

Conversations of the West: Antiquity and the 19th Century

V55.0404037 75063

Fall 2008

Professor: Craig Calhoun
295 Lafayette St (Puck Bldg) 4th floor, rm. 4139
Office hours: Mondays 11-12, or by appointment

Lectures: Monday/Wednesday
9:30-10:45
19 W 4th, Rm 101

Phone 998-8348; Department Secretary 998-8340; Dr. Calhoun's secretary 377-2700
Email: craig.calhoun@nyu.edu

Preceptors, their offices, and their recitation sections:

Tey Meadow, 295 Lafayette Street, Rm
V55.0404 030 Rct R 8:00 Silver 412
V55.0404 031 Rct R 9:30 Silver 411
Michael McCarthy, 295 Lafayette Street, Rm.
V55.0404 034 Rct F 9:30 145F 209
V55.0404 035 Rct F 11:00 48CS 103
Erin O'Connor, 295 Lafayette St, Rm.
V55.0404 032 Rct R 2:00, room not yet assigned
V55.0404 033 Rct R 3:30 Silver 705
Monika Krause, 295 Lafayette St., Rm.
V55.0404 043 Rct F 9:30 Silver 504
V55.0403 044 Rct F 11:00 Silver 504

INTRODUCTION

Greetings! Conversations of the West is one of the opening courses to the Foundations of Contemporary Culture sequence. As such, it is designed to provide you with resources that will help you in all kinds of later studies, and indeed, in life. These resources are of four kinds. First, there is knowledge of the specific authors and texts assigned in the course—most of which have long been considered basic to a good education. Second, there is the ability to read analytically, seeing how authors structure their arguments, and how later ones draw on what they have learned from earlier ones. Third, there is the skill of expressing your thoughts both in speech and in writing. Finally, there is the capacity to relate intellectual knowledge to practical affairs—in personal ethics, in your professional work, and in political and social life generally.

This is not a survey course. It is not designed to be thorough with regard to either intellectual history or substantive theoretical concerns. One semester cannot do justice to a field of knowledge so broad or to such a lengthy sweep of time. Rather, this course is designed to guide you in discovering some of the intellectual heritage that is distinctive to—even definitive of—the West. The works we study are important both because they are exemplary and because they are influential. That is, they stand as enduring examples of intellectual achievement, and because they continue to shape the way people understand the world. While they are part of an interesting

history, thus, they are not of “merely historical interest”. We will situate the works in historical context, but rather than trying to trace all of the history that connects them, we will look for ways in which later authors responded to themes introduced by earlier ones. These are the “conversations” after which the course is named. Part of your task in the course is to join in these conversations--not just to learn what others have said, but to learn how to use what they have said, disagree with it effectively, or improve on it.

The works we will study come from two historical periods, antiquity and the 19th century. Antiquity as we approach it here is a relatively long period, from about 500 BC to 500 AD. The texts that represent this period for us come from the Pentateuch (the first books of the Torah, or Jewish Bible, known to Christians as the Old Testament), from ancient Greece, from the Roman Empire, and from the early years of Christianity (the Patristic era, or that of the founding fathers). We do not study texts from ancient Egypt or Northern Europe because no major philosophical works survive from those cultures in this time period, though they did influence the formation of Western civilization. We do not study texts from the Islamic, Chinese, Persian, or Indian civilizations, even though these did flourish during the same time period and produce major philosophical and literary works. This is because they were not part of the same formation of Western civilization, though occasionally connections were made as when Europeans learned higher mathematics from Arabs, or when Marco Polo brought the noodles that became spaghetti and others brought the technology of gunpowder from China. Another MAP Foundations course, World Cultures, offers you the chance to explore at least one important non-Western cultural tradition. The division is somewhat arbitrary, for the way Europeans defined “the West” in the 19th century was partly by contrasting it to the rest of the world. They exaggerated the separateness of Western civilization, for example by paying relatively little attention to the development of Orthodox (rather than Roman Catholic or Protestant) versions of Christianity, both in and especially after the Byzantine Empire. One reason why such emphasis was placed on the distinctiveness of the West, indeed, was precisely that the processes of globalization had begun and Europeans (and later Americans) were beginning to try to understand who they were within a broader context.

Europeans (and settlers elsewhere of European descent) were also engaged in colonialism, trade, and wars around the world. An odd feature of much discussion of Western civilization is the extent to which it celebrated the inheritance from classical Antiquity while ignoring or denying the borrowings from other civilizations. This course deals mainly with texts written in Europe that ask questions about European society without seeing colonialism as an integral part of that society. In other words, most of the 19th century classics presume a separation between the internal progress of European culture and society and the external relations of Europeans to the rest of the world. It is worth keeping in mind that 21st century historians would place more stress than most of these 19th century authors did on how overseas empires shaped what went inside European societies. Administration of the colonies shaped the development of public administration inside Europe. Trading companies and colonial ventures shaped the development of the business corporation. Colonial wars not only demanded soldiers but shaped discussions of manhood and virtue. But to a large extent, it was later critical examinations that stressed these connections, not the dominant 19th century writers themselves.

In the 19th century, Europeans—and increasingly people elsewhere in the world—came to think of themselves as modern by contrast to the wide variety of “traditional” cultures. This meant not just following the latest fashions, but a basic change in thinking about the relationship of past and

future. For many, the idea of evolution explained advancement in civilization as in biology. At the same time, “modern” 19th century thinkers were eager to place themselves in relation to the most “advanced” thinkers of the past. Willing to consign some parts of history to irrelevance as the “dark ages,” moderns still identified with “the grandeur that was Greece and the glory that was Rome.” One reason is that they saw the thinkers of Antiquity as making progress, as they themselves were doing, rather than simply following traditions or even falling backwards. The theme of progress was basic to the 19th century idea of the modern. For some, this meant radical change, building a completely new and better kind of society. For others, it meant gradual, incremental change and a key question was whether this could be guided by reform or could only be left to the invisible hand of evolution. Still others, especially at the end of the 19th century worried about whether progress was coming to an end or built on shifting sands. Nearly all looked back to thinkers from classical Antiquity for help in understanding progress, conceptualizing the good society towards which it might aim, and considering whether human nature allowed for infinite perfectability or would pose basic limits to progress.

The 19th century is a much shorter period than antiquity, even though we will take a relatively long view of it that stretches from the late 18th into the early 20th centuries. It was a period of enormous intellectual productivity, however, and unlike antiquity we have lost few of its important texts. The intellectual achievements of the 19th century could also be as great as they were because thinkers in that age could “stand on the shoulders” of those who had gone before. In this course, we will emphasize the contributions of Antiquity, but there were also many from intervening periods. The 19th century saw advances in many parts of intellectual life; indeed, it was in the 19th century that the university itself took its modern form. Of course we cannot look equally at everything. One key theme has already been mentioned, the idea of progress. This is related to the development of evolutionary theory, and to other questions about social change, and whether it is possible for people to design new conditions under which to live together. We will also focus especially on what it means to be a person—to have an identity as a self-aware, responsible individual—and how this relates to political, social, cultural, and ethical life together. These ideas of the individual, of both personal and social choice, and of progress are particularly pivotal to Western civilization. We will also see that they are intertwined in efforts to understand three basic sets of issues that have occupied great thinkers and ordinary people throughout the history of the West: the relationships among (1) power, freedom, and morality; (2) necessity, diversity, and the nature of a good society; and (3) identity, responsibility, and human nature. Each of these takes on a different significance when individuals are understood as basic, and when social relations are judged according to expectations of progress rather than only tradition. These issues will appear over and again in this course, and combine in different ways. The three parts of the course represent attempts to pull together “conversations” among readings in which one cluster or another is especially prominent.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You are expected to read each of the assigned works, attend all lectures and meetings of your discussion section (arriving promptly at each), and participate actively in class discussions. In addition, you are required to write four short papers, and complete midterm and final examinations.

BRIEFS: In addition to reading the assignments for all class meetings, you are to prepare a 'brief' on each of six reading assignments (three from each half of the class), much as a lawyer might prepare for the courtroom. Each brief (or short paper) should identify a key theme in the assigned reading, explain how it is addressed in the text, and develop an argument of your own related to that theme. Do not just give general background. Your argument may support the author, disagree, suggest why something that fit an earlier time no longer fits today, compare the author to one we have already read, or pursue some other agenda. What is most important is that you not simply state an opinion, but present an argument clearly related to the text under consideration and supported with logic and/or evidence. This must be your original work.

In each discussion section, students will be divided into groups and assigned different texts. Members of each group will be responsible for helping to initiate discussion once every two to three weeks. Your written briefs should prepare you for oral discussion. While you may have things to say about many aspects of any reading, whenever you have completed a brief you should be able to present your argument orally (without reading it) if called on to do so. Briefs must be turned in at the class in which we discuss the work you address. You may discuss your briefs with others, but they should be individual products.

Briefs should be typed (double-spaced, with spelling checked) and you should pay attention to how you present your ideas. Briefs are to be about two pages long (700 words) and in no case more than 1000 words. Do not pad them out; make sure you use the space and words available to you effectively. Your preceptor will respond in terms of intellectual content, logical presentation of an argument, quality of writing. S/he will grade you, but also try to help you develop your skills and knowledge.

WEB PAGE AND ONLINE PARTICIPATION: A web page has been created for this course, using the Blackboard system. You will be able to reach this from NYU Home as soon as you register.

The web page contains the syllabus and will contain announcements, such as any possible changes of schedule. Copies of Powerpoints from the lectures will be posted to the Blackboard site. It will also give you private access to grade information. Most importantly, the web page includes access to an online message system that allows you to communicate with the course instructors and your fellow students. This is designed to enable you to carry on discussion outside of discussion sections. You can pose a question, offer an answer to one posed by someone else, or simply comment. Indeed, as a requirement of the course, we ask that you offer a question or comment at least once each week starting with the second week. Your preceptor will offer more specific guidance. Of course, you can also communicate privately with your preceptor or Professor Calhoun.

ORAL PARTICIPATION: Discussion sections are a vital part of this course. You must not only attend, but participate. You are welcome to ask questions after lectures, but with 120 students in the class this will not be a chance for real exchange. This is where discussion sections come in. You can ask your preceptor for help in better understanding lectures or readings, but it is also important to discuss meanings and implications with your fellow students. Your preceptor may ask you to present interpretations and arguments. He or she may also pose questions to challenge your thinking. You will be graded on your participation in discussion sections—not on whether you are always right, but on whether you join in and make a real intellectual effort.

EXAMINATIONS: The midterm and final examinations are required. On the midterm, you will have to answer two questions of your choice, from a set of four of my choice, out of a list of at least eight which I will circulate in advance. The final will have the same format, but you will be required to answer three questions and the study list may be longer. The final will be cumulative, meaning that you can be asked to relate more recent work to work discussed earlier in the class. We will take improvement in both briefs and exam results into consideration (it's better if your grades go up rather than down).

GRADING: Your grades will be computed as follows:

Briefs:	30%
Midterm:	20%
Final:	40%
Oral and online participation:	10%

PRECEPTORS: Your preceptor is a full teacher in this course, not a teaching assistant. Each preceptor works closely with Professor Calhoun to plan for discussion sections, grading, and other activities. S/he is your main contact if you need help or just want to discuss coursework further. S/he is also primarily responsible for grading your work.

READINGS: You don't have to buy the books; you do have to do the readings. Books containing required readings are for sale at the NYU Bookstore. **BUY FROM THE PLAN IN THIS SYLLABUS, NOT THE LIST AT THE BOOKSTORE** (which past experience suggests is often inaccurate). Many of these books are also widely available in used book stores. It is not crucial that you have any specific edition (but see suggestions in the plan). **ALL READINGS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE.** I have indicated web addresses in the Plan (these were all active, but addresses sometimes change; you can find alternative versions with a search engine). In most cases there are also web-based discussions of the texts, links to essays about them, and sometimes summaries (and there are often many different web sites, not just the ones I listed). There is no rule against using any of these resources (or those in the library). **BUT THE WRITTEN WORK YOU TURN IN MUST BE YOUR OWN CREATION.** If you quote, use quotation marks and give sources.

PLAN

Jan. 23:	Introduction: On reading, interpreting, and analyzing texts
Part I:	Power, Freedom, and Morality in Antiquity
Jan. 28:	<i>Bible:</i> The Book of Genesis (I will use the New Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version; numerous versions are online, e.g.: http://www.hti.umich.edu/r/rsv/)
Jan. 30:	More Genesis, begin <i>Bible:</i> The Book of Exodus
Feb. 4:	More Exodus
Feb. 6:	Sophocles: <i>Oedipus the King</i> (http://sophocles.thefreelibrary.com/Oedipus-The-King/3-1)
Feb. 11:	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , esp. Books 1, 2, 4, 7, 9 (http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html)

- Feb. 13: Continue Plato
- Feb. 18: Presidents Day – no lecture
- Feb. 20: Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, esp. Books I-IV
(<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>).
- Feb. 25: Epictetus: *Enchiridion* (also called *The Handbook*; composed of selections from *Discourses*, Books, I, II and IV: <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>)
- Feb. 27: *Bible*: The Gospel According to Luke; (supplement: The Gospel According to John)
- Mar. 3: *Bible*: St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians
- Mar. 5: Augustine: *Confessions*, esp. Books One, Four; Seven, and Ten
(<http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/confessions/confessions.html>).
- Mar. 10: More on Augustine
- Mar. 12: MIDTERM EXAM
- March 17-22: Spring Recess
- Part II: Individual, Society and Choice in 19th Century Modernity**
- Mar.24: M. Shelley: *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*
(<http://www.literature.org/authors/shelley-mary/frankenstein/preface.html>).
- Mar. 26: R. W. Emerson: "Self-Reliance"
(<http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm>).
- Mar. 31: J. S. Mill: *On Liberty*
(http://oll.libertyfund.org/Texts/MillJS0172/OnLibertyAndSubjection/HTMLs/0159_Pt01_OnLiberty.html).
- Apr. 2: Mill, con't
- Apr. 7: Darwin: *On the Origin of Species*.
(<http://www.literature.org/authors/darwin-charles/the-origin-of-species/>)
- Apr. 9: K. Marx and F. Engels: *The Communist Manifesto*
(<http://marx.thefreelibrary.com/Communist-Manifesto>).
- Apr. 14: K. Marx: selection on 'alienated labor' from *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*
(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>); supplement, *Capital*, Chapter 1
(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S1>).
- Apr. 16: S. Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*, (<http://home.ddc.net/ygg/etext/fear.htm>)
- Apr. 21: Kierkegaard continued
- Apr. 23: F. Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*, esp. First Essay and Second Essay sections 1-4. (<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/genealogytofc.htm>).
- Apr. 28: Nietzsche, continued
- Apr. 30: T. Dostoevsky: *Crime and Punishment*
(<http://www.classicreader.com/booktoc.php/sid.1/bookid.55/>).
- May 5: Dostoevsky, continued and Conclusion
- May 7: FINAL EXAM (8-9:50 AM)