Course Description

If the humankind has entered a new geological age called the Anthropocene, one shaped and conditioned by human activities since at least two centuries ago, what has been the role of Western or Abrahamic religions? What will be the fate of faith confronted with the unprecedented human-made transformations in nature and history as the sites of divine revelations? This course studies the fundamental ideas in Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions of nature, creation, history, environment, and the very idea of human action that have pervaded longstanding practices devoted to the domination or “occupation” of nature. We will examine key theological positions and philosophical statements by reading primary sacred and exegetical texts in each of the three major monotheistic religions. We will delve into their different accounts of the genesis of the universe and the natural-historical world, of the meaning of God’s transcendence, of the economy of the divine plan, and the productive and destructive activity of human beings as God’s “trustees” on earth. Our goal is to grasp the wide-ranging crises of the present age, or, the fall of nature, from a deep historical and philosophical perspective afforded by the archives and ideas of monotheism.

Objectives

The path that we will take in our journey starts with two stories by Kafka where the idea of the language of animals figures and ends with a movie about the fall of the human word in a decaying nature. The main houses in our course include the Bible and the Quran’s stories of genesis and creation, and key interpretations of them by Philo of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, and Avicenna within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, respectively.

Like any other journey in humanistic studies, you will learn how to read a text closely, place it in historical, cultural, and political contexts, and explore its relation to other texts in a comparative manner. You also learn how to bring out the presuppositions and assumptions behind words, arguments and interpretations, dogmas and opinions about
abstract and concrete issues, from the concept of creation to the politics of combatting the climate change. In virtue of these skills, we intend to look at the present climate crisis from a philosophical and historical perspective to realize what has contributed to its core strategical beliefs and ideological standpoints. This will help us better situate ourselves in the context of the present endeavor to defer or dispel a total apocalypse on a planetary scale.

**Evaluation:**

Reading the texts, attending the class, and participation in discussions: 15%

Biweekly one-page responses to an assigned text or a related question: 15%

Mid-term essay on choice of assigned topics, 6-8-page: 25%, the essay outline due one week earlier: 5%.

Final paper on a topic you can start developing around or after you wrote your mid-term essay: 12-15-page: 35%, outline: 5%.

Presentation (individually or in group) on our readings: an extra 5%

**Readings:**

These two books (the exact editions as specified) are required for the course, which you can find at the NYU bookstore:


*All other texts will be made available on Blackboard.*

**Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Nature: Between God and Mother**

Jan 24

Introduction

Jan 26

Franz Kafka, “The Burrow” (short story)


**Week 2**

**Naming the Crisis: the Anthropocene**

Jan 31


[https://www.nature.com/articles/415023a](https://www.nature.com/articles/415023a)
Feb 2
The Assisi Declarations (1986)
http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/the%20assisi%20declarations.pdf
(A Collection with further Statements: Faith in Conversation (1995, published 2003:

Week 3
Nature as Creation: A Divine Story

Feb 7
The Bible, Genesis 1-3.

Feb 9
The Quran (excerpts)

Week 4
The Jewish Interpretation of Creation

Feb 14
Philo, On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses, §§1-44, pp. 47-56.

Feb 16
On the Creation, §§62-130, pp. 61-80.
Genesis Rabbah, Chapters I. pp. 1-13

Week 5
The Law of Nature and the Law of Moses

Feb 21
President's Day — No Class Today

Feb 23
On the Creation, §§ 134-the end, pp. 82-93.

Week 6
The Christian Interpretation of Creation

Feb 28

Mar 2
Confessions, XII-the end, pp. 241-257.

Midterm Paper Outline Due

Week 7
Reading Heaven and Earth

Mar 7

Mar 9
Confessions, XX-the end, pp. 275-286.

Midterm Paper Due
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td><strong>Spring Break— No Classes</strong></td>
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<td>Mar 14</td>
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<td>Mar 16</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td><strong>A Judeo-Christian Tradition Formed</strong></td>
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<td>Mar 23</td>
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<td><em>Confessions</em>, XXIX-the end, pp. 316-321.</td>
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<td>Paul Tillich, “Theological Developments in the Ancient Church,”</td>
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<td>in <em>A History of Christian Thought</em></td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td><strong>The Antinomy of Creation: The Philosopher and the Believer</strong></td>
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<td>Mar 30</td>
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<td>Moses Maimonides, <em>The Guide of the Perplexed</em>, II. Chapters 20-23,</td>
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<td>pp. 312-322.</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td><strong>An Islamic Interpretation of Creation and History</strong></td>
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<td>First to Fourth Prefatory Discussions, pp. 45-65.</td>
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<td>April 6</td>
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<td><em>Muqaddimah</em>, Fifth to Sixth Prefatory Discussions, pp, 65-91.</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td><strong>The Historical Content of ‘Creation’</strong></td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td><strong>But a Strom Is Blowing from Paradise: Allegories of Fall</strong></td>
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<td>April 18</td>
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<td>Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,”</td>
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<td>Thesis 1.</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td><strong>The Created Nature Colonized</strong></td>
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<td>April 25-27</td>
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<td>Screening and discussing the movie <em>Where the Green Ants Dream</em> by Werner Herzog (1985)</td>
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Final Paper Outline Due

Week 15
A New Nature Out of the Ruins?

May 2-4
Donna Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”

May 9
Conclusions

Final paper due May?

Bibliography


https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a


Movie

ACCOMMODATION

Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

There are deeper reasons than the legal ones why using other people’s works without giving them credit must be avoided. Among them is that plagiarism amounts to alienating one’s own freedom, one’s sense of activity and self, to someone else, adopting their words in a way that could run the risk of being forever irrelevant to oneself. Borrowing ideas, words, formulations from others, even thinking with other heads (as a writer once put it), belongs to the act of thinking and writing, but you must always cite any quote, whether it is from an academic journal or TikTok, and there are simple rules for citing each and every medium. For instance, you can use the Chicago style. Here is a link to stylistics and reference.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating (adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html):

“Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).”