REACTION PAPERS

1) SIX REACTION PAPERS (2-3 pp. each, 50 points each)

For each unit of the course I will suggest several reaction paper topics based on one—sometimes two—of the assignments from the Sci. Rev. Reader. Although the focus of the reaction papers varies from week to week, in general what I am looking for is an informed, thoughtful, and intelligent response to the claims being made in the chosen reading. In most—but not all—cases, there should be concise summary of the authors central points as a preamble to your response. In general, reaction papers should also show signs of critical analysis whether your response be favorable or unfavorable. And of course the papers should show command of all the ‘small things’ that go into good writing; clean punctuation, coherent sentences, paragraphs with clear thesis sentences, transition sentences, sustained development of argument, etc. The challenge in writing a good reaction paper is conciseness: how can you inform the reader of the author’s central claim and give a critical appraisal all in just two to three pages?

You are required to write at least one reaction paper for each of the three major units of the course (i.e., I. Recovery of an Ancient Nature; II. Reformations of Knowledge; III. Rebellions & A New Scientific Regime). The remaining three reaction papers may be distributed over the topics of the course as you wish—but no more than a total of three reaction papers in any one unit.

For each suggested topic, I will provide a handout outlining the general nature of the assignment. If, however, you prefer to write a reaction paper on some other topic—i.e., on some other assigned reading, or reading you’ve done on your own—you may do so as long as you clear the topic with me in advance. In most cases the reaction papers are due the Thursday of the week after the reading in question was first assigned (e.g., a reaction paper suggested in Week 3 would be due Thursday of week 4).
Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune, whose words jar, nor his reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous. - Ben Johnson (1641)

Suggested Reaction Paper Topics for Unit I: "Recovery of an Ancient Nature"

WEEK 2:
Pseudo-Aristotle, "On the Cosmos"
Principles of Order: Beyond—or perhaps within—Pseudo-Aristotle's description of the physical cosmos (i.e., from the celestial orbs that carry the stars and planets to the structures and phenomena of the terrestrial region), there are a number of fundamental principles that govern the order of his cosmos. What are they?

Pseudo-Aristotle, "On the Cosmos" & Plato, "Timaeus"
Cosmic Comparison: Limiting yourself simply to the description of the physical world, compare and contrast the "world pictures" of Plato and Pseudo-Aristotle. What's similar and what's different?

WEEK 3:
Ptolemy, "Tetrabiblos" and/or Firmicus, "Matheseos"
Gender in the Heavens: The astrology of Ptolemy and/or Firmicus is replete with celestial objects which are assigned "sex" (male, female, hermaphrodite) and "gender" (i.e., masculine or feminine attributes). How are "sex and gender" distributed throughout the heavens? Which planets, signs, houses, etc. are made male and which female? What gendered attributes are associated with them? (Given the limited scope of the reaction paper, the following need not be part of the reaction paper, yet you might think about how the gendering of the heavens reflect gender roles and gender stereotypes in the cultures that produced or assimilated these astrological theories.)

Tuana, "The Weaker Seed . . . ".
Gender in Generation: After providing a brief summary of Aristotle's theory of generation, give me your critical appraisal of Tuana's interpretation of his theory. Do you agree with her assessment of gender bias in Aristotle? Do you find her arguments convincing? And do you think she has correctly identified the evidence of bias (if indeed you think they were biased)?

WEEK 4:
Avicenna, "Medical Canon"
"Doc, I don't feel so well" The depths of winter are upon us, yet the weather is most changeable. Even before mid-terms commence, everyone is getting really tired and stressed. And you've been living on coffee, coke, and stale potato chips for weeks. On the basis of Avicenna's "Canon" lecture, give a diagnosis of what exactly is ailing you (or one of your friends) followed by a properly Galenic therapeutic regime so that you may quickly recover your precious health.

St. Augustine, "The Real Meaning of Genesis"
Christian Science?: What evidence can you extract for St. Augustine in support of the claim that Christian theology could (at times) provide a motivation and indeed a sanction for the scientific study of nature?