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Ancient and Medieval Philosophy: Contingency and the Moral Life

This course is a historical overview of philosophical inquiry from the first theological and scientific steps of the pre-Socratic philosophers, through the classic works of Plato and Aristotle, and on to the works of medieval philosophers such as Aquinas.

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Theme

The theme of this course is "contingency and the moral life." It often appears that a great deal of our lives is outside of our control. Much of what occurs, many of the most important or significant events, "just happen" to us. The weather and other forces of nature; where, to whom, and into what strata of society we are born; accidents and the actions of other people; our own emotional response to the world, our drives, appetites, and desires; all of these things appear to be and are outside of our control. Yet they are all tremendously important ingredients of a "good" life. In other words, whether our lives are good or worth living often seems to depend significantly on elements over which we exercise no power or influence. Thus, the question naturally arises: "How can one *lead* a good life under such circumstances?"

Most of the ancient Greek thinkers were to some extent preoccupied with this question. The Greeks had a name for all of the powers that shape human life, seemingly without purpose or intent: Fate (*Tyche*). However, the Greeks also recognized that human beings did have the ability to control their environment with some measure of success. Farmers know when to plant and sow for the best crop yield. Shipbuilders and pilots know how to work wood to conquer the sea. Doctors know how to set bones and use medicines to fight accidents and disease. These "skills" or "sciences" (*techne*)

help bring some measure of reliability to human life and endeavor. As our technological skills grow, so too does the measure of our human lives, their relative comfort and ease. From this another question seems naturally to arise: "Is there a *techne* that can encompass the whole of human life? Is there a science of the good life for humans?" It is this question that almost all of the ancient philosophers are trying to answer. And as Socrates says, this is no idle question, but the question of how we ought to live our lives.

Answering this question involves attempting to understand the *whole* of a human life—from our basic "nature" as rational animals to our place in the order of nature. The attempt to construct a science of the good life requires an examination of the whole range of philosophical and scientific questions asked by the Greeks: epistemology, metaphysics, physics, ethics, and politics. Thus, this theme provides a useful thread around which can be woven a coherent narrative of ancient and medieval philosophy.

Problems and Pitfalls

One of the most serious problems students have in taking this course is with the reading. There are three general problems here. First, philosophy is difficult to read in itself. Students often have a hard time coming to grips with the arguments in the texts. Second, since this course covers such a broad range of time, the *style* of writing changes abruptly: from Plato's dialogue form to the more conversational style of Augustine to the rigorous scholasticism of Aquinas. Such stylistic changes can be difficult for even the most patient and careful reader. Finally, there is a lot to read and absorb here.

There are a number of different ways to attempt to remedy this difficulty. Providing reading and study questions is a useful solution. However, it is perhaps even more important—particularly at the beginning of the course—to actually take the time and *read the material* with the students during the class. Taking a specific passage from Plato or Aristotle and working through it carefully with the class as a whole usually has the best results. I also give my students a short piece about reading philosophy which may be helpful. (See the "Guide to Reading Philosophy" at the end of this module.)

Overview of the Course

This course will take a historical overview of philosophical inquiry from the pre-Socratic philosophers through the classic works of Plato and Aristotle, and on to the works of medieval philosophers such as Aquinas. It is structured primarily as a survey course of the first fifteen or so centuries of philosophy in the West. The best way to cover such a huge amount of material is to organize it thematically. The objectives of this course are twofold. On the one hand, it will familiarize students with the development of philosophy in the West from the time of the pre-Socratic philosophers until the end of the medieval period. On the other hand, the course will provide students with the opportunity to articulate and work through the main philosophical questions that drove the Greek and medieval thinkers and that continue to drive contemporary thinkers today.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will develop an understanding of the beginnings of Western philosophy and the classic works of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.

2. Students will develop their critical thinking skills.

3. Students will examine criticisms of all the philosophical theories they study and will debate the alternative solutions offered by these theories to enduring philosophical questions.

4. Students will study the development of Western philosophy and the ways in which philosophers uncover and critique the hidden assumptions of their predecessors.

5. Students will understand the historical contexts within which these theories arose.

Texts

Ancient Philosophy. 4th ed. Edited by Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann. Prentice Hall, 2000.

Medieval Philosophy. 4th ed. Edited by Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann. Prentice Hall, 2000.

Many of the materials read in the course can also be found online.

Outline of Topics

1. The pre-Socratics and Socrates
2. Socrates and the Sophists
3. Plato: Metaphysics: The forms
4. Plato: Ethics and politics
5. Aristotle: Return to the phenomena
6. Aristotle: Ethics
7. Transition to the medieval period
8. Neoplatonism and early Christian philosophy
9. The question of evil and the will (theodicy)
10. Reason and faith
11. On the nature of universals

Methods of Instruction

Lectures, oral presentations, and group discussion and critical analyses of the various readings, issues, and themes will take up the bulk of classroom time. In addition, short papers (both in-class and take-home), exams, and quizzes are used to ensure that students have mastered the material.

Exams

There will be two in-class exams given over the course of the semester: a midterm exam and a final exam. Each exam will be composed of a few short-answer questions and an essay question.

Quizzes

There will be five short quizzes given over the course of the semester (generally three weeks apart). Each quiz will take 15–20 minutes and will consist of 3–5 short-answer questions concerning the material and readings covered in class. Each quiz will be given at the beginning of class: no extra time will be given to those students who arrive late. Missed quizzes cannot be taken late; however, the lowest quiz grade will be dropped, so you can miss one quiz altogether without penalty.

Attendance and Participation

This class will function primarily as a seminar. This requires that students take an active part in beginning, shaping, and developing the content of the course. Thus, student participation is a significant component of this class. The main emphasis of this course is to raise and discuss the essential questions and problems that characterize the "discipline" of philosophy in its early and middle development. Discussion and conversation are very important for the learning and development of philosophy and philosophical reasoning. Useful discussion requires at least two essential factors: first, students need to be present in class, and second, students must be conversant with the material. *Thus, students are expected to have completed all of the readings on the date they are due and be ready to discuss them.*

Attendance and participation are graded in this course in the following manner.

Students will earn one AP (attendance and participation) point for merely attending class. If they participate in the class discussion through asking intelligent questions or providing answers to the questions of other students or the professor, they can earn two AP points for the class.

A student who comes to class late, or leaves class early, will only earn half credit for that day. Missing class, obviously, means that no points are awarded for that day. Please note: there are no excused absences for this class. Whatever the reason that you miss, you will not receive credit for attending—since you did not. However, it is possible to account for missing attendance and participation points by doing extra-credit assignments.

Student-Led Class Discussions

Students will also earn AP points by leading class discussions over the semester. Generally speaking, each student should plan on leading a class discussion at least three times over the course of the semester. This works as follows: every Thursday, the students will be expected to shape and lead a discussion on the readings or topics being discussed for that week. So every Thursday, students will have an opportunity to take charge of the direction of the class and focus on those things that are most interesting to them. The "student leader(s)" of the class discussion must do the following: first, they should let me know they intend to lead discussion during a particular period (the Tuesday before is fine for this); second, they must develop some interesting questions or comments about the material or topic that they wish to present to the class and that they believe will stimulate class discussion; and third, they should provide a handout of these questions and comments to the whole class.

Students can earn anywhere from 0–3 AP points for their work in leading class discussion. Note: it is possible to earn no credit if your work is particularly bad. A solid or "3"-point student-led discussion should do the following:

1. Present an analysis of the material and your own considered and argued position on the material. That is, you should not merely say: "Plato believes X, Y, and Z," but rather, you should analyze this. For example, "Plato believes X because of ABC, and it seems to me that X is contradicted by EF which Plato also believes." Or, "This stuff that Plato is saying is really important because it raises the question of how we can know more than what our

senses merely tell us." In other words, you must show me that you can and have thought about the material seriously.

2. Develop some questions, issues, or points that arise out of the readings and which can be the focus for a classroom-wide discussion. Your presentation must be tied directly to the readings that are assigned for that class. But your presentation cannot be a mere summary and replay of what we have read. You must also attempt to go beyond the readings, either through direct disagreement, or by extending the arguments and positions you agree with, or by using the readings to highlight issues that are not directly or adequately covered by the readings.

3. You should also be prepared to answer questions about the material—to the best of your ability. This will be a function of how seriously you have thought about the material.

4. You should provide the class with a handout to aid your fellow students' study, exploration, and examination of the material. Examples of this handout can include outlines of the main points of the texts; diagrams of conceptual systems being discussed; and suggestions for movies, novels, or plays that incorporate or explore some of the conceptual issues being discussed. This handout must *be typed* and handed in to the professor and the class when you do your discussion leading.

5. Your grade here will be based on the degree to which you are able to master the material and present it in a manner that sparks discussion.

The total number of AP points possible is 71. The grades for attendance and participation are as follows:

71 and above = A
56–70 = B
36–55 = C
29–35 =D
29 and below = F

Quick Reaction Papers

A quick reaction paper (QRP) is usually 1–2 pages long (if typed) and is assigned either as an in-class (solo or group) assignment or as a take-home assignment. There is no predetermined number of QRPs, nor is there a predetermined schedule for them. QRPs ask the student to respond to some aspect of the reading or issues or topics under discussion. QRPs are graded on a letter-scale: A, B, C, and F.

There are two basic types of QRPs:

In-class QRPs. As the name indicates, these are QRPs that are completed by students in class, either working singly or in small groups. Generally speaking, in-class QRPs are used to help students work through a difficult concept or idea in class. They will sometimes be used to help get discussion going, or they will be used to aid students in the application of a concept to a specific situation or problem. In-class QRPs are weighted exactly the same as take-home QRPs.

Take-home QRPs. Again, as the name indicates, these are QRPs that the student must complete outside of class and turn in on the following class date (or as otherwise indicated). Take-home QRPs *must be typed* and they must follow basic guidelines for short papers (proper quoting, structure, grammar, etc.). Take-home QRPs are usually assigned in order to facilitate a slightly more in-depth or sustained analysis of an issue, concept, argument, or idea that the class is examining. Please bear this in mind: a QRP is an opportunity for you to really try and work through the important and difficult ideas and problems with which this class deals. If you wish to get an A on these QRPs, then you must actually do this.

The basic criteria for grades on QRPs are the following:

A: The student (or students) show a strong understanding of the material and are able to ask useful and critical questions about the reading, suggest interesting possibilities or avenues of investigation, and are able to combine different aspects of the material together in interesting and new ways.

B: The student (or students) shows a competent understanding of the material and can ask interesting questions about the reading. They are able to compare and contrast different aspects of the material.

C: The student (or students) are having real difficulty understanding and articulating their understanding of the material.

F: The assignment is not done, or the assignment is totally wrong.

There are some further points that you must bear in mind:

a. QRPs cannot be turned in late, nor can they be made up. If you miss an in-class QRP, or if you fail to turn in a take-home QRP, then you will simply lose those points. You cannot e-mail me QRPs either late or ahead of time and expect them to count unless we have a prior agreement.

b. All take-home QRPs must be typed. They will not be given credit if they are not typed.

Grade Distribution

The components of the final grade for this course are as follows:

Attendance and participation	20 percent
Quizzes	15 percent
Quick reaction papers	25 percent
Exams	40 percent

The grading scale is as follows:

91–100 percent = A
81–90 percent = B
71–80 percent = C
61–70 percent = D
Below 61 = F

Syllabus

All readings should be done by the beginning of the week for which they are assigned. Many of these readings are difficult, and you should make sure that you leave an appropriate amount of time to read and think about the material. Remember to always do three things when reading the course material: (1) make notes about what you are reading; (2) write out and bring to class questions, problems, or objections that you have with the material; and (3) use the reading questions and guides that I hand out in class to help you focus your reading.

Many of the materials we are reading in class can be found online, so it is not necessary for you to buy all of the books. You can find links to the online material from my web page (http://servercc.oakton.edu/~tbowen/ then go the class's home page). However, if you decide to read the material online, *you absolutely must bring a hard copy to class*—we will often refer to the reading material during class, and you will need to have this material in front of you. Printing out the texts online is still probably cheaper than buying the books, but it is up to you to decide which you want to do.

Week 1: Introduction and the Pre-Socratic Philosophers

Read *Ancient Philosophy*, 1–28

Concentrate here on the Eleatics (19–31) and in particular on Zeno's paradoxes. Consider carefully what they were intended to prove and the logic of their structure. What do you think of these paradoxes?

Week 2: The Pre-Socratic Philosophers and Socrates

Read *Ancient Philosophy*, 1–28

Student-led discussion on the Eleatics.

Concentrate here on Heraclitus and the Pluralists. Consider the contrast between Heraclitus and the Eleatics. Also consider the sense of "randomness" and "necessity" that the atomists introduce into their system.

Read *Ancient Philosophy*, 43–46: Three Sophists

Student-led discussion on the pre-Socratic philosophers and Sophists.

Consider the implicit and explicit relativism of the Sophists. Pay particular attention to the structure and argumentative style of Gorgias' short piece on existence. See if you can map out the argument and see its logic. Is it refutable? What are the assumptions on which it rests?

Week 3: Socrates and the Sophists

Read: *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*

Student-led discussion on *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*.

Pay particular attention to two things here: first, the "Socratic" method of argumentation and discourse (*elenchus*)—consider how it is used in these two dialogues and what you think of the method. Also, consider the character of Socrates in contrast to or relation with the Sophists.

Week 4: Plato: Metaphysics: The Forms

Read *Phaedo* (all)

Student-led discussion on *Phaedo*.

Here we must watch for the "forms," what Socrates calls "absolute justice," and so on. How do they come into the dialogue? What role do they play in Socrates' sense of the world and in his equanimity with respect to his impending death? Consider very carefully the arguments for the existence of the forms, and the arguments for the immortality of the soul. How successful are they?

Week 5: Plato: Metaphysics: Attaining the Forms

Read: *Republic* (470a–480a; 502d–521b) and *Symposium* (199d–215e)

Student-led discussion on the *Republic* and the *Symposium*.

In these readings you want to watch carefully the "passage" by which one achieves knowledge of the forms. Consider carefully the moves one makes ascending the line or getting out of the cave, and the relations between the various levels. Also, consider what it means that Socrates discusses knowledge of truth within the context of a conversation on beauty in the *Symposium*.

Week 6: Plato: Metaphysics: Criticism of the Forms

Read: *Parmenides* (all)

Student-led discussion on *Parmenides*.

These are very important criticisms of the theory of forms. Make sure you understand them well. Also, consider whether you think they are strong, and what it means that Plato himself raises these criticisms in this dialogue without giving us any satisfying answer.

Week 7: Plato: Ethics and Politics

Read: *Republic,* Books 1 and Book 2 (357b–376e), and Book 10

Student-led discussion on the *Republic*.

This is going to be a condensed reading and analysis of Plato's political and ethical theory. When examining these works, try to work out what the main issue is for Plato, and how he is

trying to address it. Consider carefully that there is no separate work on ethics here—rather, for Plato, politics and ethics are the same (ask the same questions, etc.). Finally, pay particular attention to Thrasymachus' position in Book 1 and the challenge posed by Glaucon in Book 2.

Week 8: Aristotle: Return to the Phenomena

Read: *Physics*, Book 2

Student-led discussion on the *Physics*.

Turning to Aristotle presents some interesting problems and possibilities. In the *Physics* pay special attention to Aristotle's conception of causation and the discussion of necessity and chance, and importantly, the theory of teleology.

Week 9: Aristotle: Substance and the Theos

Read: *Metaphysics,* Book 1 (chapters 1–3), and Book 12

Student-led discussion on the *Metaphysics*.

The *Metaphysics* is a notoriously difficult text. Pay particular attention to the concept of substance here—how Aristotle defines it, and how he makes use of it. Also, pay particular attention to the concept of the "unmoved mover" near the end of Book 12. Note carefully the argument that Aristotle presents for the claim that there is an unmoved mover. We will see this type of argument reemerge in the medieval philosophers. Consider whether Aristotle's concept of God has much in common with Christianity, Islam, or Judaism.

Week 10: Aristotle: Psyche and the Truth

Read: *On the Soul* (all)

Student-led discussion of *On the Soul*.

This piece is probably one of the most intriguing in Aristotle's corpus. Here he attempts to articulate the nature of the human soul and to answer such questions as: Are we immortal? How can the human soul come to know eternal and universal truths? Pay particular attention to these two questions in this essay.

Week 11: Aristotle: Ethics

Read: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1 and 2

Student-led discussion on *Nicomachean Ethics*.

This is probably one of the most important texts written in the history of Western culture — right up there with the *Republic* and the Bible. We can't read all of it, but pay particular

attention to the arguments that Aristotle gives for the existence and nature of the "highest good" for human beings.

Week 12: Transition to the Medieval Period

Read: Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, *Letter to Menoeceus*, and *Principle Doctrines*

We will be using Epicurus as an example of the Hellenistic philosophical movements. Pay particular attention to his ethical theories and contrast them with Aristotle.

Week 13: The Question of Evil and the Will (Theodicy)

Read: Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* (all)
Read: Boethius, *Consolations of Philosophy*, Book 5 (all)

Student-led discussion of the free-will problem.

The question of why an all-powerful, good god would permit evil in the world is not a question that troubles the pre-Christian Greeks. But it becomes particularly problematic for the early Christian thinkers, and remains problematic today. This question is intimately tied up with the question of human freedom. Can humans have a truly free will, and yet God have true foreknowledge of our actions?

Week 14: Augustine and Early Christian Philosophy

Read: Augustine, *City of God*, Book 12ff.

This passage continues Augustine's discourse on the nature of evil and its relation to God's creation—and God's creative ability. Consider the answers and questions that Augustine develops here in relation to Plato and Aristotle.

Week 15: Reason and Faith

Read: Anselm and Guanilo (all)
Read: Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (335–350)

Student-led discussion on the relation between faith and reason and the proofs of God's existence.

Can we prove that God exists? This is the central question of Anselm and Aquinas in these two pieces. Try to work out the details of their arguments carefully.

Week 16: On the Nature of Universals

Read: Abelard, *On Universals*
Read: Ockham, *On Universals*

Student-led discussion on the nature of universals.

Whether universals exist or not is one of the key questions of the medieval period, a legacy of Aristotle's work. Again, work out the arguments here carefully.

Sample Reading and Study Questions

The texts used for this course are all primary source material and are all available on the Web. Below you will find some reading questions with which I normally provide my students. These notes and questions are intended to aid you in your reading of the material. What I shall do here is point out particular things you should pay attention to, and pose some questions which arise from the reading and to which you ought to give some time and thought. You can use these questions in any number of ways. They may serve as useful prompts for your "presentations" on particular readings and philosophers. They may also provide a useful starting point for working out the thesis and structure of your essays. Finally, studying the material through these questions will help you prepare for the quizzes.

The Pre-Socratics and the Sophists

While we are not going to spend a great deal of time discussing the "pre-Socratic" philosophers, they are important insofar as they lay down the lines of inquiry for philosophy in the period of classical Greece and insofar as the philosophers of the Hellenistic period have continual recourse to them for both a basic metaphysics and ethics. The material we have here is fragmentary, so it is necessary to read it carefully and thoughtfully—not to take things at mere face value, but to look for the reasoning and thought process inherent or implicit in the work.

Anaximander and Anaximenes

1. What is the *apeiron*? Why does Anaximander look to this rather than to one of the elements (water, fire, earth, air)?

2. Consider carefully what Anaximander might mean by the following: "The source of coming to be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of time" (9).

3. What is the significance of the choice of "air" as the primal stuff or *hule*? What is significant in Anaximenes' choice here?

Pythagoras

1. What is suggested by the focus on number in Pythagoras? Why is this a radical shift away from the earlier thinkers (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes)?

2. Are all things "numbers" or known as "numbers"? Is true knowledge of the world only possible via mathematics? (Consider statistics here as well as the role of mathematics in quantum physics.)

Heraclitus

1. How is Heraclitus' use of the concept of "fire" different from that of the earlier thinkers? (Is he also just picking a basic element?)

2. What is *logos*? Why is Heraclitus' emphasis on this concept so important?

3. Do you agree with Heraclitus that all is change? Why? What suggests this to you? How is change to be understood or comprehended?

Parmenides and Zeno

1. Concentrate here on the tension between our "lived" or "sensed" experience of the world and our ability to logically or rationally understand the world. Can we think movement?

2. Consider the "two" paths that the Goddess tells Parmenides are available—how are they distinct, and what direction do they take?

3. Go over (carefully and in detail) the arguments Zeno uses to disprove motion, diversity, change, and space. What is Zeno's point here?

4. What are the basic tenets of Parmenides with regard to being and not-being?

5. Consider carefully the basic thrust of Parmenides' and Zeno's arguments. Is thought (*nous*, *logos*) or thinkability the correct criterion of determining the "truth" or what is "real"? If it is not, if we can say that some things are real even though we cannot consistently or logically think them, then what? What does this do for our ability to communicate, for our ability to understand the world?

The Pluralists: Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus

1. How does shifting from the One of Parmenides to the "ones" of the Pluralists help in understanding reality, experience, etc.? That is, what question does it help us think through?

2. What is the role of *nous* or "mind" in Anaxagoras? What is it? How does it function in his thought?

3. How does Democritus distinguish between the "two types of knowledge"? What are they?

Plato

Plato articulates his thought through finely wrought dialogues. These are not plays, since there is no stage direction, and the focus is not on an action or series of actions. Instead, they present themselves as reproductions of conversations between (usually) Socrates and any number of other interlocutors. Because of this style, many people enjoy reading Plato's works. Of course, for the same reason, there are many people who find Plato's work difficult to read. The key, generally speaking, is to watch the flow and pattern of the conversation. What is the topic being discussed? How are the questions of the dialogue initially posed, refined, and worked out? What are the arguments presented, and how are they criticized within the context of the dialogue (if they are)? It

is useful, at times, to consider carefully who is part of the conversation and what the setting and situation are in which the conversation takes place. In the end, you must try to grasp the sense of the dialogue as a whole work. Often, as we shall see, the putative purpose of the dialogue is left unfulfilled—the primary question asked at the beginning is never answered, or the primary problems are never resolved. This suggests that the actual purpose and point of the dialogue may be other than what is stated. In the end, just read and think carefully. All references to Plato's dialogues will use the Stephanus numbers that appear in the margins of the text.

Euthyphro

1. What do you think is the significance of the setting of this dialogue? What do you make of Euthyphro's character and his mission?

2. Take some time and outline the number of attempts that Euthyphro makes to define "piety." After listing Euthyphro's attempted definitions, write out Socrates' critique (or questioning) of that definition. Pay particular attention to the problem of contradiction—is it true, for example, that Euthyphro's first adequately formed definition leads to a self-contradiction, as Socrates claims (8a)?

3. What is Socrates looking for in a definition of "piety?" Do you think that Socrates is asking after the impossible? That is, that no such definition is possible? But ask yourself this: if that is true, if there is no definition of "piety," then what do we mean when we use the word? (Is this also true of such words as "beauty," "justice," etc.?)

4. Consider this question carefully: Do the gods (or does God) love a pious act because it is pious, or is an act pious because the gods (or God) love it? Another way to put this same point: is something (some act) wrong (impious or immoral) because God says that it is so, or does God say it is wrong because it is wrong (9c–11b)?

5. Take the above question and examine what happens if you answer it one way or the other.

6. What picture of Socrates' character do you get from this dialogue? Do you think that the analogy with Daedalus is accurate (11c)? If so, then who is Daedalus: Socrates or Euthyphro?

7. What do you think Euthyphro ought to do now with respect to his father, after this conversation with Socrates? Should he pursue his lawsuit, or should he drop it?

8. What does it mean that we never get an answer to the question, "What is piety?" How are we to take this? Or is there an answer, but one not just fully recognized or articulated as such?

9. Consider carefully: what sense of Socrates' character do you get from this dialogue? Why do you think he engages Euthyphro in this particular conversation? Is it merely for the purpose that he explicitly states, or do you think something else may be going on?

Apology

1. What are the charges brought against Socrates? Why does Socrates believe that there is a preexisting prejudice against him among the jury members?

2. What does Socrates do when he hears that the god has said he is the "wisest person in Greece"? Does Socrates come to agree with the god? What is the ultimate conclusion he comes to (23b)?

3. Do you think it is possible that there is a "divine wisdom" in contrast to the relatively valueless "human wisdom"? If so, do you think it is possible to attain some level of this divine wisdom, that is, to have some valuable human wisdom? And finally, if this is not possible—if human wisdom is always of little or no value—then what is the point of education, learning, and philosophy?

4. What do you make of Socrates' questioning of Meletus? Is his argument convincing?

5. After he is convicted, Socrates is given the option of picking his own punishment. What does he pick, ultimately, and why?

6. What does Socrates mean when he speaks of himself as the "gadfly" to Athens? Socrates actually claims that the Athenians are harming themselves if they convict and execute him—what is the harm, and do you agree? (See 30a–31b.)

7. Again, what picture of Socrates' character do you get from this dialogue? Do you think we always need people like Socrates? Do you think we would execute Socrates today?

8. At one point Socrates clearly says that "an unexamined life is not worth living" (38a). Do you agree? What does it mean to lead an "examined" life? Try to work out some nature of an "examined life" by making reference to the things Socrates says in his defense.

Phaedo

1. Again, consider the setting of this dialogue—how does it bring into focus its primary thesis or concern? Reflect back on Socrates' assertions in the *Apology* that to claim to know or to fear what death is, is the height of arrogance and non-wisdom (29a).

2. Why does Socrates claim that the philosopher will desire to die (61c–d)? What problems does this involve, and what view of death and philosophy? What do you make of it?

3. What vision of the philosophical life do you garner from this dialogue? Is it attractive? Does it ring true with the character of Socrates, or with other things that he has said?

4. When Socrates asks Simmias about "absolute justice, absolute beauty, and absolute good" (65d–e), he is talking about the "forms" ("ideas," or *eidos*). How do the "forms" enter into the dialogue? How are they defined or described here?

5. Carefully catalogue and review the argument(s)—there may be more than one—for the immortality of the soul that Socrates presents throughout this dialogue. Try to follow the logic of the arguments, and consider their viability and persuasiveness.

6. Examine carefully the argument Socrates gives concerning the concept of "equality." How does he use this to prove that we learn through "recollection?" (See 74a–77a in particular.)

7. What is the "other half" of the argument (77a ff.)?

8. What kind of death scene is this? Again, consider what you make of Socrates' character and the nature of philosophy as a discipline here.

Republic, *Books 6–8*

1. Draw out the divided line carefully here. Pay special attention to how one progresses up the line from sensation to knowledge of the good.

2. Carefully examine the "allegory of the cave." What is Socrates trying to show here? What do you think of this allegory?

Republic, *Books 1 and 2*

1. Consider carefully the opening arguments concerning the nature of justice. How does this question arise? What are the initial answers offered, and how are they rejected by Socrates? What is the importance of this question over all?

2. What do you make of Thrasymachus' character? How does he contrast with Socrates?

3. What do you make of Thrasymachus' arguments? What of Socrates' counters to these?

4. Consider carefully Socrates' promise to work out an answer to the question of "what is justice"—how does he plan to go about it?

5. Consider carefully the question posed by Glaucon—the story of Gyges' ring—what do you make of this story? How would you respond to the question posed in the story?

Symposium *(concentrating on Socrates' speech)*

1. Socrates, of course, begins with a dialogue, questioning Agathon (Greek for "beauty," by the way). What is the subject of their conversation? What is Socrates trying to get at here?

2. Do you think that "love" is a matter of "lack"? That is, that what we love in someone else, or in general, is what we lack in ourselves? If this is so, then is love ultimately selfish (a desire to complete ourselves)?

3. Now this is important: Socrates' conversation with Diotima. Compare this with the divided line and the cave in the *Republic*. Go through the steps that Diotima lays out for moving from sensory enjoyment as love to contemplation of the "form" of love. What do you think of this movement?

4. Finally, what do you think of love? Do you think that Socrates has any point here at all?

Parmenides

1. What is important and interesting in this dialogue is that here Socrates (who is young in this dialogue) has to respond to criticisms of his position from Parmenides and from Zeno (whom we have already met). Carefully index the criticisms that Parmenides and Zeno make to the theory of forms and how Socrates tries to respond.

2. Consider in particular the question of how the "universal" forms relate to the "individual things," and the "day" and "sail" analogies.

3. Do you think Socrates has an adequate response here?

Aristotle

Whether or not Aristotle is difficult to read, or more difficult or easier to read than Plato, is a matter of personal preference and judgment. What is undoubted, however, is that Aristotle is a very different writer than Plato. Plato writes in dialogue, where his own voice is hidden and requires some work to unearth (if this is possible at all). Aristotle, on the other hand, writes in "essay" form and is clearly the author and speaker in his texts. But unlike "contemporary" or modern writers, the texts we have by Aristotle were not necessarily intended for publication to a wide audience. So, often what we see is that Aristotle is more interested in exploring a particular problem or formulating a particular question than in coming up with a specific answer or set of answers. Thus, often times his writing will jump from topic to topic (in an apparently unorganized manner, though a careful look can discern a pattern), and at times his writing will lead to "blind alleys" and potentially unsolvable dilemmas. So reading Aristotle requires some care. The following questions are designed primarily to point you towards specific parts of Aristotle's texts that I think are important. All citations to Aristotle's texts will refer to the "index" numbers that run along the margins of the text.

Physics, *Book 2, Parts 1–9*

1. How does Aristotle distinguish between "things existing by nature" (*physis*) and things that exist from "some other cause" (*techne*)? What is the importance of this distinction (consider the title of this work)?

2. What do you make of this comment of Aristotle: "*That* nature exists, it would be absurd to prove; for it is obvious that there are many things of this kind, and to prove what is obvious by what is not is the mark of a man who is unable to distinguish what is self-evident from what is not" (193a5)? How does this compare with Plato's conception of both the world and "investigation" into the world?

3. Why do some people identify "nature" (or substance; *ousia*) with matter (193a10–30) and why do some people identify it with "form" (193a30–193b1-10)? That is, what are the reasons for these "identifications"?

4. Following from the above question, how does Aristotle bring in the related concepts of "potentiality" and "actuality" to determine that "nature" is more appropriately identified with form?

5. Also, as a minor aside, how does Aristotle's concept of "form" here differ from that offered by Plato (forms)? (Look carefully at Aristotle's parenthetical remark on line 193b5.)

6. What are the "four causes" that Aristotle distinguishes at the opening of 2.3 (194b20)? Why does he focus on these particular "causes"? Don't forget the "modes" here.

7. Why are "chance and spontaneity" often reckoned among causes? What is the "controversy" here that Aristotle is addressing (195b35ff.)?

8. Trying to understand Aristotle's discussion of "chance" here will not work if you do not think of cause more broadly than merely as "efficient causation." Consider the examples presented concerning "collecting" for subscriptions and "house-builder" (196b35–197a5).

9. Why does Aristotle believe that everything in nature "happens" or "operates" for a goal or to achieve an "end"? How is "teleological" (end-oriented) causation contrasted with "necessity"?

10. What do you think of this argument that Aristotle gives (199a10–15): "Now surely as in action, so in nature; and as in nature so it is in each action, if nothing interferes. Now action is for the sake of an end; therefore the nature of things also is so." Is this a good argument?

Metaphysics

This is probably the most difficult text we will be reading in class. Here we are only looking at two books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—there are fourteen in all. We will look at Book 1 (Book Alpha) and Book 12 (Book Lambda).

In Alpha, you want to watch for two things in particular:

1. How does Aristotle define "wisdom"? How is it achieved? What does it involve? How is it distinguished from other forms of knowing?

2. How does Aristotle characterize the history of philosophy? What is the question that he is addressing in this history?

In Lambda, you want to watch for the following:

1. What is the basic question at issue here? That is, what is Aristotle examining or trying to talk about?

2. How does he define "substance" here? What are the three kinds of substance at issue?

3. What is at issue with the "prime mover"?

4. Why is it so important to demonstrate that "actuality" is prior to "potentiality" here?

5. What is so important about "divine" thought or self-thinking thought?

On the Soul

1. How does Aristotle define the soul? What is its relation to the body? Does it survive the body?

2. What are the different types of "soul"? What distinguishes "human" soul?

3. Very carefully, go over the discussion at the beginning of Book 3 concerning "thinking."

4. How do "actuality" and "potentiality" function here? How does this lead to the distinction between "active" and "passive" intellect?

5. How does Aristotle reason that "thinking" must be separable from the body?

Nicomachean Ethics

1. How does Aristotle come to conclude that there must be a "highest" good (1094a5–15)?

2. What are the limitations of ethics and politics as sciences?

3. How does Aristotle define (provisionally) happiness and the good? How is happiness acquired?

4. Why do you think Aristotle includes the discussion of "death" in chapter 11 (page 375)?

5. What is the relation between "virtue" and habit? How is virtue ultimately defined?

6. How does pleasure figure into all of this?

The Early Church Fathers

Here we are interested in understanding the basic intellectual framework constructed by thinkers early on in the development of Christianity as a religious movement. All of these people were writing *before* Christianity was accepted as a legitimate religion, let alone exalted to the status of the official religion of the Roman Empire. Further, you must remember that all of these thinkers were working and writing in the eastern empire—and hence were dealing not only with the Roman cultural imperatives that existed there, but were also responding to and working with very well-entrenched Hellenistic and Persian cultural and intellectual patterns of thought and behavior. Finally, because of the fluidity of movement that both the Roman and Persian (Parthian) empires afforded, there were many other influences with which these thinkers had to contend (notably from India and Central Asia). So this is a very volatile mixture.

Another point to note: most of these writers had two basic concerns (which were not always well distinguished, and were often mixed up with other subsidiary concerns). First, they were interested in defending their faith from attacks by other—often more well-established—outside influences. Second, they were interested in simply defining what exactly their faith was and what it entailed. In other words, they were still discovering and determining exactly *what it meant to be a Christian*, and they were trying to work this out both for themselves and for others. This was the beginning of the time of the great heresies—before the various synods established a canonical set of texts and doctrines that defined Christianity.

The Gospels

It is important to keep in mind that we are not reading these texts specifically as sacred texts—rather, what we want to do is examine these texts for their *philosophical and cultural import*. This will be hard for those of us who were raised to consider these texts as sacred, but it is important to adopt an attitude towards them similar to the attitude we would adopt towards any other philosophical or cultural text.

1. While reading Paul, in particular, try to identify specific passages where you believe you see significant philosophical content. For example, are there places where the conceptual apparatus developed by Greek philosophers (in particular) are being used?

2. Consider carefully the passages from *Romans* (1:16–32; 3:21–31; 5:1–11; 7:14–8:39 and 12–13). What do we see here in terms of the concept of faith and the role that faith should play in our lives? What is the relationship between the body and soul described here? Relate this to Plato and to Aristotle.

3. Regarding *Romans*, ask yourself this question: for Plato and Aristotle there is an important sense in which our "salvation" (or our ability to live a good or happy life) is clearly within our power as human beings (it's not easy, but it surely is possible). Is this true for Paul? Can we live good lives *by ourselves* (i.e., without help from God—with divine grace or spirit)? What are the implications of this for our lives? Also, consider that for both Plato and Aristotle, the goal of human life is happiness (*eudiamonia*)—is this true of the ethic of Christianity as we see it described here?

4. Consider *Acts* 17:16–43 and *Colossians* 2:8–10. How does Paul seem to describe the relation between philosophy and faith, or between philosophy and religion?

5. What is faith? How would you define it? What role should it, or does it, play in our lives? How is faith related to reason? Are they compatible, contradictories, or merely contraries? Can there be a rational faith or a faithful rationality? Is faith a kind of knowledge, or is it an attitude, or is it something else entirely? Does faith rely on God, or can you experience faith without God's intervention?

6. How should philosophy relate to religion generally? Are they enemies, or can they be made compatible? Do you find Clement, Tertullian, and Origen more amenable to your understanding of this relation, or none of the above? What is at stake in this question (today)?

The Church Fathers

These should be a bit easier, since these documents do not have the status of sacred texts. Again, however, read them as you would read any text—look for the arguments they make or imply, and look for the kinds of attitudes and beliefs that they assert or that potentially reflect the cultural context in which they were written.

1. What is the proper relationship between philosophy and faith? Both Clement and Tertullian address this issue. Why does Tertullian feel that philosophy is dangerous? What kinds of arguments (such as they are) does he make? Is Tertullian right? Is Clement? Is there another position or attitude that can be taken?

2. While you are reading Origen and Philo, keep in mind the following questions:

   a. What do you see emerging here in terms of the basic areas of concern or the basic questions that arise when one tries to think *philosophically* (rationally?) about biblical stories such as the story of creation?

   b. What basic definition of God arises or is articulated in this passage?

   c. What are the positions or questions that Origen and/or Philo feel they must argue against, and how do they construct those arguments?

   d. What use of philosophy (philosophical argumentation, conceptual structure, whatever) do you see Origen and Philo making?

3. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite constitutes a later figure than one we have been looking at previously (about four centuries later). What is interesting about Dionysius is that he marks (not the beginning, but a major stream of) a mystical tradition within both Christianity and Christian philosophy during this period. So, in reading Dionysius keep in mind the following questions:

   a. Do you see (and how do you see) Platonic and Neoplatonic influences in his writings? Consider the language that he uses, the questions that he is addressing, and the type of "argumentation" that he produces.

   b. What are the basic problems that he addresses? Try to lay out what these problems are and why they are problems.

   c. How does he define "evil"? What is the importance of his discussion of this topic considered both generally and specifically in terms of the Christian (religious and philosophical) tradition?

   d. How can we *know* God? What is the importance of his answer to this question?

   e. Why might Dionysius be considered "mystical"—is this a correct way of approaching his work?

St. Augustine

The importance of Augustine for the development of the intellectual culture of western Europe cannot be underestimated. He was working and writing during a highly tumultuous period of Roman and Christian history (who wasn't?), and his work became central in the Christian self-understanding that developed in western Europe in the post-Roman world.

On the Free Choice of the Will

1. What is the question that Augustine and Evodius are discussing? Why is this question important? (Remember the basic Christian presuppositions functioning here.)

2. What is the answer to the question: why did God give humanity free will? (Preliminary answer: first section.)

3. What is the problem of evil and the free will?

4. How does Augustine propose to show that God exists? (This is a long and relatively complicated argument, so go through it carefully.)

5. What is the relation between the senses, the inner sense, and reason? How do humans differ from animals?

6. How does Augustine relate these parts in terms of "superiority"? Why does he relate them in this way? What is the general rule by which we can tell when one function is superior to another?

7. How can we prove that reason is the most excellent faculty in humanity? Why is this important as part of the proof of God's existence?

8. How do we distinguish between objects that are "personal" and objects that are "common"?

9. How does "number" come into this exposition?

10. What is the role of wisdom and truth here?

City of God, *Book 12*

1. What is at issue in this book? That is, what is Augustine after here—what is he trying to define or articulate?

2. Try to outline the basic arguments he makes—the major points he makes and the arguments he gives for them. Then try to articulate the relations between these major points.

3. How does Augustine define the nature of evil? What is significant about this definition? What does it mean that for Augustine, everything that is created is by virtue of that creation *good*? Why is it so important that Augustine makes this point and makes it forcefully? What is at stake here?

4. What is significant about Augustine's claim that there is no efficient cause of the "evil will"?

5. What do you think about all of this?

Boethius

Boethius is another important, but unfortunately often overlooked, figure in the early medieval period. If not for Boethius, the little bit of Greek philosophy that existed in the western European world during the early Middle Ages would have been much less, if not nonexistent. For this, if for nothing else, Boethius deserves our regard—but then, there is also the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

1. When reading this text, consider how you would articulate the basic question(s) at issue or under review here. What is the problem? How does Boethius argue here—how strong are his arguments?

2. What is the problem of "free will"? How does Boethius broach this problem with philosophy? What makes it an important question in this context?

3. Why, to understand this question and the proper answer to it, must we turn our attention to the divine intellect? What is the nature of this divine intellect?

4. What is the distinction between simple and conditional necessity? How does this distinction help solve the problem of free will?

5. Do you think there is a conceptual problem in trying to hold simultaneously that God is good and all-knowing and all-powerful, and that there is evil in the world? Try to lay out what you think this problem is (whether or not you think it is solvable or particularly significant), and then what you think of Augustine's or Boethius' responses to this problem. Is there another way of solving this?

6. Do we have free will? What exactly is this? What are the ramifications of saying we do or do not have such freedom? Can free will be made compatible with God (as his nature is understood traditionally)? What do you think of this? What are the ramifications of this question and the various answers possible for our living?

7. Consider the way in which philosophy (philosophical argumentation, concepts, etc.) appear in both Augustine and Boethius. Are there significant differences or similarities between them? Do you think its role is *proper*? Would you agree that we can find *consolation* in philosophy?

Guide to Reading Philosophy

This is a short introduction to how to read a philosophical text. The material we are reading in the course is not textbook material. It is *not* material that someone else has read, distilled, and organized to make it simple. This is *primary source* material, and this means that while reading philosophy can be highly enjoyable, it is not easy. In order to really understand the material you are reading, you must not merely attempt to absorb it as though it were a list of facts (e.g., a list of important historical dates, or the periodic table). Rather, you must *think through* the material, organize it in your own mind, and *respond* to it in a thoughtful manner. The following is a list of some suggestions for helping your reading comprehension.

Read the material at least twice (and perhaps three or four times). First, read in order to identify the major points that the author is trying to make. Look for thesis statements and conclusions. On the second read, look closer for the arguments that the author is using to support the theses and conclusions. Always consider that the author is trying to say something in particular, and try to figure out what that is. Consider these questions as you read:

- What is the thesis (the central idea or main point)?
- What are the major points made in developing and supporting the thesis?
- How are key terms defined?
- What are the basic assumptions made by the author?
- What are the important implications of the author's positions?

Take notes as you read. Write down what you think the main theses of the text are, and what you take to be the primary arguments for it. Write down what the text makes you think about, what questions it poses to you. How would you respond to these questions? Finally, write down any questions you have concerning the text, any words or concepts you don't know or can't understand;

any propositions that strike you as improbable. You should write down any and all questions that you have, and you should bring these questions up in class.

Read analytically and sympathetically. That is, don't believe everything you read, and yet don't reject it out of hand either. In either case, you must be ready to argue for the positions you take in a careful and convincing manner—you must be able to both refute opposing arguments and make positive arguments that support the position you accept. (Accept nothing without proof, offer nothing without proof.) Here are some useful questions to keep in mind while you are reading:

- Is what is said clear? If not, how is it unclear?
- Are adequate definitions given for important concepts? Can you think of counter-examples?
- Are the arguments adequate to support the claims; e.g., are the premises true? Are the assumptions dubious?
- Do the implications of the text lead to absurd or false consequences?
- Are important aspects of the issue overlooked?
- How well did the author accomplish his goal?

Always try and put into your own words what the author is trying to say. Attempt to summarize the whole point that is being made, and consider it carefully—in your own words. Also, don't lose sight of the questions that are being asked—they are as important as the answers given. Try to put the questions in your own words, and then come up with your own answers. In other words, make these questions your own.

Finally, you should be reading this material not only with an "eye" to understanding what the author is trying to say, but also in order to *understand how to write out and develop your own ideas*. What are important issues to consider? How should you construct your argument?