

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

History/Religious Studies 208

WESTERN INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY TO 1500

Fall 2024

Tues & Thurs, 4:00-5:15 pm, 1651 Mosse Humanities

Prof. Eric Carlsson

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Office: 5217 Mosse Humanities Building

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

Course Description

This course introduces some central themes in the history of what retroactively came to be called “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? 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.

Learning Outcomes

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

Requisites, Course Attributes, and Workload

To enroll in this course, students must have sophomore standing or completed three credits in History or Religious Studies. This is a three-credit, intermediate-level, Humanities- or Social Science-breadth course and confers Liberal Arts & Sciences credit in L&S.

The 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.

Course Requirements

1. Class participation: Read all assigned texts, attend class, complete in-class writing exercises, and contribute actively to class discussions. In opting to take this course you are committing yourself to be present and an active participant in class. I will take attendance throughout the semester. If you become ill 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 meetings. On occasion you will also do brief in-class writing exercises based on assigned readings to spur thought and 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 paper copy of texts to class on the day they will be discussed.*

Class participation will be evaluated using the History Department’s standard rubric:

Excellent (93-100)	Good (83-92)	Competent (70-82)	Inadequate (60-69)	Fail (0-59)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastery over readings and previous discussion • Explores questions rigorously • Comes to class with interpretations and questions • Engages others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows readings well • Consistent preparation and involvement • Offers analysis of texts in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic grasp of reading • Mostly offers facts or surface-level interpretations • Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient command of reading • Attempts to contribute facts or interpretations when called but unable to offer substance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uninvolved • Unexcused • Disruptive

You will receive a participation grade (on a 10-point scale) three times during the semester: on October 8, November 7, and December 10. Attendance and class participation count for 15% of your final grade.

2. Write four 250-300-word responses to assigned readings. All prompts are posted on Canvas. You will have the option to write on most texts and you may choose which readings you respond to. If you wish, you may write up to seven response papers; if you do, the four highest grades will count. Responses will be graded using the following criteria:

- Did you answer the question clearly and directly?
- Does your response reflect a close, careful 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, submit it on Canvas by 3:00 p.m. the day the text will be discussed in class. No late papers accepted. You must complete the first response by September 26, the second by October 22, the third by November 12, and the fourth by December 10. Together, the four responses make up 15% of your final grade.

3. Write two in-class midterm exams on October 3 and October 31, respectively. The exams will consist of short identifications, a textual analysis, and/or a longer essay. You will receive a study guide one week before each test. Each midterm counts for 15% of your course grade.

4. Write an analytical paper of 750-900 words (about three pages) due on Canvas at 10:00 p.m. on November 20. Prompts will be based on texts and themes we will have discussed in class. The paper counts for 15% of your course grade.

5. Write a final exam on Friday, December 13 at 5:05-7:05 p.m. The exam will be cumulative and will ask you to discuss themes from the entire course. You will receive details about the exam format, which will be similar to the midterms, and a study guide on December 5. The final makes up 25% of your course grade.

Grading Scale

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

93-100% = A	83-87% = B	70-77% = C	0-59% = F
88-92% = AB	78-82% = BC	60-69% = D	

Honors Credit

Students taking the course for honors credit will pursue an independent project arising out of course topics and their own interests. This may take the form of a research paper or scholarly review. For those interested in literature, art, film, or other media, there are other possibilities. If you are taking the course for honors, please come to my office hours by October 2 to discuss options, determine a project, and set a schedule for completing it.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, you agree to uphold the high academic standards of UW–Madison. All work you submit must be your own. If you draw on outside sources in your response papers, you must cite them carefully, whether you repeat someone else’s exact words or paraphrase or draw on their ideas. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Submitting work generated by AI tools, such as ChatGPT, also constitutes plagiarism. If you cheat on an exam or turn in plagiarized work, you will earn a zero on the assignment, an academic misconduct report will be filed, and you may fail the course. For university policies on academic misconduct, see <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/>.

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 an assignment, to explore an idea, or simply to chat. I hold regular office hours in 5217 Mosse Humanities on Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. If you have a schedule conflict then, let me know and we can arrange another time to meet. 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.

Electronic Devices

A large body of research shows that students process information more thoughtfully, grasp concepts better, focus their attention more sharply, and as a result earn better grades when they take notes with pen and paper rather than on a computer. For this reason, and because the temptation to get distracted by matters unrelated to class is great, I strongly encourage you to refrain from using laptops during class. If you do choose to take notes on a computer, please turn off email, all notifications, and shut down your Internet browser to avoid distractions to yourself and classmates. Phones should be silenced and put away before class starts.

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 either 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

Many of our readings are excerpts from longer works. These are available in the course reader, which you can buy from the L&S Copy Center, 6120 Social Science Building. Each text is also posted as a PDF file on Canvas. *You must bring a hard copy of texts to class on the day they will be discussed.*

The required books are available at local and online stores. Copies of each have also been placed 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)

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

Reading assignments marked with an asterisk (*) are available in the course reader and on Canvas, where you can also find the recommended readings. Full bibliographical information for all required and recommended texts is available in the “Course Documents” module on Canvas.

Sep 5 Course Introduction

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

Sep 10 The Break with Myth

*Homer, *The Iliad*, Book I

*Xenophanes, fragments

Recommended: Sarah Broadie, "Rational Theology"; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 305-311; Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, 38-54

Sep 12 Socrates and the Sophists

Plato, *Apology* (entire)

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

Sep 17 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

Sep 19 Plato: The Soul and the Afterlife

Plato, *Phaedo*, 145-99; it's fine 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

Sep 24 Aristotle's World

*Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*, 1-13, 83-91, 116-30

*Aristotle, selections from *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*

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

Sep 26 Skepticism and Epicureanism

RESPONSE 1 DUE

*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"

Oct 1 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"

Oct 3

MIDTERM 1

II. Peoples of God: Jews and Christians

Oct 8

Israel, History, and Biblical Narrative

Genesis 1-4; 12; 15; 17; 25:19-34; (27, 28, 37, 39-50 recommended)

Recommended: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 1-54; Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch*, 19-38; Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Hebrew Bible and History"

Oct 10

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; Carol A. Redmount, "Bitter Lives"

Oct 15

Kingship, Exile, and Prophecy

Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 8; 2 Samuel 5, 7 (11-12 recommended); 1 Kings 8, 11; 2 Kings 17:1-23; Isaiah 1:1-2:4; 11; 52-53; Ezekiel 36:16-37:14

Recommended: Mordechai Cogan, "Into Exile"; 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, 201-216

Oct 17

Jesus and Judaism

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction*, 1-5, 35-62
Mark 1-4; Luke 11:25-37; 15:11-32; John 1:1-2:12

Recommended: Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 16-52

Oct 22

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

RESPONSE 2 DUE

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction*, 63-109
Mark 11-16; Luke 24

Recommended: J. B. Green, "Kingdom of God/Heaven"; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, 9-20

Oct 24

Paul and the Gentile Mission

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: N. T. Wright & Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World*, 366-395; Klaus Haacker, "Paul's Life"; Tom Holland, *Dominion*, 80-106

Oct 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; David Novak, "Jewish Eschatology"

Oct 31 MIDTERM 2

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

Nov 5 Christianity and Classical Culture

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3-49

Recommended: David Vincent Meconi, S.J., "Introduction" to Ignatius Critical Edition of *Confessions*; Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 162-185; Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, 1-30

Nov 7 Augustine and the Invention of Autobiography

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 50-88, 101-128

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

Nov 12 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

Nov 14 Monastic Culture

*Saint Benedict's *Rule for Monasteries*

Recommended: Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*, 42-55

Nov 19 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

Nov 20 PAPER DUE AT 10:00 P.M.

Nov 21 Islam, Judaism, and the Recovery of Aristotle

*Moses Maimonides, selection from *Guide for the Perplexed*

*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

Nov 26 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; Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe*, 154-208

Dec 3 The Individual and Human Nature in the Renaissance

*Petrarch, *The Ascent of Mont Ventoux*

*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

Dec 5 Artistic Expressions

*Giorgio Vasari, "Leonardo da Vinci" from *The Lives of the Artists*

Recommended: Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath, "Artists and Humanists"

Dec 10 Currents of Reform

RESPONSE 4 DUE

*Thomas à Kempis, selections from *The Imitation of Christ*

*Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraclesis*

Recommended: Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, 551-603; Erika Rummel, "Voices of Reform from Hus to Erasmus"

FINAL EXAM: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 5:05-7:05 P.M.