

**History 2208—Dialogue: Communicating Science and Knowledge from Socrates to Today**  
**A SNF Paideia Program Course**

**Instructor: Teddy Chappell**

**Time: Mondays from 5:15pm to 8pm**

**Location: Claudia Cohen Hall, Room 392**

**Office Hours: TBD**



Nicolas-André Monsiau's *The Debate of Socrates and Aspasia* (c. 1800) and the frontispiece of Galileo Galilei's *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* (1632)

**Course Description:** From Socrates in the fourth century BCE to Galileo in the seventeenth, the dialogue—a form of writing that stages a conversation or debate between two or more speakers—was one of the most popular genres for disseminating observations and opinions about the world, particularly when they were new or controversial. Although scientists no longer use written dialogues to share their research today, discussion, disagreement, and debate remain important tools for advancing scientific knowledge, at least in theory if not always in practice. The aim of this course will be to explore how dialogue as a genre and a principal was and still is a critical tool not just for productively communicating scientific knowledge but also for developing and creating it. In the first part of the class, we will look at a range of ancient, medieval, and early modern scientific dialogues to understand better how and why premodern authors employed the genre to advance and share their opinions even as the nature of science changed dramatically over these periods. In the second part, we will explore scholarly works on the institutional, intellectual, and technological changes from the seventeenth century onwards that led to the dialogue falling by the wayside as a genre of scientific writing. We will look at the principles and practices that have emerged in its place and to what degree they have succeeded or not in creating authentic dialogue. We will also consider

how the dialogue as a genre continued to thrive in other disciplines outside of the sciences. In short, this course will trace the (sometimes bumpy) journey of dialogue from page to principle.

One of the goals of this course will be to show students how “science” as we understand it today emerged from the much broader *scientia*, which in the premodern world simply meant knowledge. In accordance with this aim, we will look at how authors used dialogues to communicate all kinds of knowledge and opinions, ranging from religion and politics to social convention. In other words, this course will help students understand how scientific communication, both early modern and modern, originated from a much wider set of rhetorical and philosophical practices.

This course is part of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Paideia Program, which serves as a hub for dialogue in undergraduate education at Penn. SNF Paideia designated courses integrate students’ personal, professional, and civic development through “dialogue across difference” – i.e., engaging with diverse ideas and people for the purposes of mutual understanding, collective problem solving, and individual and community wellness. Engage further with Paideia’s mission to “educate the whole person” at <https://snfpaideia.upenn.edu>.

**Readings, Class, Participation, and Attendance:** All readings will be available electronically on Canvas. If you prefer physical copies of books, you are welcome to acquire them online or from the library; if you need help with this, please feel free to reach out. Keep an eye on the Canvas website for the most up to date version of the syllabus and readings.

Class each week will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to read the material for that week and come to class ready to discuss them. To kickstart discussion, each student will post a question that they had about the readings or the topics covered before coming to class. Posting these questions and participating in in-class discussions will make up students’ participation grades. **Weekly questions need to be submitted to Canvas by Saturday night at 11:59pm. No late submissions.**

Since class is only once a week, regular attendance is important and will be tracked by the instructor (more than one unexcused absence will affect students’ participation grades). If students will be absent, they should notify the instructor ahead of time. To make up for absences, students can write a thoughtful, one- to two-page (double-spaced) response to that week’s readings. This paper needs to be turned in ahead of time unless there is an emergency, and students can only do this up to two times before an alternative arrangement needs to be made with the instructor.

**Papers:** Students will be assessed primarily based on three five-page papers that are due over the course of the semester. For each paper, students will have a variety of prompts to respond to that will involve past readings. In consultation with the instructor at least a week ahead of the due date, students may choose their own prompts or topics, and advanced students may also combine two of the papers into a larger research paper. The goal with these papers is for

students to improve their writing and historical analysis, based on feedback from the instructor on previous papers, so the final two papers are worth a higher percentage overall.

**Grade Breakdown:**

30%, Participation (attendance, participation in discussions, and weekly canvas questions)

20% First response paper

25% Second response paper

25% Third response paper

**Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism, and Artificial Intelligence:** The use of chatGPT or any other generative AI to source, outline, or draft any of the writing for this course is strongly discouraged. Writing, critical thinking, and communication skills are some of the most important parts of this course, and using AI tools takes away opportunities for you to develop them. Additionally, generative AI is unlikely to produce a good or even adequate ideas or sources. If you decide anyway to use chatGPT or any similar technology to accomplish any part of the assignments for this course, you will need to explain in a footnote why and how you employed it. Otherwise, unattributed use of AI tools is considered academic dishonesty and will result in a F and possible referral to the Penn's Office of Student Conduct.

**Schedule:**

September 9<sup>th</sup>: **Introductions**

Stanley Fish's *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (p. 1-21)

September 16<sup>th</sup>: **The Trial of Socrates**

Plato, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito*

September 23<sup>rd</sup>: **Socratic Dialogues**

Plato, Selections from *Meno*, *Phaedrus*, *The Republic*, and *Timaeus*

September 30<sup>th</sup>: **Later Ancient Dialogues**

Lucian's *The Double Indictment* and selections from Augustine's *Cassiciacum Dialogues*

**FIRST ESSAY DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4<sup>TH</sup> AT 11:59PM**

October 7<sup>th</sup>: **Medieval Dialogues across Religious Difference**

Selections from Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei* and Abelard's *A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian*

October 14<sup>th</sup>: **The Dialogue in the Renaissance**

Peter Burke's "The Renaissance Dialogue" and selections from Erasmus' *Colloquies*

October 21<sup>st</sup>: **Dialogue at Court**

Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*

October 28<sup>th</sup>: **Imagining Other Worlds with Dialogue**

Thomas More's *Utopia*

November 4<sup>th</sup>: **Galileo and the Communication of Early Modern Science**

Teddy Chappell's "A World of Words: Rereading Galileo's grand book of philosophy from *Il Saggiatore*;" selections from Galileo's *Assayer* and *Dialogue of Cecco di Ronchitti on the New Star*

November 11<sup>th</sup>: **The Trial of Galileo**

Selections from Galileo's *Letter to Grand Duchess Cristina*, *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*, and 1633 trial documents

November 18<sup>th</sup>: **The Decline of Dialogue in Science**

Mario Biagioli's "Epilogue: From Patronage to Academies" in *Galileo, Courtier*; Anne Goldgar's Introduction to *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750*; Steven Shapin's "A Scholar and a Gentleman: The Problematic identity of the Scientific Practitioner in Seventeenth-century England" in *Never Pure*

**SECOND ESSAY DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22<sup>ND</sup> AT 11:59PM**

November 25<sup>th</sup>: ***NO CLASS FOR THANKSGIVING BREAK***

December 2<sup>nd</sup>: **Enlightenment Dialogues—*Alternate Class Time TBD***

Diderot's *D'Alembert's Dream*

December 9<sup>th</sup>: **Modern Dialogues on Philosophy and Science**

Michael Hampe's *Tunguska, or the End of Nature*

**FINAL ESSAY DUE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup>**