

Conversations of the West: Antiquity and the Enlightenment

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Professors:

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Conversations of the West is intended to:

- acquaint students with some of the central ideas bequeathed by antiquity to the modern Western world;
- examine how these ideas from antiquity have been received, debated, accepted, rejected, and modified by the Western world at critical junctures in its development;
- in the process, connect students with some of the most influential works and thinkers of Western history;
- hone the reading, discussion, and writing skills of students.

This section of Conversations of the West focuses on antiquity and the Enlightenment, the latter a turbulent and important period in Western history that is roughly synonymous with the eighteenth century. During the Enlightenment period, the legacy of the Judeo-Christian past was vigorously challenged, with human reason replacing divine revelation as the preferred avenue to truth and ultimately to human well-being. This shift had enormous implications for the political organization of Western societies. The thinking of the contemporary Western world has been decisively affected by the Enlightenment; many of the issues Enlightenment thinkers raised are still intensely debated in present-day America.

The central focus of this particular course will be conflict and its resolution through recourse to reliable human knowledge. We will regularly ask a series of related questions of the authors and works that we read:

- (1) Conflict is a constant of human experience. What are the major conflicts reflected in our sources?
- (2) Generally, truth is perceived as the key to proper resolution of conflict. How does truth serve to resolve conflict?
- (3) What are the avenues to truth? How active are humans in the achievement of truth? How is error explained?
- (4) How do alternative avenues to truth affect the political process? Who controls knowledge and how does control of knowledge affect the organization of society?

As we encounter the influential works of antiquity and the Enlightenment, these are the issues to which we will constantly remain attuned.

Readings:

Antiquity:

Genesis-Exodus, in the *Oxford Study Bible*

Isaiah, in *ibid.*

Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Grene (University of Chicago)

Euripides, *The Bacchae*, trans. Arrowsmith (Univ. of Chicago)

Plato, The Allegory of the Cave, from *The Republic* (Blackboard)

Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Hamilton (Penguin)

Plato, *Apology, Crito*, trans. Grube (Hackett)

Luke-Acts, in the *Oxford Study Bible*

Galatians, in *ibid.*

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin (Penguin)

Enlightenment:

Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. Shirley (Blackboard)

Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Prometheus)

Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* (Prometheus)

Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. Betts (Penguin)

Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (Oxford)

Paine, *The Age of Reason* (Citadel)

Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible* (Blackboard)

Political documents (Blackboard)

Lecture Schedule:

1/22	Introduction to course
1/24	Genesis
1/29	Exodus
1/31	Isaiah 1-12, 40-45
2/5	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
2/7	Euripides, <i>The Bacchae</i>
2/12	Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave," <i>The Symposium</i>
2/14	Plato, <i>The Apology, Crito</i>
2/19	Luke
2/26	NO CLASS
2/28	Acts, Galatians
3/4-6	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , books 1-4 and 7-8
3/11	Review
3/13	Mid-term
3/18-20	SPRING BREAK
3/25-27	Introduction to the Enlightenment
4/1-3	Spinoza, <i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i> , chaps. 13, 14, 16, 20
4/8	Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i>
4/10	Lessing, <i>Nathan the Wise</i>
4/15	Montesquieu, <i>Persian Letters</i> , letters 1-14, 57-68, 97-110, 147-161

4/17	Voltaire, <i>Letters Concerning the English Nation</i> , letters I-XVI
4/22	Paine, <i>The Age of Reason</i> , First Part
4/24	Jefferson, <i>The Jefferson Bible</i> , 37-55 and 138-147
4/29	Political documents
5/1	Glances backward and forward

Course requirements and grading:

Attendance at lectures and recitation sessions is required. The lectures will set out the key directions and concepts of the course. Missing these presentations will be costly. The recitations will explore in depth some of the issues raised in the readings and lectures. Students are expected to be prepared for the lectures and the recitation sessions and to participate actively in both.

Each student must produce a typed response of 1-2 pages to each of the readings in the course. These reading responses will be used regularly during lecture and recitation sessions. These responses will be collected at the end of each lecture. They will be used to judge group understanding of the readings and to monitor individual attendance and engagement. Students should retain a copy of their reading responses to study for the midterm and the final. Two reading responses—those for Plato's *Apology* and *Crito* and Paine's *The Age of Reason*—will be special. They will involve responses to specific questions, will be 2 to 4 pages in length, and will be graded. The regular reading responses, the three special reading responses, and participation in both lectures and recitation sessions will constitute 30% of the final grade.

There will be a mid-term examination and a final examination, the former counting for 30% of the final grade and the latter for 40% of the final grade.

Instructor information:

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