V55.0402. Conversations of the West:
Antiquity and the Renaissance

Fall 2004                Instructor: Professor Anthony Low
Preceptors: Sarah Nash, Julia E. Schleck

Sophocles, Sophocles I: Three Tragedies, University of Chicago Press.

Sep 7  Introduction.
Sep 9  Odyssey 1-4 (The quest of Telemachus).
Sep 14  Odyssey 5-12 (Odysseus from the sea).
Sep 16  Odyssey 13-24 (Homecoming).
Sep 21  Genesis 1-11 (Creation and fall: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah).
Sep 23  Genesis 12-50 (Covenant and blessing: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, story of Joseph).
Sep 28  Exodus (Moses). Paper 1 Assigned.
Sep 30  Job (Trial and debate; the voice from the whirlwind). [You may omit ch. 32-37.]
Oct 5  Sophocles, Oedipus the King (Justice and tragedy).
Oct 7  Plato, dialogues in The Trial and Death of Socrates (freedom and justice).
Oct 12  Plato, Symposium (the nature of love).
Oct 14  Virgil: Aeneid 1-2 (Driven by Fate).
Oct 21  Virgil: Aeneid 5-6 (Death and Prophecy)
Oct 28  Midterm Examination. (Includes all readings and class discussion up to this point.)

Nov 9  Augustine, Confessions 1-4 (Youth). Paper 2 assigned.
Nov 11  Augustine, Confessions 5-9 (Conversion).
Nov 16  Pico, On the Dignity of Man (read the title essay only).
Nov 18  Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Natural law, morality, and political sovereignty).

Nov 23  Castiglione, *The Courtier*, Books 1 and 4. **Paper 2 due in section.**

Nov 25  **Thanksgiving.**


Dec 14  Milton, *Paradise Lost* 11-12. [Note: Thursday classes and sections meet on this Tuesday]

Dec 16-23 Final Examination period (emphasis on second half of course but some questions on everything read in the course and on all class discussions).

**BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION:** The readings include seminal works from three traditions, represented by the cities and civilizations of Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome, which deeply influenced the development of western thought and culture, converged in the middle ages, and were reborn in the Renaissance. We shall attempt to strike a balance between respecting the integrity of each work as it speaks on its own behalf and relates to its particular time and culture, and various significant themes that emerge among the works, as they influence, continue, develop, talk to, modify, and sometimes reject one another. No single overarching theme can encompass such a variety of works and do them justice, but some concerns repeatedly arise: the nature of humanity; the purpose of life; the nature of justice; death and the afterlife; sin, error, and repentance; virtue, excellence, and the good life; body and soul; national identity; the building of civilization; the value of community; the relation between God or the gods and human beings; the balance of providence or fate and free will. In the late classical period, Augustine transforms and synthesizes many of these topics, which are reborn and reconsidered in the Renaissance. Such large themes cannot be well understood, however, without attention to particular texts, stories, persons, images, and similar details, which give them life and energy and make them memorable. **Therefore you should read the assigned works closely, with imaginative care, and preferably with enjoyment, and should not hesitate to ask questions about things that puzzle you.**

**OFFICE HOURS:** Professor Low: 19 University Place, Room 521  Hours: Tues-Thurs 12:30-1:30, or other times by appt. Tel. 998-8805 (E-mail is quicker than telephone except in office hours).

E-mail: Prof. Low, low@compuserve.com; Preceptors: Sarah Nash, snash@nyc.rr.com; Julia E. Schleck, Julia.Schleck@nyu.edu. Please e-mail your Preceptor with questions about grades, assignments, permission for absences and the like; copy messages to me if you wish.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** Papers should be 5-6 pages typed, with further details provided by your preceptors. The midterm and final examinations will include several essay questions on the assigned materials as well as short answer questions and identifications. The midterm will cover readings to that point; the final will cover readings for the whole course with emphasis on the second half of the course. Grades are based on papers (18.75% each), quizzes, attendance and participation in sections, midterm exam (12.5% each); and final exam (25%).