

Philosophy for Understanding Theology (0539)

Department of Theology

Tyndale Seminary

Wednesday at 8:30 a.m.

Instructor: Dr. Victor Shepherd

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday by appointment

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Description

This course endeavours to acquaint students with the history of philosophy from the pre-Socratics to modernity, especially where the history of thought intersects theology. The course seeks to inform students of the Western world's intellectual (and, to less extent, the social and political) development, and to indicate where this development has influenced theological understanding and articulation even where theologians may not have been aware of philosophy's "encroachment."

Outcomes

Students will be able to identify, discuss, and respond to diverse philosophical questions that arise repeatedly as theologians ponder the substance of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." At times these questions have been posed implicitly, at other times explicitly. In any case theology is never written without an explicit or implicit "conversation" with philosophy.

Since it has been argued (Hans Urs von Balthasar) that philosophy is most fruitful when it deliberately engages theology – i.e., philosophy that ignores theology thereby impoverishes itself – students will be able to grasp the importance of a profound, protracted dialogue between the two disciplines.

Students will be helped to come to terms with the following the issues:

Why should a Christian study philosophy?

Can philosophy elucidate problem areas in theology?

Is philosophy an aspect of that "world" which Christian mission engages?

Can philosophy "keep theology students honest" by exposing facile and premature theological assertions?

Does philosophy help expose the cultural context in which all theology is written?

How does philosophy help us fulfil the commandment to love God with our mind?

How does philosophy assist in exposing Christian declensions and distortions we might otherwise overlook?

Can philosophy help us avoid a premature simplicity that undervalues legitimate intellectual difficulties with the Christian faith?

Required Textbooks

Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*

Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted (eds.), *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*

Assignments

[1] Papers

Students will submit two papers, 2000-2500 words each, that probe the intersection of philosophy and theology. For instance, a paper on Plato's theory of knowledge and its relation to virtue would probe the boundary between his understanding and that of biblical thought on such matters as the possibility and actuality of our knowledge of God, the role of the Holy Spirit, the difference between virtue as a natural phenomenon engendered by philosophical wisdom and grace-facilitated obedience to the living God.

The first paper is to be submitted by the conclusion of class, February 25, and is to discuss and critically reflect on text and lecture materials of any one class session from the beginning of the course to this point.

The second paper is to be submitted by the conclusion of the examination, April 22, and is to discuss and reflect critically on text and lecture materials of any one class session from "The Beginnings of the Modern World..." to Kierkegaard.

Note 1: The mark on late papers will be reduced by a letter-grade per day.

Note 2: The instructor is not permitted to accept papers after April 22.

[2] Final Examination

Evaluation

Each paper: 33% (for 66% of final grade)

Examination: 34%

Total: 100%

Note: A select bibliography will be supplied in class.

Schedule: 2003

Note: "T" = text (Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*)

"R" = readings (Allen and Springsted, *Primary Readings in Phil. for Und. Theol.*)

Jan. 14	Introductory Lecture: "What is Philosophy?"	
		"Why Should a Christian Study Philosophy?"
Jan. 21	Plato I	T: 15-37 R: 16-38
Jan. 28	Plato II	T: 39-59 R: 1-15
Feb. 4	Cynics and Stoics	T: 61-70
Feb. 11	Plotinus	T: 70-91

Feb. 18	Aristotle	T: chapt. 4, plus 107-110
Feb. 25	Aquinas	T: chapt. 6 R: 59-66
Mar. 4	The Beginnings of the Modern World: Nominalism, Humanism, The Scientific Revol'n T: chapt. 7 (plus article by Emil Fackenheim)	
Mar. 11	Hume	T: 189-202 R: 153-171
Mar. 18	Reading Week – No Class	
Mar. 25	Kant	T: chapt. 9 R: 172-185
Apr. 1	Hegel	T: chapt. 10 R: 210-218
Apr. 8	Kierkegaard	T: chapt. 10 R: 219-227
Apr. 15	Marx	T: chapt. 10 R: 244-247
Apr. 22	Examination	