

# EXPERIENCE

HUM 599

*Spring 2015; Wednesdays, 1:30-4:20 pm*

D. Graham Burnett & Jeff Dolven  
History of Science / English  
Princeton University

**A** genealogy and a practicum. The course will explore the varieties of experience from Montaigne and Bacon to Dewey and Agamben, with attention to epistemology and aesthetics, science and religion; readings will guide a series of practical experiments in the transfiguration and/or instauration of knowledge, and of the classroom as a home for it. Our shared project will be to imagine how humanistic inquiry might hold itself open to the demands of a concept that refuses concepts.

Work for the course, beyond the shared space of the seminar room, will consist of weekly exercises in (initially) the recording and (eventually) the making of experience. Experiments in a variety of media, situations, temporalities are encouraged.

## **WEEK 1:**

### **Introductory and Organizational Meeting**

Michel de Montaigne, "On Experience" (1588)  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience" (1844)

## **WEEK 2:**

### **Experience and the Experimental Philosophy**

Francis Bacon, *New Organon* (1620) selection  
Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637) selection  
Daston, "Strange Facts, Plain Facts, and the Texture of Scientific Experience"  
Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 1 ("The Trial of Experience")

## **WEEK 3:**

### **The Conditions of Experiential Possibility**

Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) selection  
Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 2 ("Experience and Epistemology")

**WEEK 4:**

**The Feeling of (a) Thought**

Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) selection  
Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 4 (“Returning to the  
Body through Aesthetic Experience”)

**WEEK 5:**

**God-speak and the Heart’s Language**

Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured  
Despisers* (1799)  
William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)  
selection  
Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 3 (“The Appeal of  
Religious Experience”)

**WEEK 6:**

**Poetry and Experience**

William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794)  
William Wordsworth, “Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*” (1798)  
and *The Prelude* (1805) selection

MIDTERM

**WEEK 7:**

**Visitor**

Readings to be determined

**WEEK 8:**

**Wait, Start Again—from Here, Now, This...**

Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and  
Transcendental Phenomenology* (ca. 1937) selection  
William James, “A World of Pure Experience” (1904)  
Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896) selection

**WEEK 9:**

**Art**

John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934)  
Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 7 (“The Cult of  
Experience in American Pragmatism”)

**WEEK 10:**

**Language and Anguish**

Walter Benjamin, "Experience" (1913) and "Experience and Poverty" (1933)

Theodore Adorno, selection

Giorgio Agamben, "Infancy and History" (1978)

Hans Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics: An Interview with Carsten Dutt" (1993)

Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 8 ("Lamenting the Crisis of Experience")

**WEEK 11:**

**Ecstasis**

George Bataille, *Inner Experience* (1943)

Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression" (1963)

Michel Foucault, "How an Experience Book is Born" (1978)

Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*, chap. 8 ("The Poststructuralist Reconstruction of Experience")

**WEEK 12:**

**The Past: Experience/Experiment**

Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (2005)

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