

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

History/Religious Studies 208

WESTERN INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY TO 1500

Spring 2022

TTh, 9:30-10:45 a.m., 1641 Mosse Humanities

Dr. Eric Carlsson

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Office: 5217 Mosse Humanities Building

Office hours: Tuesdays 11:00-1:00 and by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces some central themes in the history of what retroactively came to be known as “Western” thought and religion as it developed from antiquity to the dawn of the modern era. We will explore how a variety of individuals and communities have grappled with some of the vital questions of human existence: Who are we as humans and what is our place in the cosmos? Does the divine exist and, if so, what is its nature? What is wrong with the world and how can evil be overcome? Are there universal standards for personal ethics and social justice? What defines a flourishing life? Is it even possible to find answers to such riddles and, if so, how?

Such first-order questions may seem abstract but they have been posed as people have confronted practical problems in social and political life, and so this course will pay attention to some of the varied historical contexts in which they have emerged. Our geographic focus will rest on the Mediterranean world, moving northwards into Europe towards the end of the course. We will start by analyzing some prominent intellectual movements in Greco-Roman antiquity. We then turn to ancient Israel and early Christianity and probe some key themes in Jewish and Christian thought. In the last section of the course we will consider how thinkers from late antiquity to the Renaissance drew on classical and biblical sources to engage some pressing issues of their day—and how in the process they forged a diverse and discordant intellectual tradition that continues to profoundly shape the contemporary world.

Course Objectives

The main objective of this course is to spark and nourish your fascination with pre-modern Western intellectual history and religious thought. If you invest time, thought, and hard work in the course, you will also improve your ability to:

- identify and explain the significance of some key movements, thinkers, and texts in the emergence of the Western intellectual tradition
- interpret complex writings from the past contextually, critically, and empathetically
- construct strong historical arguments based on evidence and careful reasoning
- compose clear analytical and argumentative written prose

Course Credit

This three-credit course meets for two 75-minute periods each week over the semester and carries the expectation that you will spend an average of three hours outside of class for each class meeting. In other words, plan to allot about six hours per week for reading, writing papers, studying for exams, and preparing for class meetings. Some weeks the work load will be heavier; other weeks it will be lighter.

Course Requirements

1. Attend and be prepared to participate in all class meetings. In opting to take this course you are committing yourself to come to class regularly. I will take attendance throughout the semester. If you test positive for Covid-19 and/or need to quarantine, contract another illness, or face an emergency that forces you to miss a class session, please email me as soon as possible. More than two unexcused absences will lower your class participation grade.

We will discuss assigned readings during most meeting and on a few days we will spend most of the class period in discussion. You are expected to read all required texts closely beforehand and to come ready to voice your insights and questions and to engage with those of your classmates. *You must bring a copy of the assigned readings, in either paper or electronic form, to class on the day they will be discussed.*

You will receive a participation grade (on a 10-point scale) three times during the semester: on February 24, April 5, and May 5. Attendance and class participation count for 10% of your final grade.

2. Write four 250-300-word responses to assigned readings. Questions for each reading will be posted on Canvas. You will have the option to write on most texts and may choose which readings you respond to. If you wish, you may write more than four response papers; in that case the four highest grades will count. The first response must be turned in by February 10, the second by March 10, the third by April 7, the fourth by May 5. Response papers will be graded using the following criteria:

- Did you answer the question clearly and directly?
- Does your response reflect a close, thoughtful reading of the whole of the relevant text(s)?
- Is your paper based on the text itself rather than generalizations or things you may have read about the text elsewhere (such as the Internet)?
- Is it written in clear and concise prose, free of typos and grammatical errors?

To get credit for a response, leave it on Canvas before the class when the reading is due; the submission folder closes at 9:30 a.m. sharp. No late papers accepted. Together, the four responses make up 15% of your final grade.

3. Write two analytical essays of 1500-1700 words (4-5 pages) each. You will submit two versions of each essay. On February 15 you will turn in a complete draft of your first paper. The following week you will meet individually with a Writing Fellow for comments and feedback on your draft (see below for more on Writing Fellows). On March 1 you will submit a revised version of your essay. The schedule for the second paper is similar: first draft due on April 12 meeting with your Writing Fellow the next week, revised version due on April 26. Each part of the process (draft, meeting, revision) will form part of your final grade on each essay. Details about the process and evaluation criteria will come with the first essay assignment. The first paper counts for 15% and the second for 20% of your course grade.

4. Write an in-class midterm exam on Thursday, March 24 and a final exam on Wednesday, May 11 at 2:45-4:45 pm. The midterm will include several short (one-paragraph) identifications and a longer essay. The final will be similar but will include an additional essay or text analysis section. You will receive a study guide with potential identifications and essay questions one week before each test. The midterm counts for 15% and the final for 25% of your final grade.

Grading Scale

All assignments and your final course grade will be calculated using the following scale:

93-100% = A
88-92% = AB

83-87% = B
78-82% = BC

70-77% = C
60-69% = D

0-59% = F

Honors Credit

Students taking the course for Honors credit should consult with me by the week of February 21 to discuss options for an Honors project. These include expanding the second analytical paper, writing a research paper on another topic, or doing a project involving art or media. For Honors students, the course grade will be determined as follows: class participation 10%; responses 15%; first essay 15%; midterm 15%; Honors project 25%; final exam 20%.

Communication and Office Hours

I welcome meeting with students outside of class time. You are encouraged to come to office hours at any time during the semester, whether to discuss a question or problem you've encountered in the course, to get help on a paper, to explore an idea, or simply to chat. I hold regular office hours in 5217 Humanities on Tuesdays, 11:00-1:00. If you have a schedule conflict then, let me know and we can arrange another time to meet. In general the best way to reach me is by email (eric.carlsson@wisc.edu). I check email regularly and will try to respond within 24 hours. Often I can reply sooner than that, but on weekends response time may be up to 48 hours.

Writing Fellows

We are fortunate to have four Writing Fellows working with us this semester: Thekla Ketcher (ketcher@wisc.edu), Sarina Boley (srboley@wisc.edu), Megan Bratland (mbratland@wisc.edu), and Rhianna Prine (rprine@wisc.edu). These undergraduates are skilled writers who have been chosen through a campus-wide selection process and given intensive training on how to offer constructive criticism during the writing process. Each of you will work with one of the Fellows individually on your two papers. They will read your polished drafts closely, offer detailed comments, and meet with you individually to make suggestions for how your drafts can be improved.

Experienced writers know that all good writing involves extensive revising. The most effective way of re-seeing one's work is by getting thoughtful feedback from an intelligent reader. That is what the Writing Fellows provide. They are not experts in the subject matter of the course and will generally not offer substantive critiques of your paper. Nor will they grade your papers. Instead, they will help you see where your argument and presentation could be clearer and more effective and they will flag logical and conceptual problems in your prose. All of us, no matter how much experience we have as writers, can benefit greatly from the kind of thoughtful engagement with our work that the Fellows will offer you. I urge you to make the most of this opportunity.

Policy on Late Papers

Because the Writing Fellows will be reading papers on a tight schedule, you must submit them on time. If you face a situation that makes it impossible for you to complete your paper on schedule, please contact me immediately. Unless arrangements for an extension have been made with me at least 24 hours before the due date, late papers will be deducted 10% for each day they are late.

The History Lab

The History Lab is an excellent resource for undergraduates writing history papers. Trained Ph.D. students in history will help you regardless of your stage in the writing process—formulating a thesis, developing your argument, citing sources, revising your drafts, and more. The History Lab is located in 4255 Mosse Humanities Building. Sign up for a one-on-one appointment, either in-person or online, at <https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>.

Electronic Devices

You may bring a laptop or tablet to class to access readings posted to Canvas and to take notes. (Note, however, that a growing body of research suggests that students process information more thoughtfully, grasp concepts better, focus their attention more sharply, and—unsurprisingly—earn better grades when they take notes with pen and paper rather than on a computer.) You may use your device for Hist/RS 208 purposes only. Please turn off email and other notifications. Cell phones should be silenced and put away before class starts.

Academic Integrity

UW-Madison takes academic integrity very seriously. No form of cheating or plagiarism—representing somebody else’s work as your own—will be tolerated in this course. In your papers you must cite sources carefully, whether you repeat someone else’s exact words or paraphrase or draw on their ideas. If you have specific questions about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please speak with me or consult http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html. Penalties for plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and other forms of cheating range from failing an assignment or a course to being expelled from the university. For university policies on academic misconduct, see <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/>.

Learning Accessibility

If you have an instructional need that requires accommodations, please inform me of this at the start of the semester or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will then work directly with you or coordinate with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

UW-Madison Statement on Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. UW-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background—people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Course Texts

The following required books are available for purchase at local and online bookstores and are also on reserve at College Library in Helen C. White Hall. The primary sources come in multiple English translations and editions, but *please use and cite the following versions*:

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. and ed. Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (Penguin, 2003)

Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert Dobbin (Penguin, 2008)

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Ignatius Press, 2012)

The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, trans. and ed. Betty Radice, rev. by M. T. Clanchy (Penguin, 2003)

Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, ed. A. H. T. Levi and trans. Betty Radice (Penguin, 1994)

You will also need an English translation of the Bible, including both the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament. I recommend the New Revised Standard Version, but any scholarly translation is acceptable for this course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

NOTE: Reading assignments marked with an asterisk (*) and all recommended readings are posted on Canvas. There you will also find full bibliographical information for the required and recommended readings.

Jan 25 Course Introduction

I. The Greeks, the Gods, and the Good Life

Jan 27 The Break with Myth
*Homer, *The Iliad*, Book I
*Xenophanes, fragments

Recommended: Sarah Broadie, "Rational Theology"; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 305-311

Feb 1 Socrates and the Sophists
Plato, *Apology* (entire)

Recommended: Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 311-21; Barbara Cassin, "Sophists"; Monique Canto-Sperber, "Socrates"

Feb 3 Plato: Knowledge and the World of Ideas
*Plato, "Parable of the Cave," from *The Republic*
Plato, *Phaedo*, 116-45

Recommended: T. H. Irwin, *Classical Thought*, 85-117

Feb 8 Plato: The Soul and the Afterlife
Plato, *Phaedo*, 145-99; it's OK to read just the editor's summaries on pages 145-175
*Plato, "The Myth of Er," from *The Republic*

Recommended: Julia Annas, *Plato*, 65-76; Michael L. Morgan, "Plato and Greek Religion"; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 321-337

Feb 10 Aristotle's World
*Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle*, 18-25, 47-50, 70-75, 91-100
*Aristotle, selections from *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*

Recommended: T. H. Irwin, *Classical Thought*, 118-144

Feb 15 Skepticism and Epicureanism
*Lucretius, selections from *The Nature of Things*

Recommended: A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 75-106; Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism*, 37-51, 68-81; Stephen Greenblatt, "The Answer Man"; Jim Hinch, "Why Stephen Greenblatt Is Wrong"

RESPONSE 1 DUE

ESSAY 1 POLISHED
DRAFT DUE

- Feb 17 Stoicism: Philosophy and the Good Life
 Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book I: 1-3, 6, 9, 12-21, 24; Book II: 2, 5, 8, 10, 14, 18, 22
- Recommended:* Brad Inwood, *Stoicism*, 1-26; Carrie Sheffield, "Want an Unconquerable Mind?"; James Stockdale, "Courage Under Fire"

II. Peoples of God: Jews and Christians

- Feb 22 Israel, History, and Biblical Narrative PAPER CONFERENCES
 Genesis 1-4, 12, 15, 17; recommended: chs. 25, 27, 28, 37, 39-50 THIS WEEK
- Recommended:* Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Hebrew Bible and History"; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 23-46; Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch*, 19-38; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 113-133
- Feb 24 Covenant and Torah
 Exodus 1-6, 12-14, 19-20, 32; Deuteronomy 1-3, 6, 28-30
- Recommended:* Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures*, 40-61; Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch*, 38-63
- Mar 1 Guest Lecture: Aidyn Osgood REVISED ESSAY 1 DUE
- Mar 3 Kingship, Exile, and Prophecy
 Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 8, 12; 2 Samuel 5, 7, 11-12; 1 Kings 8, 11-12; 2 Kings 17:1-23; Hosea 1-3; Isaiah 1:1-2:4; 11; 52-53; Jeremiah 30-31; Ezekiel 36:16-37:14
- Recommended:* Jacob Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began*, 55-66; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, 3-31; Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 156-165
- Mar 8 Jesus and Judaism
 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus*, 1-56
 The Gospel According to Mark 1-4; The Gospel According to John 1:1-2:12
- Recommended:* Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 16-52
- Mar 10 Jesus and the Kingdom of God RESPONSE 2 DUE
 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus*, 57-114
 The Gospel According to Mark 11-16
- Recommended:* J. B. Green, "Kingdom of God/Heaven"; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, 9-20

-- SPRING BREAK --

Mar 22 Paul and the Gentile Mission
*N. T. Wright & Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World*, 366-395
Acts of the Apostles 1-2, 9:1-31; 15:1-35; 17:16-34; Paul's Letter to the Galatians
(entire); Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 15

Recommended: Klaus Haacker, "Paul's Life"; Tom Holland, *Dominion*, 80-106

Mar 24 MIDTERM EXAM

III. Jerusalem, Athens, and the Making of an Intellectual Tradition

Mar 29 The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism
*Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 211-229
*Selections from the Mishnah and the Talmud

Recommended: Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World*, 117-141

Mar 31 Christianity and Classical Culture
David Vincent Meconi, S.J., "Introduction" to Ignatius Critical Edition of *Confessions*
St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3-49

Recommended: Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 162-185;
Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, 1-30

Apr 5 Monasticism and Saint Augustine
St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 50-88, 101-128

Recommended: Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 17-25; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 151-175

Apr 7 Augustine and the Shaping of Western Christianity RESPONSE 3 DUE
St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 129-160, 194-262 (Bk VII is recommended)

Recommended: Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 58-77; Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*,
101-128

Apr 12 Culture and Learning in the "Dark Ages" ESSAY 2 POLISHED
*Einhard, selections from *Life of Charlemagne* DRAFT DUE
*Rosamond McKitterick, "The Carolingian Renaissance of Culture and Learning"

Recommended: Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*,
66-75

Apr 14 Scholastic Culture and the Individual
Peter Abelard, *The Story of His Misfortunes*, 3-43
Heloise, Letter to Abelard, 47-55

Recommended: R. N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, 103-151

- Apr 19 Islam, Judaism, and the Recovery of Aristotle PAPER CONFERENCES
 *Moses Maimonides, selections from *Guide for the Perplexed* THIS WEEK
 *St. Thomas Aquinas, selections from *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*

 Recommended: Marcia L. Colish, Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 129-159; G. K. Chesterton, Saint Thomas Aquinas, 66-96
- Apr 21 Women and Mysticism
 *Hildegard of Bingen, selections from *Vita and Scivias*
 *Julian of Norwich, selections from *Revelations of Divine Love*

 Recommended: Frances Beer, Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages, 1-13
- Apr 26 The Individual and Human Nature in the Renaissance ESSAY 2 REVISED
 *Petrarch, *The Ascent of Mont Ventoux* VERSION DUE
 *Pico della Mirandola, selections from *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

 Recommended: Charles G. Nauert, Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe, 8-24; Charles Trinkaus, In Our Image and Likeness, 505-526
- Apr 28 Artistic Expressions
 *Giorgio Vasari, selections from *The Lives of the Artists*

 Recommended: Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath, "Artists and Humanists"
- May 3 Currents of Reform
 *Thomas à Kempis, selections from *The Imitation of Christ*
 Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, 3-25, 29-37, 63-67

 Recommended: Diarmaid MacCulloch, Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years, 551-603; Erika Rummel, "Voices of Reform from Hus to Erasmus"
- May 5 Humanism and Reformation RESPONSE 4 DUE
 Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, 86-94, 104-116, 125-134

 Recommended: Willam J. Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism"; Alister McGrath, The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation, 32-68

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2:45-4:45 P.M.