Note: Assignments are due on the day for which they are listed. Written assignments must be word-processed or typed.

**Tuesday, April 4**

For today, please read the first article in the packet 1 handout, Marcia Bartusiak’s “Beyond the Big Bang.” Questions and the written assignment for this article will be on a separate handout.

**Wednesday, April 5**

For today, please read the second article in the Packet 1 handout, Suzanne Langer’s “The Prince of Creation.” Frankly, this is a long, tough read, but it’s worth it. Remember that it was written at the height of World War II: Fortune Magazine turned to Ms. Langer, then a famous philosopher, with the question, “Why are humans making such terrible war on each other?” Her answer was published in the 1944 issue. Here are some questions to help you understand the article. You should read and think about each one, but you have to write answers only to those marked with an asterisk (*):

1. On the first page of the essay, Langer sees WWII as a war between “national states.” These to her are more than physical or geographical groups. What does she view them as? If she were writing today, what would she say today’s big conflicts are between?

2. Would you say that what she describes starting at the bottom of the first page and going on to the next page is still the case today? On the second page, what adjectives does she use for our life today?

3. In the middle of pg. 120 Langer gets into man’s ability to use symbols. What does it enable man to do? (It is Mr. Langer who, as a woman written in 1944, automatically used “man” to mean “humans.” In order not to confuse things, I am going to follow her practice here—even though, thank goodness, it sounds old-fashioned and wrong today.)

4. On pg. 121, what difference does Langer dwell on between men and animals?

5. Especially note the next to last paragraph at the bottom of pg. 121 (“We usually assume….”). Did you find it as thought-provoking as I did? Explain.

6. On pg. 122, Langer continues distinguishing humans from animals on the basis of the human mentality’s “preoccupation with symbols, with :images and names that mean things, rather than with things themselves.” What are some of the human activities she names that depend on symbolic expression? Would you say you spend most of your day in a “mind-made world”? 
7. On pg. 123, Langer begins a very important section distinguishing a sign from a symbol. Summarize this distinction in one or two sentences of your own words. (Read all of pg. 123 and on to pg. 124 before trying this.)

8. At the top of page 124, enjoy (especially if you are young!) Langer’s vision of what life would be like if we had “kept to the straight and narrow path of sign using.” Would you go for it?

9. The first full paragraph on pg. 125 (“The process of transforming all direct expression. . . .”) seems very important, especially how that paragraph ends. Does she sound right to you? In a sentence or two, explain why you think or do not think so.

10. On pp. 125-126, put in your own words how Langer explains the human need for symbolic expression. Why does she like the expression, “I can make nothing of it”?

11. Pg. 126, first full paragraph (“Conception is a necessary and . . . .”): Do you understand and agree with the parallel she draws between a religious mind making human history a drama of sin and salvation and a scientific mind envisaging the facts? According to the article on Einstein and Hubble, did Einstein do so envisaging?

12. *Top of pg. 127: This begins a somewhat over-long section on the nature of language. But in this first paragraph at the top of the page, she sums up what she says we mainly use language for. In a word, what is it?

13. *Top of page 128: Put into your words what the “vegetative stage” in human development is, according to anthropologists. What comes out of this vegetative stage?

14. On pg. 129, second full paragraph (“Yet this power of envisagement. . . .”) things begin to get exciting! What is the danger Langer sees in man’s “power of envisagement”?

15. Bottom half of pg. 129: According to Cassirer, what do humans tend to do with their symbols?

16. Bottom of pg. 130: Langer begins a beautiful section about how our conceptions, and their expression, have given rise, over the centuries, to the great divinities, myths, and rituals around which societies have coalesced. The second full paragraph on pg. 18 (“For thousands of years. . . .”) seems especially lovely. Do we – do some of us – have anything like this today?
17. *“Then came the unprecedented change” – middle paragraph of pg. 131. What was it? Do, please, pause over the beautifully written sentence about “the clatter of gears and the confusion of gadgets.” Do you agree with it as a description of our present situation?

18. *Paragraph beginning at very bottom of p. 131 – “The answer, I think . . .”): Please summarize this paragraph in no more than two sentences (a hard task!). Does it seem to you to describe our present situation.

19. Page 132, first full paragraph (“Because we are at a new beginning”): Does this still hold true today? Explain your answer.

20. *How do new conceptions get clothed, according to Langer?

21. Page 133, first full paragraph: How does Langer explain the oddity of growing nationalism (in her time) at a time when the world was already going so global (“mobile and cosmopolitan” would be her words)?

22. In her final paragraph, Langer uses “fictions” as many people use “myth.” “Fictions” comes from the Latin verb meaning “to make.” Fictions, like myths, are made things, not lies. They are things humans make to express what they conceive. And what they conceive could well be true. It’s nice to think so, since, according to Langer, our conceptions are all we have. Would you agree, or would you put forward an alternative? Answer in a few sentences, please.

23. *Going back over the essay, what three passages would you most want to call attention to in a seminar? For each passage, explain why you chose it in a comment of at least four or five sentences. (You may, of course, choose passages already pointed out in the previous questions.

**Thursday, April 6**

*Reading assignment:* Revelation, chapters 1 through 16. Revelation is the last book of the New Testament. This week we will be doing an initial reading of this book. We will return to it in the eighth week for a more careful analytical reading. This time we are reading it for first impressions (even though some of the member of the class will already be familiar with it). I suggest reading the assignment straight through without pausing too much over the excellent footnotes. You may want to read the introduction in our Bible, but you do not have to; also, there is very helpful material in the Stephen Harris book, pp. 516-524 of the 7th edition. But mainly concentrate on reading the biblical text. The actual “revelation” begins at chapter 4. In the first three chapters, the author is addressing messages to seven churches in part of the Roman Empire called Asia Minor (see map in the Bible or in Harris).

*Writing assignment:*
(1) Focusing on chapters 4 through 16, name at least three different emotions or states of mind that the writing would be likely to evoke in a reader. Fear? Hope? Awe? Confusion? Vengefulness? Gratitude? Other? For each one, say why you think these chapters would evoke this emotion, and for each one cite at least two specific passages that might evoke the emotion – six passages in all. For each passage, give chapter and verse (“Rev. 5.17-19” or “Rev. 5.17 to 6.12”) and write out at least the first sentence of the passage.

(2) The mythologies of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Egypt – the general region in which Revelation was written – are full of what are called “combat myths.” We will be reading and hearing more about these. They often involve combat between a supreme god trying to establish order in the universe and a powerful challenger trying to disrupt this order. (Suzanne Langer would say that such myths express people’s conceptions. How might people have developed a conception of the universe as a site of combat between huge forces?) In Revelation, chapters 12 and 13 (and well beyond) describe combat – first in the heavens between the dragon and the archangel Michael, champion of Israel, and then on Earth between Satan and “those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus” (12.17). It makes for pretty amazing war writing. After all this, one short question: In 12.4, what is the first thing the dragon does? To appreciate the significance of this, go to the very front of your Bible, to Genesis 1.14-19.

Friday, April 7

Reading assignment 1: Rev., chapters 17 through 22

Writing assignment 1:

1. Are there any new emotions you would add to yersterday’s list? If so, name them and explain the addition, again citing two specific passages. If not, name the emotions from yesterday’s list that would likely be reinforced by today’s reading, and say why.

2. Assuming that the author’s principal intended audience is fellow Christians living in the Roman Empire, summarize the main message Revelation is trying to send them about what should be their relation to the Roman state.

3. Do read the footnote to 17.1-18.24. What city does “Babylon” represent? Why, according to the footnote to 17.1-18 is Babylon referred to as a whore, rather than, say, a pimp or a serial killer?

4. One more little detail question: In chapter 21, the author describes his vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” following the final defeat of the devil after the millennium. What happens to the sea? How does the footnote explain this?

5. Make one connection between something Langer says in her essay and Revelation.
Reading assignment 2: The third article in the Packet 1 handout, Paul Boyer’s “When U.S. Foreign Policy Meets Biblical Prophecy.”

Written preparation on Paul Boyer’s article: This article is short and easy to understand. Although Boyer clearly has a political position unfavorable to the foreign policy of the current Administration, his essay presents a good quick overview, by an expert, of the roots and nature of one popular strand of prophecy belief in the United States in the last century. (1) According to Boyer, what evidence do prophecy believers use to support their claim that current events in the Middle East are fulfilling ancient prophecy? (2) What evidence do they use to support the claim that modern Israel is entitled to territory in the West Bank and Gaza? (3) Cite one passage in the Boyer article that struck you as especially interesting, thought-provoking, informative, or debatable. Identify the passage (“p. 23, third paragraph”), write out at least one sentence from it, and say why you think it is noteworthy.

Monday, April 10 (preview)

Today we are pleased to announce that we will have a guest lecture by Professor Scott Noegel, Professor of Biblical and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Washington. He will be speaking about mythologies of the ancient Near East. This was the only day Professor Noegel could come, and so we are re-arranging the planned reading for the week a bit/

Reading assignment: Genesis 1.1-2.14 (Creation) and Genesis 6.1-9.28 (Noah).

More information to come.