BEPH-3310

history of ancient and medieval philosophy

purpose & objectives:

Ostensibly, this is a course designed to acquaint you with the thought of the principle figures of ancient and medieval western philosophy. However, it is my hope that during this study you will not only learn about the history of philosophy, but that you will learn from it as well. The history of philosophy can be read as the "struggle of the human intellect to attain truth." And while no one philosophical system has completely grasped truth, this fact does not negate the value of a study of the development of such systems, nor even the value of the attempts to gain truth. As such, we should come to this study expecting to find errors, but also, pieces of the truth. It is then your responsibility to learn both from the errors and from the truths observed.

Additionally, the study of ancient and medieval philosophy is of special importance to the Christian student. Greek philosophy formed the intellectual milieu of the Incarnation of Christ, and the development of medieval philosophy represents the intellectual development of the early Christian Church, as early Christians began to work out systematically the philosophical implications of the Christian faith.

To summarize: the history of philosophy is the history of the ideas that have influenced and will continue to influence the development of our culture. It is the goal of this course to make you aware of these ideas and to engage these ideas critically. Hopefully, this will equip you to recognize (as much as is possible) the historical foundations of our present cultural context, thereby learning how best to live within it.

texts:


Course Requirements:

You are responsible to read the assigned texts and to participate in a threaded discussion list in connection with the assigned readings. Completion of these readings and participation in this discussion list will be worth 15% of the final course grade.

You are also required to write a critical review of Karl Popper's The Open Society and Its Enemies. This assignment will be worth 30% of the final course grade.

There will be three exams. Two of these exams will be take-home, and the third exam might possibly be take-home as well. You will be informed of the structure of this exam in advance. Each exam will be worth 15% of the final course grade.

Class participation will determine the remaining 10% of the final course grade.

Grading Scale and Course Policies:

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Late assignments (except for discussion list postings) will receive an automatic 15% grade reduction for each day after the due date. If you do the math here, you can see that any assignment not turned in by one week from the due-date receives an automatic zero. Best advice: do your work on time!

Postings to the threaded discussion list must be posted by the beginning of class on the assigned due-date. Any contributions not posted on time cannot be posted for credit, except for in rare cases.

Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive an automatic zero for the assignment.

Course Schedule:

- Aug 21 - 26: Introduction
- Aug 28 - Sept 9: The Presocratics and the Sophists
- Sept 16 - 30: Socrates & Plato
- Oct 2 - 14: Aristotle
- Oct 16: Hellenistic & Greco-Roman Philosophers
- Oct 21 - 30: St. Augustine
- Nov 4 - Dec 4: The Medieval Model and the Problem of Universals (Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, & Roger Bacon)

Important Dates:

- Tuesday, Oct 7: Take-home Exam #1 due
- Tuesday, Nov 11: Take-home Exam #2 due
- Wed., Nov 26 - Mon., Dec 1: Thanksgiving vacation
- Tuesday, Dec 9, 3:00 - 5:00: Scheduled final exam period
- TBA (you choose): Popper review due

Some dates are approximations and may change.