Conversations of the West:
Antiquity and Medieval

V55.0401 section 001
Spring, 2004
Tuesdays/Thursdays - 9:30AM-10:45AM
Silver Building Room #714

Professor: Zvi Ben-Dor Benite
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53 Washington Square South, #517
Office hours: Tu./Th. 11:00-13:00
and by appointment

Teaching Assistants: Emily Spangler, Olga Kirschbaum, and Susan Louise Valentine

Recitations' times:
002 F 9:30AM - 10:45AM
003 F 11:00AM - 12:15PM
004 M 9:30AM - 10:45AM
005 M 11:00AM - 12:15PM
006 M 1:30PM - 4:45PM
007 M 4:55PM - 6:10PM

Introduction:

This course has as its primary aim to familiarize students with the origins and recurrence of central themes and problems in Western culture. Specifically, it is concerned with the so-called “Judeo-Christian-Islamic” and Hellenic traditions – the two traditions underpinning Western cultural development from classical antiquity on – and the reinterpretation, reception, and, in some instances, rejection of those traditions during the medieval period. The course aims to provide a historical and social context for the texts under consideration and to assess the ways in which medieval thinkers attempted to reconcile their own unique historical circumstances with the legacy of classical Judeo-Christian-Islamic and Hellenic tradition. The course is divided into two main parts. Part one introduces the classical texts from antiquity in a more or less chronological order, from Genesis to St. Augustine. This part also introduces the main issues that ancient thinkers (and writers) discussed. As part of this section we will read also the Qur'an (Koran), which represents the basic Islamic interpretation of the Judeo-Christian classical texts.

The next part of the class introduces the most important medieval thinkers - Christian, Muslim, and Jewish - and shows how the medieval thinkers attempted to reconcile their own unique historical circumstances with the legacy of classical Judeo-Christian and Hellenic tradition. This part of the course is thematic rather than chronological. Taking the term “Conversations of The West” literally, it aims also to show how medieval thinkers interacted with the classical heritage and with each other. Thus, each week is
dedicated to one specific topic and presents related excerpts of the ancient and medieval thinkers with whom this course is concerned.

**Requirements:**

Lecture: attendance and reading of weekly assignments.
Section: attendance, participation, discussion & written assignments (25%)
Two short (3-5 pp.) *typewritten* papers (12.5% each; 25% combined)
Midterm examination (20%)
Final examination (30%)

The distribution of these percentages is such that you are afforded maximum opportunity to get a good grade – no one item is overwhelmingly weighted in the figuring of your grade. However, this distribution also means that we shall NOT accept late papers, nor shall we assign any “extra credit” work. Makeup examinations will not be provided except in the case of documented catastrophe.

Please note that section participation contributes to a significant proportion of your grade. Attendance and preparedness in section are mandatory.

**Required books:**

*Oxford Study Bible* (Oxford University Press)
*Great Dialogues of Plato* (Penguin)
*The Philosophy of Aristotle* (Penguin)
*Sophocles: Complete Plays* (Penguin)
*The Aeneid* (Penguin)
*The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Penguin)
*The Koran* (Penguin)
*Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy* (Broadview Press)

All books are available at the NYU bookstore. You can also purchase them online at the press’ websites.

Books will be used in the order that they appear on this list.

**Please Bring The Relevant Books to Class!**

**Schedule of Classes**

Jan. 20th - Introduction: The concept of canon and the need for (re)interpretation. Textuality -- Religious and historical.

Jan. 22nd Cosmologies and the formation of worldview
Jan 27th  Religious covenant and the roots of historical conflict
*Oxford Study Bible*, Exodus (all)

Jan 29th  What would God do in order to win a theological debate?
*Oxford Study Bible*, Job; Jonah (all)

Feb 3rd  The nature of fate; Human justice and Divine justice; the state and
natural law
Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex; Antigone*

Feb 5th  Socrates: Dialogue and Knowledge
Plato: The Apology; Meno; and Symposium. Try also to read Crito

*Note:* essay question #1 handed out in lecture

Feb 10th  Plato: Imagining the perfect society; Ultimate reality and the Platonic
"ideal."
Plato's *Republic* (Skim the first and second halves; you MUST read the
summary, and also Books I-IV and book VII. Book II is especially
critical, so try, please, to do it all.)

Feb 12th  Aristotle and the Organization of Knowledge
Aristotle: *Logic* (pp. 130-160); *Ethics* Books I, II, X.

*Note:* essay question #1 due in lecture

NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED

Feb 17th  Divine intervention, fate, and free will; Conceptions of sin and
punishment in the Roman world
*Aeneid*, skim books 2-3-5; you MUST read 1 and 4 and you MUST read
book 6

Feb 19th  The Jewish origins of Christianity
*Oxford Study Bible*, Luke (all)

Feb 24th  Miracles, belief, salvation, and "true" knowledge
*Oxford Study Bible*, John (all)

Feb 26th  The gentile origins of Christianity; Paul's "Law"
*Oxford Study Bible*, Paul's letters to the Romans, Thessalonians, and
Timothy (both)
Mar 2\textsuperscript{nd} \textbf{Original sin, free will, and divine grace}
Augustine’s \textit{Confessions}, (specific pages TBA)

Mar 4\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Islam and Muhammad}
The Qur’an (read sura # 96; 1-6)

Mar 9\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Islam and Muhammad (continued)}
The Qur’an (read sura # 7; 34; 53; 22; 9; 26; 19; 12)

Mar 11\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Midterm Examination in Class}

\textbf{Spring Recess}

\textbf{Part II: all texts appear in Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy}

Mar 23\textsuperscript{rd} \textbf{Necessity, Contingency, and Causation}
Read the introduction to the section and also Aristotle; Avicenna; Abelard; Al-Ghazali and Averroes

Mar 25\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Necessity, Contingency, and Causation (continued)}
Read St. Thomas Aquinas; Siger of Brabant; The Condemnation of 1277; Henry of Ghent; John Duns Scotus; William of Ockham

Mar 30\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Is There an Infinitely Perfect Being?}
Read the introduction to the section and Aristotle; St. Anselm; Al-Ghazali and Averroes; St. Thomas Aquinas; John Duns Scotus; William of Ockham

Apr 1\textsuperscript{st} \textbf{Could the World be Eternally Existent?}
Read the introduction and Aristotle; St. Augustine; Al-Ghazali and Averroes; Moses Maimonides

Apr 6\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{no class}

Apr 8\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Could the World be Eternally Existent? (continued)}
St. Thomas Aquinas; Henry of Ghent; John Duns Scotus; William of Ockham

Apr 13\textsuperscript{th} \textbf{Determinism, Free Will, and Divine Foreknowledge}
Read the introduction to the section and Aristotle; Boethius; St. Anselm
Apr 15th  Determinism, Free Will, and Divine Foreknowledge (continued)
Read St. Thomas Aquinas; Siger of Brabant; John Duns Scotus; William of
Ockham

Apr 20th  Virtue and Reason, Sin and Sex
Read the Introduction and Aristotle; St. Augustine; Al-Ghazali; Abelard;
St Thomas Aquinas

Apr 22th  The "Darkness Which is Beyond Intellect"
Read the Introduction and Plotinus; Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite;
John Scotus

Apr 27th  The "Darkness Which is Beyond Intellect"
Eriugena; Ibn Tufail; Meister Eckhart

Apr 29th  Review for Final Exam