

REL 480.001/PSC 424.004 – Faith, Anxiety, and Redemption

[Last revised: 16 January 2021]



*Angelus Novus*

(Paul Klee, 1920; image via Wikimedia)

*A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History")*

*Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. (Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia)*

Instructor

Daniel Levine, Associate Professor, Departments of Political Science and Religious Studies Email: [djlevine@ua.edu](mailto:djlevine@ua.edu)

Class Meetings

*When:* Mondays, 3:30-5:50 pm

*Where:* via Zoom (details here and on Blackboard Learn):

- **Note:** As public-health developments allow, I will consider an optional – and appropriately distanced – in person component to the course for students who are interested in this. We can discuss this on the first day of class.

### Office Hours

*When:* Wednesdays, 2:30-3:30pm and Thursday, 4:00-5:00pm; or by appointment (contact me by email) *Where:* via Zoom, contact details:

- *Web:* <https://uasystem.zoom.us/j/97517211193?pwd=aEU0c2FLRE1QL2l5TzhkQWxiQWxlQT09>  
Password: 911334
- *phone:* Dial +1 646 558 8656 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 669 900 6833 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 346 248 7799. Enter meeting ID# (975 1721 1193) and password 911334.

### Student Learning Outcomes

Students enrolled in this course will be expected to:

- *Read and analyze* conceptually challenging conceptual, theoretical, and/or speculative texts with an eye to their key arguments;
- *Relate those texts to one another* in terms of agreement or disagreement, whether in conversation (discussion), in formal academic writing (papers), or in timed expository writing (exams);
- *Reflect* on the key themes of this course – anxiety, fear, politics, etc. – with specific reference to their own beliefs and experiences, and in light of contemporary events;
- *Formulate and sustain* original oral and written arguments based on these reflections.

### Note on Expectations and Format

This is an advanced undergraduate seminar tied to an ongoing research project. This means two things:

1. Students will be expected to read carefully, and to prepare for and participate in class consistently. The readings are intended to be challenging and open-ended; while not especially long, they may require more consistent and mindful attention than in other courses. You are *not* expected to understand them entirely on the first (or second) attempt. You *are* expected to address yourself to them with seriousness; to do your best; and to ask the best questions of them you can. You should also expect to write, and revise, a great deal.
2. Second, more than in most classes, what you get out of the class will be determined by what you put in. Our readings will follow our discussions, and the syllabus may change. You'll be expected to 'roll' with that. There will be less 'spoon feeding' than you may be accustomed to, and less rote learning: more thinking new thoughts, more discussion, more argumentation.

### How I will communicate with you:

- *Course announcements, date changes and other general information* will be emailed and posted on BB-L – look for the prefix 202110-REL-480-001 in the subject line & remember to check your 'spam' filter.
- *Individual emails* will be sent from my UA e-mail account ([djlevine@ua.edu](mailto:djlevine@ua.edu) or [daniel.j.levine@ua.edu](mailto:daniel.j.levine@ua.edu))

### How to communicate with me:

- By email, preferably from your UA/crimson account and with an identifying subject line (eg: 'REL 480').
- At office hours – no appointment needed! Come one and all.
- By appointment – if/as needed, especially if your schedule prevents you from attending regular office hours. Send an email, or ask after class.

### Books and Course materials

The following books have been ordered via the Supply Store. That said, cheaper and/or free alternatives exist. I have provided ISBN numbers to make online purchasing easier, and links to these on BB-L.

- Anne Washburn, *Mr. Burns and Other Plays* (Theatre Communications Group, 2017), isbn 9781559364812 (\*\*note: cheaper copies on Amazon)
- Caron Gentry: *This American Moment* (Oxford University Press, 2018), isbn 9780190901264 (\*\*note: *much* cheaper copies on Amazon! Also, an electronic copy is available for free via UA Libraries (w/your 'myBama' info).
- Rowan Williams: *The Tragic Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2017), isbn 9780198736417
- *The Simpsons*, Season 5, episode 2: "Cape Feare" (1993). *You'll need to have seen this for the Washburn play to make sense; we'll refer back to it often. **How to obtain a copy:** If you subscribe to Disney+ or Hulu, it is available on-demand. If not, you may purchase the single episode for \$1.99 on Amazon, Apple, GooglePlay or Vudu.*

### Grading and Assessment

#### *Participation and Attendance (20%)*

As noted, consistent preparation and participation is expected; *merely being present does not suffice*. You will find it difficult to hide among your peers, and you should expect to be called upon from time to time.

Assigned readings should be completed by the date indicated. Please have your copies of the texts ready to hand when we discuss them, as well as any notes you have taken.

As we meet only once a week, habitual absences will make it difficult to do well.

#### *'Clapbacks' (4 x 5% each = 20%)*

I have selected readings that are, I hope, both challenging and interesting. That's the 'carrot'. Here's the stick: each of you will be responsible for preparing a one-page 'clapback' – ie, a set of written responses to the texts you are reading. Instructions on how to upload these will follow. I have assigned six of these, and will drop the two lowest grades (or you may skip two). ***They are due at the start of class on 2/1, 2/8, 2/15, 2/22, 3/22, and 3/29.***

The format of these 'clapbacks' is essentially up to you. You may wish to summarize the arguments of the text, and then critique them. You may wish to pose a set of questions that follow from them. You may wish to ask a series of direct questions, from the straightforward ("I don't understand; what is the author trying to say here?" "Why is this written in such an odd, jargon-filled way?") to the more speculative: ("I think the text is arguing X, and if so, what follows is Y"). If you choose a week in which there is more than one reading, you can pick one to focus on, or try to read them 'against' one another.

While not formal essays, these should be written using correct grammar/spelling, in a 'voice'

appropriate to university scholarship, and should be clearly focused around a coherent thought or set of

thoughts. They should not be much longer than a typewritten page (roughly, 250 words). Each will be graded on a 5-point scale. I will provide comments and feedback.

The purpose of the 'clapbacks' is to help you gather your thoughts, impressions, or questions – so that you arrive to class prepared to discuss the text in the most productive way. For this reason, I will not accept late work, save in the context of a documented medical or personal emergency.

#### *Papers (20%)*

You will each submit two short (4-6 pp.) papers based on in-class readings; these will be returned to you with close comments. You will be required to revise the papers and resubmit them. If the paper is significantly improved, your grade will be revised upwards. If you fail to turn in a resubmission for one or both your papers, I will reduce the grade assessed by *one full letter* at the end of the semester.

This is a large public university, and each of you will bring different strengths and weaknesses with you. Students who have problems with the technical aspects of writing – sentence mechanics, syntax and grammar, organizing ideas around a thesis, etc. – will be expected to address themselves to these, and to show improvement. Students who evince mastery of these skills early on will be pointed to additional texts or alternative arguments. My aim is to meet you where you are, and to help you progress. I will upload a rubric to give you a sense of how the papers will be graded.

#### Dates of paper assignments:

- First paper topics distributed: 3/3
- First paper due: 3/10
- Revisions due: 3/19.
  
- Second paper topics distributed: 3/24
- Second paper due: 3/31
- Revisions due: 4/9

If you find you are struggling, please feel free to come see me in office hours. I'd also strongly recommend that you avail yourself of the services offered by the Writing Center, Lloyd Hall Room 322 (for directions and setting up appointments, <https://writingcenter.ua.edu/>). *An extra set of eyes never hurts.*

#### *Written Final (20%)*

There will be a written final, based on the substantive topics of the course. This will take the form of an open-ended essay test, in which you have a choice among a number of questions. Questions will be pre-circulated, and you can use books and notes. While each of you must turn in your own work, you are welcome to 'brainstorm' with one another as you write up your answers.

#### *How your Final Grade Will be Calculated:*

Attendance/Participation 20%

'Clapbacks' 20% (5% each x 4)

Paper 1 20%

Paper 2 20%

Final 20%  
Total 100%

4  
REL480/Spring21/16Jan21

Grading scale

A+ 99-100%	B+ 87-<90%	C+ 77-<80%	D+ 67-<70%
A 93-<99%	B 83-<87%	C 73-<77%	D 63-<67%
A- 90-<93	B- 80-<83%	C- 70-<73%	D- 60-<63%
			F 0-<60%

*There will be no rounding.*

Changes

Every effort will be made to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as stated here. That said, I reserve the right to change and/or amend these guidelines. In such cases, I will communicate with you via email and/or Blackboard Learn, and will provide reasonable accommodations, as needed.

Schedule of Readings and Discussions

1/18. Welcome!

Class dismissed for MLK Day. Please watch intro video, and come prepared to discuss the readings and video assigned for 1/25.

1/25. Shock and Awe

“Cape Feare” (episode 2 from Season 5 of *The Simpsons*, as noted above).

Washburn, *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*, Act I, pp. 125-157. (Order online or purchase; or on UA Box for this week only).

2/1. Contingency, Fear, and Faith

Paul Tillich: “‘Kairos’ and ‘Kairoi’.” In *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III (Chicago, 1963), pp. 369-72. (UA Box)

Reinhold Niebuhr: “Why the Christian Church is not Pacifist.” In *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses* (Yale, 1986), pp. 102-119. (UA Box)

Yishayahu Leibovitch: “After Kibiya.” In *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* (Harvard, 1992), pp. 185-90. (UA Box)

2/8. Thinking about Feeling: Fear vs. Anxiety

Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Christiani: *What is the History of Emotions?* (Polity, 2018), pp. 26- 62. (UA Box)

Genesis 22:1-19 (UA Box, or use your own copy if you prefer)

Søren Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge, 2006), 7-20. (UA Box)

5

REL480/Spring21/16Jan21

### 2/15. Regimes/Communities of Fear (1): Security

Orit Rozin: "Infiltration and the Making of Israel's Emotional Regime in the State's Early Years." *Middle East Studies* 52:3 (2016), 448-72. (UA Box)

Vassili Grossman: *Life and Fate* (NYRB Books, 2006), 80-93. (UA Box)

### 2/22. Regimes/Communities of Fear (2): After Auschwitz and Hiroshima

Judith Shklar: "The Liberalism of Fear." In Nancy L. Rosenbaum (ed.): *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Harvard, 1989), 21-39. (UA Box)

Herman Kahn: "In Defense of Thinking," here *infra The Essential Herman Kahn* (Lexington, 2009), 9-25. (UA Box)

Hans J. Morgenthau: "Death in the Nuclear Age." *Commentary* (September, 1961), 231-4. (UA Box)

### 3/1. Regimes of Fear (4): Traumatic Communities

Emma Hutchison: *Affective Communities in World Politics* (Cambridge, 2016), 33-71. (UA Box)

Eli Zaretsky: "Trauma and Dereification: September 11 and the Problem of Ontological Security." *Constellations* 9:1 (2000), 98-105. (UA Box)

Darryl Worley: "Have you Forgotten?" (SKG Music, 2003); watch/listen on Youtube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6yLQRF-cEU>

### 3/8. Regimes of Fear (5): Narrating New Beginnings

Anne Washburn, *Mr Burns*, Acts II & III, 159-end. (Supe Store/Amazon)

### 3/15. Classes dismissed

3/22. Faith, Anxiety, Politics (1)

Caron Gentry: *This American Moment: A Feminist Realist Christian Intervention* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 1-61. (Supe Store/Amazon/UA Libraries)

3/29. Faith, Anxiety, Politics (2)

6

REL480/Spring21/16Jan21

Gentry, *This American Moment*, 116-141 (Supe Store/Amazon/UA Libraries)

4/5. Tragedy and the Political

Sophocles: *Antigone*. (More details to follow as regards this reading.)

4/12. Can Faith be Tragic? (1)

George Steiner: "A Note on Absolute Tragedy." *Literature and Theology* 4:2 (1990), 147-156. Rowan Williams: *The Tragic Imagination* (Oxford, 2016), 82-107.

4/19. Can Faith be Tragic? (2)

Williams, *Tragic Imagination*, 108-36

Gentry, *This American Moment*, 142-50

Course and University Policies

*COVID-19 Health and Safety Information*

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan.

*Disability Accommodations*

This course is intended to be inclusive for all University of Alabama students. If you have any kind of disability – emotional, physical, cognitive, or learning-related, whether apparent or otherwise – and you need accommodations for or alternatives to discussions, assignments, or exams, please feel free to

contact me. Accommodations may also be made for those whose financial, legal, medical, or family situations (*inter alia*) compromise their ability to engage fully with the course. If you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course you are invited, but not required, to contact me to discuss your specific needs. In order to maintain equity, certain accommodations (including, but not limited to, extensions and alternative assignments) may be extended classwide.

As well, I encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Services (1000 Houser Hall; [205 348-4285](tel:205-348-4285) Voice; [205-348-3081](tel:205-348-3081) TTY; [ods@ua.edu](mailto:ods@ua.edu)). If you have a diagnosis, ODS can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan for *all* of your classes without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors. Accommodations will be provided upon request and individually tailored, given the remote learning instructional method and the flexibility this entails. University policy

7

REL480/Spring21/16Jan21

on this matter may be obtained via the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#), as detailed in the Online Catalog.

#### *Recording Class Sessions or Course Content*

Students may not record course content and/or post course content publicly, including on social media sites. Students who record and/or post course content without instructor approval may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

It is not presently my intention to record class sessions. If I determine that there is a need to do so, you will be notified before any recording takes place. In that event, you will have the option not to use your profile image and to disengage your camera. If you participate with your camera engaged, or display a profile image, it will be understood that you have agreed to have these recorded. Alternatively, it will be your responsibility to turn your camera off, and to remove your profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute their audio input during class and participate orally will be understood to have agreed to having their voices recorded. If you are not willing to be recorded, it will be your responsibility to keep your microphone on 'mute' and to confine your comments to the 'chat' feature.

Any/all pre- and live-recorded lectures, presentations, and class discussions are for viewing by students in this course and section only, for as long as they are enrolled. They may not be posted in any public forum or shared with anyone not enrolled in this class. Any student violating these rules may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.

#### *Statement on Academic Misconduct*

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) provided in the Online Catalog.

#### *Severe Weather Protocol*

Please see the latest [Severe Weather Guidelines](#) in the Online Catalog.

#### *UAct Statement*

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website ([www.ua.edu/uact](http://www.ua.edu/uact)) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.



### *Pregnant Student Accommodations*

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the [UAct website](#).

### *Religious Observances*

Students should notify me in writing/via email during the first 2-3 weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. I will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. Full policy at [Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines](#).