Endings/Spring 06

Assignment: Essay 1

Due dates: Fri. April 21 – first draft for in-class peer review
Tue. April 25 – revised essay, along with first draft and peer comments

Length/format: Four to six pages, word-processed, double-spaced. The essay should have a title and should use a standard citation method, such as MLA, for citations. (Further explanation of citation will be given in class.)

Topic

The topic of this essay is to be the central question of how religious thinking and writing differ from scientific thinking and writing. The essay should address this central question through a comparison of religious/mythic treatments of the Flood story, specifically Genesis 7-9, and scientific accounts of the Black Sea flood (see below). For discussion of the ways-of-knowing aspect of this assignment, you may also want to draw on the course readings and lecture material that have dealt with them – the Langer essay, the Batto introduction, the Davis and Ward and Brownless readings.

Organization

Your essay should have the following sections:

1. **Introduction and thesis.** Often just a paragraph long, the introduction wants to get the reader thinking about the topic and then to state the central claim – often called a thesis – around which you are going to build your essay. You want a pretty clear statement of this claim by the end of your introduction. It is a kind of promise to the reader about what will follow. And then you want to be sure to fulfill the promise!

2. **Examination of religious/mythic accounts of a great Flood.** In this section you will analyze the Flood story in Genesis [as well as one other Flood story, such as the one in Gilgamesh or another document we’ve looked at] in the light of such questions as these: What kinds of causes do the writers give for what occurred? What kinds of effects do they describe? Are the writers trying to do more than just describe the facts of what happened? How concerned are they to show readers what they are basing their account on? Are they trying to make a point? What is the reader supposed to get out of these religious/mythic accounts of the Flood?

    *You should not simply answer these questions in a list, and you should certainly not just re-tell the story of Noah.* Remember that you are trying to develop a point about the nature of the writers’ thinking and writing.

In analyzing the thinking and writing in this scientific material, you want to first make sure you’ve got the basic information under control about the cause and effect of the Black Sea Flood according to these account -- and then you can ask many of the same questions suggested above for the religious/mythic material. What kinds of causes and effects are these scientists and science writers interested in? What data do they look at to determine just what happened and why? What basic assumptions or theories are their accounts built on? Are they trying to go beyond a description of facts to make a point? If so, what? What is the cause of the Black Sea Flood? What is the effect of the Black Sea Flood? What geological/climatological theories is the Black Sea Flood built on?

4. **Comparison of the religious/mythic thinking and writing and the scientific thinking and writing.** It is likely that some of the main points of similarity or difference will have emerged in the two previous sections, but here you should highlight and summarize the main similarities or differences, as you see them, between religious and scientific thinking and writing with regard to motive (the reason for which they are done), the kinds of information they are interested in, the kinds of causes and effect they concentrate on, and what kinds of appeal they rest their cases on – appeals to authority, to emotion, to logic, to evidence?

5. **Conclusion.** No matter what you may have been taught in the past, *this is not the place to simply re-state your thesis*. Yes, you want to look back over what you have been saying; you want to gather up your main ideas; but, again, you do not want simply to tell us what you have just told us. Instead, you want to offer some concluding reflection about it. You may even want to point to questions raised by your study (but beware of bringing up whole new topics that you’re not going to be staying around to discuss!).

6. **OPTIONAL: Assessment of a work that claims to bridge the two ways of knowing.** For this section, you will base yourself on Isaac Newton Vail’s *The Misread Record or The Deluge and Its Cause* (1921 reprint). It is a short work (84 pages), but given that he was a firm believer in “Spelling Reform” (no, really, check out [http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/spell/histsp.html](http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/spell/histsp.html)), he uses words like “thot” (thought) throughout his writing which makes it a bit difficult to decipher.
Concentrate on pp 7-15 and pp. 37-57 (though Professor Vail does make an ardent case for multiculturalism on pp. 24-37 that you may find truly mind-bending).

Does Vail’s writing resemble the writing in the Bible, or in the abstracts found at the GSA conference site? Give an example from his writing and from the other source to justify your claim. Make the assessment: is Vail’s work a religious tract, swaddled in the language of science, or a scientific work with religious overtones? Explain your answer.

We will further explain this assignment in class and spend some time looking at a sample essay. We will also give you written information about the criteria we will use in grading your essay. Let us know what specific aspects of the assignments you might want us to say more about.