Fall 2000

PHIL 309: History of Christian Philosophy

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Dordt College

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Phil. 309 HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY Dr. Roger Henderson (Ex. 6330)

Course Description

An analysis of the origin and development of Christian philosophy since the Reformation, in the context of Western thought.

Objectives

That the student will:

1. be able to analyze a philosophical text in order to distinguish the historical school of thought or sources it springs from,
2. be able to analyze a philosophical text in order to distinguish which notion of Christian philosophy is operative in it,
3. gain a knowledge of some key figures and trends in this history,
4. be able to articulate his or her own approach to Christian philosophy.

Course Outline

(See below)

Means of Instruction

Lectures, group work, writing exercises, reading (aloud) and discussion of papers.

My office number is C121.

Evaluation is based as follows:

- Five papers (ten points each) 50%
- One final paper 20%
- Writing exercises (twenty-five) 25%
- Class participation 5%

Grading Scale: 90-100 A; 80-90 B; 70-80 C; 60-70 D; below 60 F.

Texts

Sapientia (a photo-copied reader)
Miracles by C.S. Lewis
Reason within the bounds of Religion by N. Wolterstorff
Very capable Christian thinkers have disagreed with each other on a wide variety of issues both trivial and profound. One reason for this is sin; but another is the overabundance of meaning in creation — human life and history. Because of differences in vantage point, period and perspective, many different but legitimate interpretations of philosophical questions can be given. This realization should inform our attitude and approach to the history of Christian philosophy. Nevertheless, we cannot deny believing that some interpretations are better than others — more representative of a Biblically oriented position.

Broadly speaking Christian philosophers have tended to think and work along the philosophical lines of Platonic or Aristotelian thought, of (Stoc) natural law, a docta ignorantia or a covenant idea; frequently the lines have been crossed if not confused.

Although "A History of Christian Thought" is a title you might come across occasionally, it is unusual if not rare to find "A History of Christian Philosophy." Deep and complicated questions lay behind this near absence. While these questions cannot be avoided, we are going to address them only indirectly for the most part.

Some of the questions we will have to face are as follows: How do the decisions we make in philosophy fit into the view we take of how a Christian life ought to be live? Is philosophy something we just can’t do without, i.e. must everyone philosophize to some extent, leaning on some tradition. If philosophy is properly a purely rational process why are their disagreements among rationalists? Can philosophy do without some sort of "foundation"?

My approach, as suggested above, will assume that reality is of a meaning-rich and relationship-rich character allowing for an overabundance of possible interpretations. Nevertheless, at any point in time, each philosophy can be said to be more or less Biblically oriented. I say "Biblically oriented" rather than simply "Biblical" because I think that, particularly in philosophy, there are various layers of interpretation which have to be negotiated before philosophical ideas can be put side by side with Biblical doctrines for comparison and judgement. Approaching this question in terms of "the Biblical ground motive" is helpful, but for some philosophical views it does not provide a graspable basis for judgement.

The order of our journey will be as follows: We begin with a short essay about the goal of philosophy which its author says is wisdom. This will prime us to consider the character of the historical period in which our course officially begins, the Renaissance-Reformation period.

We then read an extensive article by I. Lakatos which spells out a way of looking at and evaluating the history of science. His "reconstruction" articulates the programmatic and communal character of science which can be used to analyze the various historical schools of philosophy. St. Augustine is our next stop — the inexhaustible progenitor of Christian reflection. He played a major role in inspiring generations of Christian philosophers — and is often seen as the inceptor of Medieval philosophy in all its flavors. His importance to Martin Luther can hardly be exaggerated and he is quoted by Calvin more than is any other Church Father.

From Augustine we turn to questions about the source of order and nature of universals, which involves the Covenant. Much attention was being paid to these questions during the period of Martin Luther’s education. Luther is identified with the via moderna or the nominalist school of Ockham which focused on these problems. These discussions should lead us into a considerations of the many sides and immense influence of Martin Luther.

The next major Christian thinker we will read is John Calvin, who both builds upon Luther and adds valuable insights of his own. While neither Luther or Calvin are usually looked upon as philosophers, they help give rise to a way of life which fosters the growth of a whole new form of culture in Northern Europe. Their influence can be found in Elizabethan England — which we will read about.

From there we turn to Pascal. His "philosophy" militates against the "God of the philosophers" and picks up certain lines present in Luther and also in Augustine. Thomas Reid represents the Scottish school of common sense — this in contrast to David Hume. Our attention then turns to the Dane, S. Kierkegaard who we will read with the help of Prof. Adams.

We will then look briefly look at Hamann and Dostoevsky. More extended attention will be given to the work of C.S. Lewis, A. Kuyper and N. Wolterstorff. While neither the first two were philosophers by training, both put forth such highly articulated views of life that their thought has offered most of what is usually understood as a philosophy.

Before drawing our survey to a close, we will read one piece each by A. Plantinga, G. Grant, O.K. Bousma and H. Dooyeweerd.
**Phil 309, History of Christian Philosophy; Dordt College Fall 2000, Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 1</td>
<td>Fr</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Read “The goal of Philosophy”; write one paragraph based on the reading in which you formulate its primary thesis, the importance of the thesis and your opinion of it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 8</td>
<td>Fr</td>
<td>Lakatos and Lewis</td>
<td>Read Carre in <em>Sapientia</em> p.27-40; write one paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 11</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Augustine &amp; Philosophy</td>
<td>Read Luther Between... in <em>Sapientia</em> p.48-49; Maurice <em>Sapientia</em> p.50-74; write one paragraph. Augustine <em>Sapientia</em> p.83-86.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 13</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Luther</td>
<td>Read Luther’s “Preface to...1545” <em>Sapientia</em> p.75-82; write one paragraph. Augustin <em>Sapientia</em> p.83-86.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 15</td>
<td>Fr</td>
<td>Luther</td>
<td>Read Marenbon <em>Sapientia</em> p.87-89; Luther’s “Disputation...” <em>Sapientia</em> p.92-95; “Quest” <em>Sapientia</em> p.96-99; write a paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 18</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Luther</td>
<td>Read Oberman <em>Sapientia</em> p.100-119; write a paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 20</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>“Divine Absolute Power, Divine Ordering Power”</td>
<td>Read Oberman <em>Sapientia</em> p.120-13; write a paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 22</td>
<td>Fr</td>
<td>The <em>via moderna</em></td>
<td>Work on paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 25</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Papers (first)</td>
<td>Read Encyclopedia article...&quot;Calvin&quot; <em>Sapientia</em> p.132-134; <em>Institutes...</em> excerpts <em>Sapientia</em> p.135-141; Answer study questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 27</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>Read <em>Institutes...</em> excerpts <em>Sapientia</em> p.141-147; Write an essay using an image or metaphor (of your own invention) to capture Calvin’s attitude towards philosophy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 29</td>
<td>Fr</td>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>Read <em>Institutes...</em> excerpts <em>Sapientia</em> p.147-154.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 2</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>Read Tillyard, <em>Sapientia</em> p.155-161; write a paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Elizabethan Thought &amp; Cambridge Platonism</td>
<td>Read <em>Les Pensees</em> # 184-241 <em>Sapientia</em> p.165-173; write a paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 9</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Pascal</td>
<td>Read “Hume and Reid” <em>Sapientia</em> p.173-183; write a brief essay on Reid’s answer to or critique of Hume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 11</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Reid</td>
<td>Read material prepared by Dr. Charles Adams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 16</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Papers (second)</td>
<td>Read “Personal Universe..” <em>Sapientia</em> p.184-295; write a paragraph.</td>
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</table>
Oct 18 We    Hamann

Read Dostoevsky, “Notes from Underground.” Sapientia p.206-214; write an essay using an image or metaphor (of your own invention) to capture the flavor of Dostoevsky’s thought.

Oct 20 Fr    Dostoevsky, Solvyov,

Read Miracles Ch. I-III, formulate one of his arguments in outline form.

Oct 23 Mo    Lewis

Read Miracles Ch. IV-VII, discuss in a brief essay his argument about naturalism from as many sides or perspectives as you can.

Oct 25 We    Lewis

Read Miracles Ch. VIII-XIII.

Oct 27 Fr    Lewis

Work on paper.

Oct 30 Mo    Papers (third)

Read Kuyper Centennial Reader p.1-16; Answer study questions.

Nov 1 We      Kuyper

Read Centennial Reader p. 19-44; write one paragraph.

Nov 3 Fr      Kuyper

Read Centennial Reader p. 87-124; write one paragraph.

Nov 6 Mo      Kuyper

Read Centennial Reader p. 363-401; write an essay using an image or metaphor (of your own invention) to capture Kuyper’s approach to philosophy.

Nov 8 We      Kuyper

Read Centennial Reader p. 461-490; write one paragraph.

Nov 10 Fr     Sphere Soverignty

Work on paper.

Nov 13 Mo     Papers (fourth)

Read Taliaferro, Sapientia p. 242- ; make an outline of “schools” of Christian philosophy.

Nov 15 We     Christians and 20th Century Philosophy

Read Plantinga “Advice...” Sapientia p.222-231 write one paragraph.

Nov 17 Fr     Plantinga

Read Reason Within... p. 1-55; answer study questions.

Nov 20 Mo     Wolterstorff

Read Reason Within... p. 56-100; write one paragraph.

Nov 27 Mo     Wolterstorff

Read Reason Within... p. 100-146.

Write paper.

Dec 1 Fr       Wolterstorff

Read Grant, Sapientia p.232-241.

Dec 4 Mo       Papers (fifth)

Read Bousma, Sapientia p.215-221; write one paragraph.

Dec 6 We       Grant

Read “Calvinism and Natural Law”; write one paragraph.

Dec 8 Fr       Bousma

Work on paper.

Dec 11 Mo     Christian Philosophy

Work on paper. Final Paper due Dec. 18

Dec 13 We     Christian Philosophy