

**Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology  
and  
Zaytuna College  
PHST4377 Disputation I: Ancient / Islamic Sources**

**Fall 2020**

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**General Overview of Disputation I and II**

Disputation I and II is a two semester course which covers selections from Plato, Aristotle, and selected Islamic and Christian authors. The inspiration for the courses is the art of formal disputation, which has its origins in Greek philosophy, and attains mature form in both Islamic and Medieval Christian thought. The rules of formal disputation provided a framework in which topics of importance could be examined by thinkers of differing points of view, since they agreed on key metaphysical and logical principles. Faculty from both institutions will guide students through an exploration of disputation as it is found in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and flows into both Islamic and Christian philosophy. Through analysis of both primary sources and critical commentaries, students will learn epistemological and metaphysical tools to study texts, and to engage in productive dialogue by focusing on the search for definitions. In Disputation II, students will also explore the use of these tools for examining contemporary ethical topics.

**Disputation I Course Description**

Disputation I is the first part of a two-part course. Disputation I cover selections from Plato, Aristotle, Ghazālī, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. Faculty from both institutions will guide students through an exploration of disputation as it is found in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and flows into both Islamic and Christian philosophy. Through analysis of both primary sources and critical commentaries, students will learn epistemological and metaphysical tools to study texts. The Plato and Aristotle readings will focus on the formation of definitions. Format: seminar. Evaluation: 15-20 page paper, graded by faculty of the student's institution. Intended Audience: Phil MA students; advanced Undergraduate students. [Faculty Consent required; Auditors Excluded; Prerequisite of one course each in Ancient Philosophy and Logic; DSPT and Zaytuna students only]. 3 Units. *NOTE: Disputation I is a prerequisite for Disputation II.*

This course will meet at Zaytua College.

**Required Texts:**

Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Richard McKeon. New York: Modern Library, 2001.  
ISBN-13: 978-0375757990.  
Paperback. \$21.95.

OR

Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle (2 Volumes)*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

ISBN: 9780691016504      \$62.50  
ISBN: 9780691016511      \$62.50

Plato. *Sophist*. Translated by Nicholas P. White. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993. ISBN: 978-0872202023. MSRP: \$11.00.

OR

Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997.  
ISBN: 978-0-87220-349-5  
MSRP: \$60.00

Ibn Rushd. *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*. Translated by Charles E. Butterworth. Brigham Young University, 2001.  
ISBN-10: 9780842524797      \$22.99 (new)  
ISBN-13: 978-0842524797

Ibn Rushd. *Tahafut al Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*. Translated by Simon Van Den Bergh. Publisher: David Brown Book Co (June 1978)  
ISBN-10: 0906094569      \$17.91 – 46.99  
ISBN-13: 978-0906094563

Ghazali. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Translated by Michael Marmura. Brigham Young University; Second Edition, 2nd edition (February 5, 2002)  
ISBN-10: 0842524665      \$46.67  
ISBN-13: 978-0842524667

Other course materials will be available online, or will be posted on Moodle during the week of the assigned reading.

**Grade:**

Paper: 100%

DSPT Students are to abide by the the DSPT’s policies regarding academic honesty as found in the *DSPT Student Handbook*. The grading policy as found in the student handbook, as well as the institutional assessment rubrics, will serve as the guideline for grading. We will review the policies at the beginning of the course.

**Course Requirements**

This seminar course will focus on close reading and in-class discussion of primary text passages. Due to the nature of the course, the grade will be based solely on the student papers, which will be graded by faculty of the school where the student is registered. Students will be expected to participate in the seminar discussions. Class participation should give evidence of careful reading of the texts. During discussion, students will be expected to use the assigned readings to support their interpretation. Students are to listen attentively to fellow students and to engage in genuine conversation. DSPT student papers will be evaluated based on support of a clear thesis statement, coherence of argument, and on effective use of primary and secondary sources. As part of the introduction to the Islamic world-view, DSPT students will be required to listen to and take notes on at least one of the recorded Zaytuna lectures. A copy of the notes will be shown to the DSPT professor(s) for proof of completion of the assignment.

## Course and Institutional Learning Goals

The main course goal for Disputation I is to introduce the students to Ancient and Islamic principles of dialectic and demonstrative logic, as well as application of these principles to select questions. In particular, the course will focus on the following topics:

- Plato's method of definition-formation by collection and division
- Aristotle's principles of logic and dialectic, and some application of these principles in natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics
- Ibn Rushd's legal defense of philosophy and the truths delivered by the philosophical act.
- The deployment of dialectical principles by Ghazali and Ibn Rushd on the topics of:
  - Creation and Eternity of the World
  - Resurrection of the Body
  - Causality

The format of the course, especially the in-class discussions, will give students the opportunity to work toward DSPT's institutional learning goals: integrative thinking, intellectual humility, self-direction, and ability to collaborate. We will have a brief in-class discussion regarding the institutional learning goals, available here: <https://www.dspt.edu/our-mission>

## Outcomes

By the end of Disputation I, students should have a working knowledge of Platonic and Aristotelian requirements for a definition, and some knowledge of how to form a definition. Students should have a knowledge of the difference between Philosopher and Juror in the Islamic tradition, and familiarity with specific topics of concern to early Medieval Islamic Scholars. Students should also have a deeper understanding of the metaphysical commitments of the Greek and Islamic traditions, a facility with epistemological strategies and metaphysical terminology, and a greater awareness of and sensitivity towards the cultural and religious values of all participants.

Students should be able to speak and write intelligently about some aspect of the topics covered. Students will demonstrate subject-appropriate critical thinking skills by offering interpretive insights on the texts, and by assessing contemporary scholarship on the primary texts. Students will demonstrate mastery of the material in class discussion and in the 15-20 page research paper.

## Class Outline

### 1-Course introduction and Ancient World-views

The goal of this week's course is to go over the syllabus, course format, and course expectations. There will be a brief general overview of Platonic/Aristotelian philosophy as a response to the Homeric world-view, and to the pre-Socratic thinkers. A 1-hour seminar-style discussion of a scholarly article or short story will give the students an introduction to the seminar discussion format, and will also challenge them to start looking for definitions in this course, and in daily interactions with others.

### 2-Platonic Definition: *Sophist* and selections from *Phaedrus*

The goal of this week will be to examine Plato's principles of forming definitions by

collection and division. Sections from the *Phaedrus* will give the students a view of Plato's account of the realm of Ideas and the immortality of the soul.

### 3-Aristotle: *Categories, On Interpretation, Metaphysics*

The goal of this week is to provide students with a review and further exploration of Aristotle's ten categories of being, as well as his argument that 'Being' cannot itself be a genus. These principles will provide a foundation for many definitions.

### 4-Aristotle: *Posterior Analytics*

The goal of this week is to examine Aristotle's account of definition and scientific knowledge from causes. Demonstrative scientific knowledge uses definition as the middle term of a syllogism to show how attributes belong to the subject of the syllogism.

### 5-Aristotle: *Topics, Metaphysics*

The goal of this week is to examine Aristotle's account of dialectic, and how dialectic differs from scientific knowledge obtained by demonstration from first principles. Aristotelian dialectic is not exactly the same as Platonic dialectic. Both demonstration and dialectic are required for philosophical inquiry. We will look at some passages from the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle engages in dialectical inquiry (argument from opinions of others, weighs both sides of a question, argument from common principles as contrasted with principles proper to a science).

### 6-Aristotle: readings from Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and/or Metaphysics

The goal of this week's course is to examine select passages where Aristotle goes through the steps of definition-formation, or shows how properties follow from definitions (scientific demonstration). Passages will include: definition of the soul in *De anima*, definition of happiness and virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and possibly passages from the *Metaphysics* on God, eternity, potency, act, accidental and necessary being, and the distinction between practical, productive, and theoretic science.

### 7-Transition day: Islamic World-View

The goal of this day is to offer a presentation of Islamic culture and World-View to provide a context to appreciate the role of great thinkers in the Islamic tradition, including but not necessarily limited to those examined in this course, as well as an understanding of why and how Greek philosophy came to be present in and appreciated by the great thinkers. Specifically we will look at the translation of Greek and Syriac philosophical texts in the Islamic Civilization, who are the philosophers (*falāsifa*) and what distinguishes them from the theologians (*mutakallimūn*).

### 8 and 9 -Ibn Rushd's Legal Ruling on Philosophical Truth and Revelation

The goal of this week is to examine a legal verdict on the validity and obligation of conducting the what Ibn Rushd calls the act of philosophy. Ibn Rushd will make the argument that the act of philosophy is mandatory by the Sacred Law (*sharī'ah*). It is essentially a defense of philosophy. All mistakes of philosophers are deemed to be accidental not essential. More importantly, Ibn Rushd will argue that the truths of philosophy are not in conflict with the truths of revelation. Apparent conflicts are resolved by deploying rules of interpretation.

### 10 and 13 – Ghazālī *Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-falāsifa)*

The goal of these four weeks is to examine Ghazālī's method in engaging the

philosopher's position on the world's pre-eternity, the doctrine of causality, and the doctrine of the soul's immortality and the denial of bodily resurrection. We will also look at Ibn Rushd's responses to Ghazālī's engagement. In our examination, we will pay close attention to the methods of dialectic and disputation deployed by both authors. We will specifically look at how Ghazālī presents the arguments of his opponent, identifies the premises he will engage, and how he will either refute or demonstrate incoherence on the part of the opponent. We will also see how Ghazālī defines an 'Agent' and the role of this definition in his response to the philosopher's conception of causality. For each topic, we will examine Ibn Rushd's response to Ghazālī's positions. In his response, Ibn Rushd will deploy specific dialectical techniques such as accuracy of Ghazālī's presentations, *reductio ad absurdum*, and whether or not the conditions for a demonstrative syllogism have been met.