this second paper respond to the feedback on Paper #1, to the examples of student papers discussed in class, and to your growing understanding of the paper guidelines given out for Paper #1.

A comparative assignment, but with a difference

The assigned topic for this paper is to develop some interesting interpretative arguments by bringing together passages from Lucretius and either Empedocles or Heraclitus.

You may modify this assignment, and write a paper on only one of these authors, only if you meet with me in my office to discuss a 500-word draft, at a point in your writing process when you won’t mind redirecting your efforts into the assigned topic, if I ask you to.

As opposed to the comparative topic most commonly chosen for the first paper (the influence of the Ionians on Parmenides), please do not approach this topic with the assumption of direct Presocratic influence on Lucretius. (In lecture, I will present some important points of Empedoclean influence, which you may use if they are useful in an argument—the point is not that influence doesn’t exist, but rather that you should make an argument whose interest and insight hold up whether there was any influence or not.) Think about it this way. Suppose Heraclitus and Empedocles wrote in Classical Chinese, and that Lucretius had no way of knowing their ideas. Since Heraclitus and Empedocles (like Lucretius) have powerfully imaginative ways of writing and presenting their ideas about physical reality, and philosophical insights they believe carry deep implications for the meaning and direction of human life, it would still be very interesting to analyze Lucretius in relation to those Chinese writers.

The nature of this topic means that, potentially, you may accomplish some very original work simply by choosing which passages from the different authors (or for that matter from within the work of a single author) you are going to consider together. But, as the sign on I-70 tells you when you are about to descend from the Rockies to the plains, “Truckers, don’t be fooled!” The originality of your collocations does not in any way relieve you of the duty to use the texts as the starting point for an interpretative argument. You will be judged on your reasoning and insight in choosing what to say about the texts. If you don’t understand why “Lucretius and Heraclitus both talk about X,” followed by quotations from both authors, is NOT an argument, reread the Paper #1 Guidelines!
Don’t get obsessed with the gods; Don’t pretend to be an expert about the Greeks/Romans

In *On the Nature of Things* (1.101), we read, “Such heinous acts could superstition prompt!” If Lucretius were looking into the future, he could have been referring to the tendency of student papers to base their arguments on easy and unsubtle ideas of the supposedly sweeping religious significance and authority of the Greco-Roman gods. This has led to some pretty “heinous” papers. My experience has taught me that student assumptions about the gods, and ancient belief in the gods, are rarely accurate and relevant enough to make a solid contribution to an argument. Simply avoid the subject unless you’re really sure that you’re engaged in an original interpretation of the specific ideas about the gods expressed by your author.

This is really just a specific case of a more general danger: the seductive temptation to engage in sweeping generalizations that begin “The Greeks…” or “The Romans…” It is almost guaranteed that the following words will be an oversimplified or wrong assumption that will weaken rather than strengthen the argument. Remember, the joy of studying the Classics through the primary texts is that we don’t have to generalize—we can understand and interpret the actual Greek or Roman author under discussion! Never assume anything is important or true for that author without demonstrating it on the basis of the text itself. (Likewise, never make easy assumptions about what “the Greeks” or “the Romans” would have thought about the text.)

Due date, (No) late papers, Formatting

The paper is due on Wednesday, May 24, in class at 9:35 a.m. Length and formatting are the same as for Paper #1.

The syllabus made plain that, “Any arrangements for missed work must be agreed to in advance.” I will normally not make such arrangements unless the reason you are presenting in advance is a very good one (usually a disabling medical condition), and also well-documented. Late papers may be accepted (or not accepted) at my discretion. Assume at least a 10% grade penalty per day, and please assume that whatever reason has caused your paper to be late will not impress me as a very good one. In the life for which college is preparing you for, no one really cares why your work and responsibilities do or don’t get done. I hear that the #1 reason for which otherwise able and intelligent employees get fired is for simply not meeting their responsibilities reliably.

Grading and Feedback

For the first paper, you got copious feedback that tried to identify points where improvement was possible towards the kind of writing we are learning in this course. For the second paper, I will assume that you no longer need all that repetition and application of what is already there in the Paper #1 Guidelines. I will give each paper specific marks on such (increasingly meaningful, I hope) points as: Good thesis (ambitious, supportable, interesting, creates burden of argument, etc.); handling of each point (emphasis on argument and interpretation); use of quotes; avoidance of summary and generalization; interesting and original ideas; persuasive, well-supported, solidly argued; attention to Paper #1 feedback; basic grammar and editing; higher-level use of language (clarity of content and structure); formatting (reference citations, word count, etc.); etc.