

**The Impact of the Great War on Western Culture and the Western Worldview**  
**OLLI Study Group # 260 (Spring 2024)**

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Days, Times, Dates & Classroom: TBD

Format: Lectures with Discussion.

**Study Group Description:**

Intellectual and cultural historians generally consider World War I the turning point in modern Western civilization. This disastrous war shattered Enlightenment confidence in human reason, exposed the nineteenth-century myth of inevitable progress, challenged traditional belief in a divinely ordered universe, and fostered a postwar cosmic pessimism and materialist cosmology. To understand the war's effect on Western culture, we will compare prewar and postwar philosophy, theology, literature, art, and music, focusing on the evolving Western view of reality. We will end with a discussion of the continuing influence of the war on Western culture and cosmology.

**Required Texts:**

O'Connor III, Charles A. *The Great War and the Death of God: Cultural Breakdown, Retreat from Reason, and Rise of Neo-Darwinian Materialism in the Aftermath of World War I* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2014), ISBN 978-0-989-9169-9-8;

\_\_\_\_\_. "Judaism and the Rise of Scientific Materialism after the Great War," *Confluence, The Journal of Graduate Liberal Studies* (Fall 2016) (Handout);

\_\_\_\_\_. "Western Music, Cosmic Meaning, and the Great War," *Confluence*, (Fall 2018) (Handout);

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Great War in African American Experience and Culture" (manuscript) (Handout).

Stace, W. T. "Man against the Darkness," *Atlantic Monthly* (Sept. 1948) (Handout).

**Schedule of Classes and Reading**

1. **Introduction: Culture, Cosmology & the Great War ()**. Course introduction and overview.  
**Readings:** O'Connor, Chapter 1; Introductory pages to Western Music (pages 117-20) & Judaism (pages 101-04). **Suggested Readings:**<sup>1</sup> Rupert Brooke, "Peace"; William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming." **Viewing:** Auguste Rodin & Raoul Hausmann; **Listening:** Sir Edward Elgar & Maurice Ravel.
2. **19<sup>th</sup> Century Cultural Turmoil ()**. Enlightenment's rationalist legacy, Romanticism's protest, religious doubt, Darwin's challenge, and prewar religious thought. **Readings:** O'Connor, Chapter 2; Articles on Judaism and Western Music (prewar era). **Suggested Readings:** William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*; Matthew Arnold, *Dover Beach*; Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Windhover" & "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day"; Thomas Hardy, "Hap" & "The Darkling Thrush." **Viewing:** William Blake. **Listening:** Ludwig van Beethoven & Gustav Mahler.

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<sup>1</sup> All **Suggested Readings** will be supplied in PDF format via email before each class.

3. Fin De Siècle Culture & The Great War (). Prewar literature, art and music; and the surprise, history, and toll of war. Readings: O'Connor, Chapters 3 (pages 45-58) & 7 (pages 161-67). Suggested Readings: Thomas Hardy, "Channel Firing." T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*. Class Viewing: Ludwig Kirchner, Pablo Picasso, Umberto Boccioni, and Ludwig Meidner. Listening: Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky & Gustav Holst.
4. The Yanks, Wartime Culture & Cosmic Pessimism (). Americans and African Americans at war, war poets, soldier artists, and wartime literature and music. Reading: O'Connor, Chapter 3 (pages 58-75) & article on African Americans . Suggested Readings: Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* & Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire* (selections); Selected poems by Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, T.S. Eliot, Siegfried Sassoon, John McCrae, Alan Seeger, and Claude McKay. Viewing: Christopher Nevinson, Fernand Leger, Ludwig Kirchner, and Otto Dix. Listening: Edward Elgar & Alban Berg.
5. Postwar Scientific Cosmology & Secular Worldview (). The scientific revolution, scientism, Scientific Materialism, and rise of the New Atheism. Readings: O'Connor, Chapters 5 (pages 101-104) & 8 (pages 201-222); W. T. Stace, "Man against the Darkness"; Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (selections). Suggested Readings: Thomas Nagel, "The Core of *Mind and Cosmos*"; John F. Haught, "Teilhard, Einstein, and the Meaning of Time." Listening: Gustav Holst
6. Postwar Christian and Jewish Thought (). Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy, Paul Tillich's existentialism, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's process thought, Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship, mainstream Catholic and Jewish thought, and American Fundamentalism and its anti-Darwinian crusade. Readings: O'Connor, Chapters 4 & 8 (pages 222-231); Judaism article. Suggested Readings: *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (pages 11-17, 29-39 & 56-57). Listening: Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copeland & Arnold Schoenberg.
7. Postwar Philosophy: Metaphysics, Positivism, and Existentialism (). Wittgenstein and Logical Positivism; Husserl and scientism; and Heidegger, Sartre, and existentialism. Readings: O'Connor, Chapter 5. Suggested Readings: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (selections); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*; Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus." Listening: Dmitri Shostakovich.
8. Postwar Literature: Creative Imagination in a Determinist World (). Literature coping with cosmic meaninglessness and existential alienation. Reading: O'Connor, Chapter 6. Suggested Readings: Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (selections); Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time*, "Chapter VI" and "Soldier's Home"; and Sartre, *Nausea* (selections). Listening: Benjamin Britten
9. Postwar Art: Dadaism, Surrealism & the Music of Dystopia (). Human irrationality in war and peace. Reading: O'Connor, Chapter 7. Viewing: Otto Dix, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, George Grosz, Hannah Höch, and Max Ernst; Listening: Kurt Weill
10. Course Review & the Postwar Riven Cosmos (). Physicalism, Fundamentalism, and Process Thought. Reading: O'Connor, Chapter 9. Suggested Readings: John F. Haught, "*Mind and Cosmos – Another Look*"; Thomas Nagel, "Is Consciousness an Illusion?" (New York Review, March 9, 2017).