Reminders

• The final exam will be handed out at the conclusion of Thursday’s class (June 2). It is to be completed by 5 PM Friday, June 10. It may be turned in either to my mailbox on the ground floor of Robinson, or to me in my office in Rm. 6.

• The oral section of the final exam will take place in Rm. 023 Robinson according to the following schedule:

  **Friday, June 3**
  
  4:00 Jordan
  4:45 Tyson
  5:30 Nyssa
  6:15 Anna
  7:00 Tomo

  **Thursday, June 9**
  
  4:00 Abby
  4:45 Rachel
  5:30 Andy

Meetings are expected to last ~ 30 minutes.

• Book reviews are due by 5 PM Friday, June 10. They may be turned in either to my mailbox on the ground floor of Robinson, or to me in my office in Rm. 6.

• For seniors and graduate students, both the exam and book review are due by 8 PM Friday, June 3. They may be turned in either to my mailbox on the ground floor of Robinson, or to me in my office in Rm. 6.

Assignment for Thursday, June 2

Well, this is it – the final reading assignment of the course!

• Primary Writings: **Albert Camus**, *The Myth of Sisyphus*.
  The Myth of Sisyphus was little known and well-filed in those libraries of archaic lore that rarely see the light of day until Albert Camus came along. In 1942, he repopularized Sisyphus and the suffering he went through. It seems that, due to a “certain levity in regard to the gods”, Sisyphus had been condemned to pushing a stone up a hill for eternity. Every time the stone reached the top, however, it would roll back down, forcing him to roll it up again – and, we would surmise, to endlessly face disappointment along with physical pain and laboring. As you read this, ask yourself: Why do you suppose Camus chose to end with the line “One must imagine Sisyphus happy”? (See the “Thought Question for the Final Class” below.)

  Note that Camus makes reference to a number of other myths, fables, and stories in this short work, mostly inherited from the ancient Greeks. Although it is not necessary to understand all of these references to grasp the *big picture* of what Camus is saying, here are brief descriptions of two of them, to assist you read along:

  “Nights of Gethsemane”: Gethsemane is mentioned in the Bible as the location to which Jesus and his disciples retreated prior to his arrest and ultimate crucifixion. This occurs after the Last Supper, and it is in this place that Jesus most starkly confronts his impending death. He asks his disciples to remain awake with him throughout the night, but they fall asleep, underscoring both their humanity and Jesus’ complete isolation at this time.
The story of Sophocles’ Œdipus: A story by the ancient Greek poet Sophocles, first performed in about 425 BC. The basic plot is that, shortly after Œdipus is born, his parents (his father is a king) learn from an oracle that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother. They decide to kill him, and give him to a slave to be “exposed” on nearby Mt Cithaeron, a haunt of wolves and other wild beasts. The slave takes pity on the baby, and instead of leaving it to die, gives the boy to a fellow-shepherd from Corinth, the other side of the mountain. To make the long story short, Œdipus lives, and ultimately (although unwittingly) fulfills the prophesy. This story is used by Camus as an example of a person who evidently has lived according to a horrible pre-determined fate, and yet, near the end of his life, is able to conclude that “all is well”.


This is the most technical writing piece of the semester. In this relatively recent review (from ~ 2 years ago) by one of the lead players in the Accelerating Universe discovery, read about both the history and practice of using SNe Ia to measure cosmological parameters. The article closely follows the approach that we took in class, and fleshes out many of the ideas that we just touched briefly upon. It also pushes the science into the future and tells about the results to come in the next several years (e.g., the measurement of $w$, the cosmic equation of state). The basic conclusions of this paper have not been altered by the findings of the last two years, which have served mainly to reduce the error bars on the measured values. The most recent values using high redshift supernovae are (assuming a flat universe with cosmological constant): $\Omega_M = 0.29^{+0.05}_{-0.03}$, $\Omega_\Lambda = 0.71^{+0.05}_{-0.03}$, $w = -1.02^{+0.13}_{-0.19}$ (for non-evolving $w$), and a cosmic jerk at $z = 0.46 \pm 0.13$.

Thought Question for the Final Class

On the final day of the course, Thursday June 2, please turn in a (brief) written response to the following question:

Do you believe that “One must imagine Sisyphus happy”?  

This will form the backdrop for Thursday evening’s discussion.