

Instructor: Adam Kotsko
E-mail: a.kotsko@shimer.edu
Office: 219 Office phone: 312-235-3547

Course Description

This course covers foundational texts for the Western philosophical and theological traditions. The texts selected cover a wide range of time periods and genres, showcasing the diversity of these two discourses as well as their complex interrelations.

Course Requirements

Each student will pick one work about which to write an interpretative essay. You will choose a question that the work raises for you, and use close reading of the work to analyze how the work's author addresses the question. Your paper should be critical as well—in other words, you should assess the strength of the answer your author gives—but your critical evaluation must follow, not replace, the interpretive portion of the paper. The paper should be five to eight pages long. **This first paper is due at the beginning of the last session before Dean's Break (October 5).**

A final paper is due on the last meeting of the semester. For this paper, choose one idea or topic which has been addressed by more than one author and which you find interesting and significant. Examine the ways in which at least two (and no more than three) of the authors have addressed this idea and how they have affected your views. The second paper should be six to ten pages long. Late papers are not accepted. **Final papers are due at the beginning of the final day of class (December 1),** and students will be expected to discuss them during that session.

The centerpiece of any Shimer class is conversation. For a group and the individuals in it to make progress through conversation requires that all participants attend consistently and are on time. Excellent attendance is, thus, only the minimal expectation for the class. **Students who miss four class sessions will be subject to dropping or failing the course.**

Students will be graded based in roughly equal amounts on their written work and their class participation.

Required Course Readings

Anselm, *Proslogion*
Aristotle, *Metaphysics*
Augustine, *Confessions*
Bible: Genesis (Alter translation); John and 1 Corinthians (New Jerusalem Bible)
Descartes, *Meditations on First Theology*
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*
Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*
Pascal, *Pensées*
Plato, *Apology, Phaedo, Phaedrus*
Teresa of Avila, *Life of St. Theresa*
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* (selections; handout)

Course Objectives

1. Demonstrate ability to understand seminal works of philosophy, theology, and religion.
2. Show ability to summarize complex arguments, describe the logic of such arguments, and explain how rhetorical form shapes an argument.
3. Analyze, summarize, and discuss sacred texts thoughtfully and respectfully.
4. Demonstrate awareness of the intended and unintended ambiguities in prose narratives.
5. Cite the advantages and disadvantages of precision in a text.

Tentative Course and Reading Schedule

The Hebrew Scriptures

August 25	Thursday	Genesis 1-4
August 29	Monday	Genesis 5-11
August 31	Wednesday	Genesis 12-22
September 1	Thursday	Genesis 23-36
September 5	Monday	<i>Labor Day—No class</i>
September 7	Wednesday	Genesis 37-50

Classical Greek Philosophy

September 8	Thursday	Plato, <i>Apology</i>
September 12	Monday	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> 57a-88c
September 14	Wednesday	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> 88d-118a
September 15	Thursday	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> 227a-257b
September 19	Monday	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> 257c-279c
September 21	Wednesday	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> , book Lambda (a.k.a. 12)

Origins of Christianity

September 22	Thursday	New Testament: 1 Corinthians
September 26	Monday	New Testament: John 1-12
September 28	Wednesday	New Testament: John 13-21

Foundations of Medieval Christianity

September 29	Thursday	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , books 1-3
October 3	Monday	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , books 4-6
October 5	Wednesday	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 7-9; First paper due
October 6	Thursday	<i>Dean's Break—No class</i>

October 10 Monday Augustine, *Confessions*, books 10-11
 October 12 Wednesday Augustine, *Confessions*, books 12-13

Medieval Thought: Scholasticism and Mysticism

October 13 Thursday Anselm, *Proslogion*
 October 17 Monday Gaunilo and Anselm's exchange (follows *Proslogion*)
 October 19 Wednesday Aquinas, *ST* 1.1 a. 1 q. 2; *SCG* I.1-8
 October 20 Thursday Teresa of Avila, *Life*, chs. 1-3, 8-11, 14
 October 24 Monday Teresa of Avila, *Life*, chs. 16-21, 37-38, 40

Beginnings of Modern Philosophy

October 26 Wednesday Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1 and 2
 October 27 Thursday Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 3
 October 31 Monday Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 4
 November 2 Wednesday Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 5-6

The Problem of Faith in the Modern Age

November 3 Thursday Pascal, *Pensées*, §§110-188
 November 7 Monday Pascal, *Pensées*, §§418-51, 832-50
 November 9 Wednesday Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Preface, Exordium, Eulogy
 November 10 Thursday Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Preliminary Expectoration
 November 14 Monday Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problema I
 November 16 Wednesday Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problema II
 November 17 Thursday Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problema III, Epilogue

Philosophy of the Enlightenment

November 21 Monday Locke, *Essay*, Epistle; Book 1; Book 2, chs. 1-2
 November 23 Wednesday *Holiday Break—No class*
 November 24 Thursday *Holiday Break—No class*
 November 28 Monday Locke, *Essay*, Book 3, chs. 1-3; Book 4, chs. 1, 5-6
 November 30 Wednesday Locke, *Essay*, Book 4, chs. 9-10, 18
 December 1 Thursday **Final papers due; discussion of final papers**