

ST504 : HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN THOUGHT : DAVIS

Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA

Course Syllabus : Fall 2008

Please send questions to Prof. Davis at davis@covenant.edu

Texts:

Baird & Kaufmann, *From Plato to Derrida*, 3rd ed., Prentice Hall 2000, ISBN 0-13-021532-5. This is referred to as “B” in the schedule of readings.
Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (the schedule below refers to the Vintage International/Random House, 1983 version; ISBN 0-679-73373-6, but the edition is not crucial).
Plantinga, *God, Freedom & Evil*, Eerdmans, 1974/7, ISBN 0-8028-1731-9.
Smith, Stout & Minkema (eds.), *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, Yale University Press 1995, ISBN 0-300062044 (SSM in the schedule)
Supplemental Reading packet (distributed in class)

Exams:

Final Exam distributed during the final weekend and due (postmarked or e-mailed) two weeks later.

Papers:

Christian Thought Essay. A careful look at the devotional writing of one Christian thinker in light of the intellectual climate of the writer’s age. In addition to summarizing the principal features of the writer’s work, the essay’s thesis will concern the writer’s success at managing the philosophical currents of his or her age along Biblical lines. See below for details. A Prospectus for this essay is due during the second weekend of meetings (**Oct 18**); a Rough Draft of this essay is due during the fourth weekend of meetings (**Nov 15**). The Final Draft is due (postmarked or e-mailed) **Dec. 31**. See below for a full description of this assignment.

Reading Responses. At the beginning of each Friday session students will be required to submit one-page responses for two of the questions for the assigned readings for the weekend. One response must answer a “Summary” question, and the other an “Analytical” question. The two may not deal with the reading (so not the same *letter* question for both--that is, about the same reading). The lowest grade for one of these responses for the semester will be dropped.

Quizzes:

Both Friday evening and Saturday morning sessions will typically begin with a brief quiz over the assigned readings and prior class lectures/discussions. In some cases, quizzes will be replaced with group problem-solving activities. The lowest quiz/group-participation grade will be dropped. (*Note: students may form regular reading groups of no more than four students provided that each member agrees to prepare some form of written précis of their portion of the reading. Group members may work together on some quiz questions.*)

Grading: Grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

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| Final Exam..... | 30% |
| Christian Thought Essay Prospectus..... | 5% |
| Christian Thought Essay Draft..... | 10% |
| Christian Thought Essay Final..... | 15% |
| Quiz/Participation Average..... | 15% |
| Reading Response (average)..... | 25% |

Schedule of Readings & Assignments:

Sept 12 *The Nature of Philosophy and the Pre-Platonics*

Readings: Parmenides, see selection at <http://home.ican.net/~arandall/Parmenides/>
Heraclitus, *Fragments* found at
<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/HERAC.HTM>

Sept 13 Ancient Philosophy:

Plato, Aristotle, Stoics

Readings: Plato, *Euthyphro* (B 8-20), *Apology* (B 21-38), *Republic* VI-VII (B 129-141)
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I-II (B 184-207) *Physics* II (B 151-162)
Epictetus, *Encheridean* (B 257-268)

Oct 17 Early Church Fathers & Neo-Platonism:

Justin, Tertullian, Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius

Readings: Justin, *First Apology* (selections) [handout distributed Sept. 1]
Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* [handout]
Plotinus, *Enneads* I,6, (B 270-276)
Augustine, *Confessions* VIII, XI, *City of God* XII.1-9 (B 286-310)
Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* V.6 (B 313-316)

Writing: **Two Reading Responses for the First Weekend set.**
Christian Thought Essay Prospectus

Oct 18 Medieval Philosophy:

Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Ockham, Molina, Calvin

Readings: Anselm, *Proslogion* and with Gaunilo (B 319-325)
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (selections) (B 337-366 and handout
on analogy)
Ockham, *Summa Logicae* I.14-16 (B 369-374)
Flint (on Molina), *On God's Providence* [handout]
Calvin, *Institutes* I.i-x [on-line]

Writing: **Two Reading Responses for the Second Weekend set.**

- Oct 31** **Early Modern Philosophy:**
Descartes, Hobbes, Pascal, Locke
 Readings: Descartes, *Meditations* (B 387-430)
 Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.12-15 (B 447-459)
 Pascal, *Pensees* (B 476-482)
 Locke, *Of Civil Government* [handout]
 Writing: **Two Reading Responses for the Third Weekend set.**
- Nov 1** *Leibniz, Edwards, Hume*
 Readings: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* 1-14 (B 595-605)
 Edwards, "On Being, "Religious Affections," "Original Sin" (SSM 9-13,
 137-171, 223-243)
 Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* II-VII, X (B 703-733,
 746-757)
- Nov 14** **Late Modern Philosophy:**
Kant, Hegel
 Readings: Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* §40-§56 (B 817-830)
 Kant, *Foundation for the Metaphysics of Morals* I-II (B 852-882)
 Hegel, from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* B.IV.A (B 898-903)
 Writing: **Two Reading Responses for the Fourth Weekend set.**
- Nov 15** *Kierkegaard, Marx, Mill*
 Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling, Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (B
 953-971)
 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Communist
 Manifesto* (B 975-993)
 Mill, *Utilitarianism* II (B 912-925)
 Writing: **Christian Thought Essay Rough Draft**
- Dec 5** **Contemporary Philosophy:**
Existentialism
 Readings: Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* I.1-3, *Twilight of the Idols, The Anti-
 Christ* I.1-7, 62 (B 1006-1027)
 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "The Myth of Sisyphus" (pp. 119-123) and
 "An Absurd Reasoning" (pp. 1-65)
 Writing: **Two Reading Responses for the Final Weekend set**
- Dec 6** *Analytic Philosophy, Postmodernism*
 Readings: Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (B 1101-1117)
 Ayer, from *Language, Truth and Logic* (B 1122-1130)
 Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" [handout]
 Taylor, "Postmodern A/Theology" [handout]
 Plantinga, *God, Freedom & Evil*, pp. 1-64
 Writing: Final Exam distributed
- Dec 20:** **Final Exam due (midnight by e-mail or postmarked)**
Dec 31: **Christian Thought Essay (midnight by e-mail or postmarked)**

CHRISTIAN THOUGHT ESSAY : Full description:

Purpose of this essay: Christian thinking about the faith and the relationship between faith and life unavoidably reflects the intellectual climate of its time period. If only because thinking takes place in human language, concepts and idioms, even the most careful Christian writers have had to wrestle with uncritically adopting the world's categories, assumptions and values at the very heart of their devotional lives. This essay will give the student the opportunity to join in this struggle as a concerned spectator, reading a renowned author focusing attention on the author's success in dealing with the influence of their own intellectual climate.

Target Length: Eight pages is the approximate target for the Final Draft, but the nature of the topic demands that this not be thought of as a maximum. If the paper exceeds 10 pages it should be obvious that the length was necessary. Because it is likely that the Rough Draft will suggest fruitful lines of development, a draft between six and eight pages will be acceptable.

Style: Chicago Style (footnotes, bibliography, etc.) is greatly preferred.

Reading Requirement, Length: In order to comment seriously on an author's success in using without falling prey to the limitations of their intellectual environment, it will be necessary to read *at least* 100 pages of an author's work. (Because some editions have very small or large print, the minimum might be more clearly specified as 30,000 words. The idea is for comments to be based on an adequate foundation. Err on the side of reading too much, not too little.)

Reading Requirement, Content: Although systematic academic writing must struggle with philosophical currents and baggage, it is self-consciously written for an intellectual audience and thus it is often difficult to determine whether the author adopted biblically suspect concepts and idioms for the sake of the audience. The same can't be said, however, for devotional writing and works prepared exclusively for other believers (letters, prayers, sermons, diaries, journals, devotionals, etc.). In order to simplify the task of analysis, it will be important that the readings be clearly intended for an exclusively Christian audience. (The best data will come from writing intended for a small audience of intimate friends or parishioners, or even written only for the author's edification.)

Topics: The choice of the Christian author is left to the student, but students would be advised to choose an author who worked in an intellectual climate with which the student has some familiarity. (For example, a student with little knowledge of the intellectual climate of 18th century New England shouldn't attempt to assess Jonathan Edwards' success at managing the problems posed by the prevailing worldview.) Here is a short list of suggestions that purposely omits some obvious possibilities:

Augustine's *Confessions* (the early books)
Anselm's *Monologion*;
Teresa of Avila's *The Life of Teresa of Avila*
Blaise Pascal's *Pensees*
Samuel Rutherford's *Letters*
Soren Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*; (etc.)

Thesis Requirement: Even though the focus is on personal writings, every essay must have a thesis *about the author's success at using without being used by the available conceptual resources*. It will be necessary to do more than summarize. You will be arguing for a conclusion about the author's success.

Prospectus: One to two paragraphs identifying (a) the author to be considered, (b) the content basis for the analysis, (c) a justification for believing that the content basis will be adequate for the analysis attempted, and (d) the reason for selecting this author and content basis. The Prospectus is due by e-mail Feb. 6 (Friday) and is likely to be returned with comments on Mar. 1. (Students without access to e-mail should provide an electronic copy to John Sowell for e-mailing.)

Rough Draft: A very serious six to eight page draft of the essay is due during the fourth weekend. Extensive comments on this draft will be returned on or before the final weekend. While it is acceptable to leave one or two sections of the draft incomplete, the draft must have a thesis and any gaps in the text should be accompanied by an explanation of what the author expects to have happen in the section. The more complete the draft is, the more helpful and focused the comments can be, so aim for a draft that isn't very drafty.

Reading Response Questions Sets:

The First Weekend Set : Due at the start of class *on Oct 17:*

1. Summary Questions (complete 1)

- a. Explain the roles that reason and change play in the thinking of Parmenides and Heraclitus *in the readings assigned*.
- b. Explain the point of Socrates' lengthy response to Euthyphro's suggestion that piety is what all the gods love.
- c. Explain how the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic* reinforces Socrates' defense of himself in Plato's *Apology*.
- d. Explain what Aristotle means by a "virtue," and why it is a central concern in his ethical theory.
- e. Explain how Epictetus would have you counsel a grieving mother whose child has just died of cancer.

2. Analytical Questions (complete 1)

- a. Assess the claim that Parmenides and Heraclitus offer *contradictory* accounts of reality, one positing uniformity and order to the exclusion of change, and the other positing flux to the exclusion of order.
- b. Suppose a Christian District Attorney found himself in a situation today analogous to Euthyphro's (father implicated in the death of a servant). Should the D.A. prosecute (or press charges against) his father? Justify your answer, anticipating likely objections.
- c. Socrates gives a number of reasons he doesn't fear death. Assess the adequacy of his reasons.
- d. Response to the claim that the "fruit of the Spirit" that Paul describes in Galatians 5 is best understood as a set of *virtues* in Aristotle's sense of the term.
- e. Respond to the claim that Calvinism shares with Stoicism a fatalistic attitude about the future: since all is determined ahead of time, we should only concern ourselves with our attitude about the inevitable.

The Second Weekend Set: Due at the start of class on Oct 18:

1. Summary Questions (complete 1)

- a. Compare and contrast the use that Justin and Tertullian make of non-Christian (pagan) philosophers in their arguments.
- b. Explain what Augustine and Boethius mean by “time” and how they understand God’s relationship to time.
- c. Explain one of Gaunilo’s objections to Anselm’s treatment of the fool’s rejection of God’s existence and Anselm’s reply to the objection.
- d. Explain Thomas Aquinas’ answer to the question, “Can man attain happiness by his natural powers?”
- e. Explain Ockham’s position on the problem of “universals.”

2. Analytical Questions (complete 1)

- a. To what extent should a Christian today imitate Justin’s practice of insisting that Christian doctrine is very similar to doctrine’s espoused by the broader culture?
- b. Assess the strength of Augustine’s reasons for concluding that time can’t be the measure of the motion of heavenly bodies.
- c. Assess the success of Anselm’s argument *given* the purpose he hopes he it will meet.
- d. Critique Molina’s “middle knowledge” solution to the problem of providence and human freedom.
- e. Critique Calvin’s position on the non-Christian’s knowledge of God.

The Third Weekend Set: Due on Oct 31:

1. Summary Questions (complete 1)

- a. Explain the final position that Descartes reaches concerning the relationship between his mind and his body and concerning *what* he is.
- b. Explain what Hobbes means by a “law of nature” and the status of moral obligations in his account of “natural law.”
- c. Explain Leibniz’s account of how miracles are possible (in the *Discourse*).
- d. Explain Edwards’ answer to the problem of finding a mark that distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever (in *The Religious Affections*).
- e. Explain Hume’s analysis of the origin of our idea of the necessary connection between cause and effect.

2. Analytical Questions (complete 1)

- a. Critique either of the arguments that Descartes develops for God’s existence (in the third and fifth meditations).
- b. Respond to the claim that Hobbes and Calvin share the same pessimistic view of human nature.
- c. Critique Leibniz’s reasoning to the conclusion that this is the best of all possible worlds.
- d. Critique Edward’s explanation of the change that befell Adam (& Eve) as a result of the first sin (in Part IV of *Original Sin*).
- e. Respond to Hume’s conclusion that it would never be reasonable to believe that a miracle had occurred.

The Fourth Weekend Set: Due on Nov 14

1. Summary Questions (complete 1)

- a. Explain Kant's solution (in §53-54) to the antinomy of freedom and determinism.
- b. Explain what Kant means by insisting that we must always treat humanity *as an end* and never *as a means*.
- c. Explain why Kierkegaard focuses on the story of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*.
- d. Explain two of the senses in which capitalism *alienates* the laborer (according to Marx in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts").
- e. Explain how Mill handles any two of the criticisms of his Utilitarianism that he treats in *Utilitarianism*.

2. Analytical Questions (complete 1)

- a. Critique Kant's treatment of God.
- b. Assess the usefulness of Kant's "Categorical Imperative for making moral choices.
- c. Critique Kierkegaard's reasons for claiming the "Truth is Subjectivity."
- d. Respond to the claim that America is really a Communist country because all of Marx's substantial predictions for the Communist utopia have been realized in America's welfare state.
- e. Critique Mill's account of "individuality" as an ideal.

Final Weekend Set: Due on Dec 5

1. Summary Questions (complete 1)

- a. Explain Nietzsche's theory about the role of *ressentiment* in the development of the concept of "evil."
- b. Explain what Camus means by "absurdity" and how Sisyphus illuminates his contentions about the human condition.
- c. Explain the "verification" criterion that Ayer settles on (in *Language, Truth & Logic*) for determining whether a statement is nonsensical or not.
- d. Explain why Rorty insists that he *isn't* a relativist. (Write this so that it would be intelligible to a Sunday School class that thinks "relativism" is the main threat to Christian truth today.)
- e. Summarize Plantinga's reasons for concluding that the "atheological" argument fails.

2. Analytical Questions (complete 1)

- a. Respond to Nietzsche's complaint that Christian morality is an anti-natural, diseased morality.
- b. Write a letter to a non-Christian friend who has expressed deep appreciation for Camus' tough-minded working out of the implications of God's non-existence.
- c. Identify and explain the single most significant departure from orthodoxy in Taylor's "Erring: A Postmodern A/theology" and justify your choice.
- d. Respond to the claim (typical of Rorty) that the evangelical church has willingly allowed the pursuit of "Truth" to become a fetish that leads us to sacrifice community for the sake of a modernistic myth.
- e. Assess the adequacy of Plantinga's answer to the question, "Was It within God's Power to Create Any Possible World He Pleas'd?"

Late Work

1. Unless otherwise stated in the syllabus, all late work will be penalized one letter grade for each day it is late (excluding Sundays).
2. Late penalties for late rough drafts (when assigned) will be assessed against the grade for the final draft of the paper.