

Sample Syllabi

Caleb Cohoe

These sample syllabi are outlines of courses that I have taught or developed. The content and arrangement of the courses is flexible and can be modified to fit the needs of your students. I am also happy to structure courses to fit with departmental aims and requirements.

History of Ancient Philosophy

Caleb Cohoe

Course Description:

In this course we will discuss the ideas and arguments of major ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. We will focus on the thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and consider developments prior to Socrates and after Aristotle in relation to these three foundational figures. The course starts with Socrates and the beginnings of philosophical ethics. We will then consider the questions about ethics, knowledge, and the nature of reality that Plato raises in his dialogues. This will lead into a close study of Plato's greatest masterpiece: the *Republic*. After Plato, we will turn to Aristotle's natural philosophy and metaphysics, including his comments on his Pre-Socratic predecessors. We will then consider Aristotle's ethics. We end with a survey of philosophical activity in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This course will introduce students to the history and continued relevance of the first centuries of western philosophy.

Texts:

S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C. D. C. Reeve (editors), *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy (Fourth Edition) from Thales to Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett, Fourth Edition 2011). Additional readings (some required, some optional) will be made available on the Blackboard website under Course Materials. Many of these readings are also available online.

Reading/writing assignments:

Required weekly readings will typically amount to about 20-60 pages. The required readings will all be primary texts taken from ancient philosophers. Optional readings will include modern commentary as well as additional historical material. Although the readings are relatively short, they are difficult, requiring close study and multiple readings. The best approach is to read each text both before and after we discuss it in class. Reread each piece several times if necessary.

You will be asked to write three papers: a shorter first paper (700-1200 words), a longer second paper (1200-2000 words), and a final paper (1750-3000 words), for which you will be required to complete a research bibliography. There will be no exams. You will also be asked to complete a number of short reading responses, consisting of (1) a brief one paragraph summary of the main claims of the reading and the evidence offered in support of them and (2) a question you have in response to the reading. Several classes during the semester will be set aside for group discussion and presentations. These presentations will form a large part of your course participation grade.

Grading:

First Paper: 15%, Second Paper: 25%, Final paper: 35%, Course Participation and Reading Responses: 25%

Course Outline:

1. *Introduction: The Emergence of Philosophy: the Pre-Socratics in relation to Traditional Greek Thought*
2. *Socratic Definition in the Euthyphro*, August 21-26
 - a. Plato, *Euthyphro*
3. *Socrates' Trial and Conviction*, August 28
 - a. Plato, *Apology*
4. *No One Does Evil Willingly*, September 4-9
 - a. Plato, *Protagoras*, 348c-362a
5. *Learning as Recollecting*, September 11-16
 - a. Plato, *Meno*
 - i. Optional secondary source: Gail Fine, "Inquiry in the Meno"
6. *The Phaedo's Introduction of the Forms and Argument for the Immortality of the Soul*, September 16-18
 - a. Plato, *Phaedo*
7. *Plato's Republic*, September 23-October 7
 - a. Why Be Moral? (Books One to Two)
 - b. Justice in City and Soul (Books Two to Four)
 - c. Parts of the Soul (Book Four)
 - i. Optional secondary source: Hendrik Lorenz, "The Analysis of the Soul in Plato's Republic"
 - d. Theory of Forms: Line, Sun, and Cave (Books Six and Seven, 503b-518b)
 - i. Optional secondary source: Myles Burnyeat, "Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul"
 - e. Education, the Arts, and the City (Books Two to Three, Seven, and Ten)
 - i. Optional secondary source: Alexander Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media"
8. *Aristotle's Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics*, October 9-November 6
 - a. Aristotle's Categories (*Categories* and *De Interpretatione* 1 and 9)
 - i. Optional secondary source: Verity Harte, "What's a particular, and what makes it so? : some thoughts, mainly about Aristotle"
 - b. Aristotle's Theory of Change (*Physics* I 1, 7-9; Selections from Parmenides and the Atomists)
 - c. On Nature and the Four Causes (*Physics* II 1-3, 7-9; Selections from the Pre-Socratics)
 - i. Ursula Coope, "Aristotle on the Infinite"/"Aristotle: Time and Change"
 - d. On the Soul (*De Anima* II 1-4)
 - e. On Wisdom, Matter, and Form (*Metaphysics* I 1-3, VII 1-4, 17)
 - f. Perception and Understanding (*De Anima* II 5-6, 12; III 4-5)
 - g. God and the Order of Reality (*Metaphysics* XII 6-9)
9. *Aristotle's Ethics*, November 11-November 20

- a. The Human Good and Happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics* I 1-5)
 - b. The Human Work Argument (*Nicomachean Ethics* I 7-9, 13)
 - c. Aristotle on Lack of Control (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 1-3)
 - d. Aristotle on Contemplation and Happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics* X 6-8)
10. *Later Greek and Roman Philosophy*, November 20-December 4
- a. Epicurean Ethics and Natural Philosophy (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, Selections)
 - b. Stoic Ethics and Natural Philosophy (Epictetus, *Handbook*, Selections)
 - c. The Impotence of Reason: Pyrrhonian Skepticism (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines* I, Selections)
 - d. Augustine on Good, Evil, and Happiness (*Confessions*, Selections, *City of God*, XIX and XX, Selections)

Introduction to Medieval Philosophy

Caleb Cohoe

Course Description:

In this course we will become acquainted with medieval philosophy through exploring three areas of discussion that were central to this period. (1) The relationship between God and creation: Can we prove that there must be a divine being? Could the world have been much different than it is? (2) The relationship between God, freedom, and evil: If God exists, why is there evil in the world? Does human freedom require the possibility of evil? (3) The distinctive nature of human beings: are human beings bodies, soul, or some combination of both? What are our distinctive activities and abilities? We will begin with Augustine and Boethius, who wrote during the decline of the Roman Empire. We will then consider some important philosophers from the Islamic tradition as well as Moses Maimonides, the most distinguished Jewish medieval philosopher. After a look at Anselm's famous ontological argument for the existence of God, we will turn to an extended examination of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the pre-eminent medieval philosopher, and his reconciliation of Christian beliefs with Aristotelian philosophy. Finally, we will look at later medieval philosophy, considering the positions that John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham put forward in response to Aquinas. In addition to tracing the development of philosophical thought in the medieval period, we will explore the continuing relevance that these discussions have for us today.

Texts:

A. Hyman, J.J. Walsh, Thomas Williams (editors), *Philosophy of the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic and Jewish Tradition* (Indianapolis: Hackett, Third Edition 2010), Selected Online Resources

Reading/writing assignments:

Required weekly readings will typically amount to about 20-60 pages. The required readings will all be primary texts taken from medieval philosophers. Optional readings will include modern commentary as well as additional historical material. Although the readings are relatively short, they are difficult, requiring close study and multiple readings. The best approach is to read each text both before and after we discuss it in class. Reread each piece several times if necessary.

You will be asked to write four short essays (500 words) as well as two longer essays (1,000 words). There will be take-home exams at midterm and at the end of term.

Grading:

Short Papers: 20%, Midterm exam: 25%, Long Essays: 20%, Final exam: 25%, Course Participation: 10%

Course Outline:

1. *Introduction*, Week One
 - a. Our Three Central Themes
2. *Augustine*, Weeks One to Four

- a. Augustine's Life: "Our heart is restless until it rests in You" (*Confessions*, I-II, Selections from III-VII, VIII-IX)
- b. On Evil, Freedom, and Foreknowledge (*Confessions*, Selections from VII and X; *On the Freedom of the Will*)
- c. Refutation of Skepticism (*Against the Academicians*)
3. *Boethius*, Week Five
 - a. Providence and Freedom, (*Consolation of Philosophy*, III)
4. *Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, Weeks Six to Seven
 - a. Al-Ghazali Against the Eternity of the World (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*)
 - b. Ibn Rushd on the Nature of the Intellect (*Long Commentary on the De Anima*, Selection)
5. *Moses Maimonides*, Weeks Seven to Eight
 - a. On the Relation between Creation and God (*Guide to the Perplexed*, Selections)
 - b. Evil, Providence, and Suffering (*Guide to the Perplexed*, Selections)
6. *Anselm*, Week Nine
 - a. The Ontological Argument (*Proslogion* and exchange with Gaunilo)
7. *Thomas Aquinas*, Weeks Ten to Thirteen
 - a. Aquinas's Metaphysical Framework (*The Principles of Nature, On Being and Essence*)
 - b. Aquinas's Proofs for the Existence of God (*On Being and Essence, Summa Theologiae {ST} Part I, Question 2, Articles 2-3*)
 - c. God and Creation (*ST*, Selections)
 - d. Human Nature (*ST* 1q75-76)
 - e. Human Cognition (*ST* 1q78, 85)
8. *Later Medieval Philosophy*, Weeks Fourteen to Fifteen
 - a. John Duns Scotus on Contingency and the Divine Will (Selections in *PMA*)
 - b. Scotus on Human Cognition (Selections in *PMA*)
 - c. William of Ockham on Human Cognition (Selections in *PMA*)

Happiness in Ancient and Medieval Western Philosophy

Caleb Cohoe

Course Description:

Is happiness a feeling, a state of mind, or an activity? Can our desire for happiness conflict with what is good for us or for society? Is our happiness up to us or does it depend on external circumstances? These questions are of vital importance today. There is also a long and rich tradition of philosophical thinking about them. In this upper level course we will explore a variety of ancient and medieval perspectives on these questions. We will start by looking at Socrates' striking claim that the unjust cannot be happy, as presented in Plato's *Gorgias*. We will then carefully go through Aristotle's discussion of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. We will employ it as a reference point in considering the views of happiness put forward by later philosophers. We will examine what constitutes happiness: the Epicureans insist that bodily pleasure and the absence of pain are central to happiness, while the Stoics argue that happiness is entirely internal and unaffected by our bodily condition. We will also consider the relationship of happiness to other aspects of human life. We will look at Aristotle's reasons for claiming that our entire political and social order should be organized around happiness. We will compare this position with John Duns Scotus's contention that our desire for justice and our desire for happiness are fundamentally different and can oppose one another. Through this course we will come to appreciate how careful reflection on the reasons for holding a view can aid us in thinking about practical as well as theoretical matters. Coming to a better knowledge of what happiness is will help us to achieve it.

Texts:

Course Packet

Reading/writing assignments:

Required weekly readings will typically amount to about 15-40 pages. The required readings will all be primary texts taken from ancient and medieval philosophers. Optional readings will include modern commentary as well as additional historical material. Although the readings are short, they are difficult, requiring close study and multiple readings. The best approach is to read each text both before and after we discuss it in class. Reread each piece several times if necessary.

You will be asked to write two short essays (500 words) as well as two longer essays (2,000 words). There will be take-home exams at midterm and at the end of term.

Grading:

Short Papers: 10%, Midterm exam: 25%, Long Essays: 30%, Final exam: 25%, Course Participation: 10%

Course Outline:

1. *Introduction, Week One*
 - a. A Conceptual Note: Happiness Compared to *Eudaimonia* and *Beatitudo*
 - b. Contemporary and Ancient Perspectives on Individual and Communal Goods
 - i. Julia Annas, "Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality"
2. *Traditional Greek Conceptions of Happiness*
 - a. Solon and Croesus in Herodotus's *Histories*
3. *Happiness, Pleasure, and Justice in Plato's Gorgias*
 - a. Can the Unjust be Happy? (*Gorgias*, 462b-481b)

- b. Are the Good and the Pleasant the Same? (*Gorgias*, 481b-513e)
 - c. Socrates' Conclusions, (*Gorgias*, 523a-527e)
- 4. *Aristotle on Happiness*, Weeks One to Five
 - a. The Centrality of Happiness to Ethics (*Nicomachean Ethics (NE)* I 1-2)
 - b. Happiness is Living Well and Doing Well (*NE* I 4)
 - c. Candidates for Happiness (*NE* I 4-5)
 - d. Happiness as Final (*NE* I 7)
 - e. The Function Argument (*NE* I 7)
 - f. Happiness and Self-Sufficiency (*NE* I 7-11)
 - g. Happiness and Fortune (*NE* I 9-11)
 - h. Contemplation is Happiness (*NE* X 6-8)
 - i. The Practical Life is Secondarily Happy (*NE* X 6-8)
- 5. *Epicurean Views of Happiness*, Week Six to Seven
 - a. Living Pleasantly is the Highest Good (Cicero, *De Finibus* I and II, Selections)
 - b. Happiness as the Absence of Pain (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* I and IV, Selections)
 - c. Happiness as the Absence of Fear (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* I and III, Selections)
- 6. *Stoic Views on Happiness*, Weeks Seven to Eight
 - a. Only Virtue is Good
 - i. Cicero, *De Finibus* III, Selections
 - b. Our Happiness Depends on Us (Epictetus, *Handbook*; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Selections)
 - c. Our happiness is unaffected by external circumstances (Epictetus, *Handbook*; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Selections)
- 7. *Augustine on Happiness*, Weeks Nine to Ten
 - a. The impossibility of happiness in this world (*Confessions* I, IX, X, Selections; *City of God* XIX and XX, Selections)
 - b. The nature of true happiness (*City of God* XIX and XX, Selections)
- 8. *Thomas Aquinas on Happiness*, Weeks Eleven to Thirteen
 - a. Happiness as the goal of all human beings (*Summa Theologiae*, Treatise on Happiness, Selections)
 - b. Natural and Supernatural Happiness (*Summa Theologiae*, Treatise on Happiness, Selections)
- 9. *Duns Scotus on Happiness and Justice*, Weeks Fourteen to Fifteen
 - a. The Affection for Advantage Contrasted with the Affection for Justice, (Selections from the *Reportatio* and *Ordinatio*)
 - b. Disagreements between Aquinas and Duns Scotus

Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

Caleb Cohoe

Course Description:

Can we discover whether God exists through the use of reason? If there is a divine being, what is this being like? Does the nature of human morality depend on whether such a being exists? These questions are of central importance to human life and to both philosophy and religion. In this course we will approach such questions by employing the methods of philosophical reason, carefully examining arguments and considering their fundamental assumptions. We will use readings drawn from both historical texts and contemporary philosophical discussion, focusing primarily on the Western tradition. We will look at arguments for and against the existence of God, as well as considering more generally what the appropriate grounds are for holding (or failing to hold) theological or religious beliefs. We will look into a number of specific topics that arise in the philosophy of religion, such as whether an omniscient or omnipotent being is logically possible, whether human beings can survive death, and what the nature of evil is. We will also consider the broader implications that these questions have for our overall view of the world and our place in it, comparing theistic accounts of the world with atheistic and naturalistic accounts. Through this course we will come to appreciate how careful reflection on these issues can help us to better grasp and formulate our own beliefs and understand the beliefs of others.

Texts:

Linda Zagzebski, Timothy D. Miller (editors), *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: Ancient to Contemporary* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2009) ISBN: 978-1-4051-8091-7; Additional readings posted online.

Assignments:

Required weekly readings will typically amount to about 20-50 pages. The required readings will be taken from both historical and contemporary sources. Although the readings are relatively short, they are difficult, requiring close study and multiple readings. The best approach is to read each text both before and after we discuss it in class. Reread each piece several times if necessary.

There will be a mid-term exam and a final as well as two short papers (1,000 words each). You will also be asked to complete a number of short reading responses, consisting of (1) a brief one paragraph summary of the main claims of the reading and the evidence offered in support of them and (2) a question you have in response to the reading. Several classes during the semester will be set aside for group discussion and presentations. These presentations will form a large part of your course participation grade.

Grading:

Short Papers: 25%, Midterm exam: 20%, Final exam: 25%, Reading Response/Course Participation: 30%

Course Outline:

1. *Introduction*
 - a. Methods and Approaches Found in the Philosophy of Religion

2. *What Are the Implications of Religious Diversity?* August 22-27
 - a. All Religions Have the Same Purpose ("The Bodhgaya Interview," The 14th Dalai Lama)
 - b. No Religion is Exclusively Right, But All Point Us to Ultimate Reality ("Religious Pluralism and Salvation," John Hick)
 - c. Exclusivism ("Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," Alvin Plantinga [online])
3. *Naturalism and Theism*, August 29-September 5
 - a. Naturalistic Accounts of Religious Belief
 - i. "Origin of Religion," David Hume
 - ii. "The Future of an Illusion," Sigmund Freud
4. *Arguments Concerning the Existence of God*
 - a. Arguments from Design, September 5-12
 - i. "The Fifth Way," Thomas Aquinas
 - ii. "The Watch and the Watchmaker," William Paley
 - iii. "Critique of the Design Argument," David Hume
 - iv. "The Teleological Argument," Robin Collins
 - v. "The Argument from the Appearance of Design," J.J.C. Smart
 - b. Cosmological Arguments, September 17-19
 - i. "The Kalam Cosmological Argument," Al-Ghazālī
 - ii. "The Argument from Dependent Beings," Samuel Clarke
 - iii. "Critique of the Cosmological Argument," David Hume
 - iv. "The First Three Ways," Thomas Aquinas
 - c. The Ontological Argument, September 24-26
 - i. "Anselm's Ontological Argument" Anselm
 - ii. "Descartes's Ontological Argument," René Descartes
 - iii. "The Ontological Argument," Alvin Plantinga
5. *The Problem of Evil*, October 1-8
 - a. "On the Free Choice of the Will," Augustine
 - b. "Evil and Omnipotence," J. L. Mackie
 - c. "The Free Will Defense," Alvin Plantinga
 - d. "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," Marilyn Adams
6. *Religion and Morality*, October 15-17
 - a. The Divine Command Theory of Morality
 - i. Robert M. Adams, "Divine Commands"
 - b. "The Moral Argument for the Existence of God," Immanuel Kant
7. *Naturalism and Theism, Part 2*, October 24-6
 - a. Naturalistic Responses to Design
 - i. "Atheism and Evolution," Daniel C. Dennett
 - b. Problems for Naturalism
 - i. "How Naturalism Implies Skepticism," Alvin Plantinga
8. *What Are the Grounds for Religious Belief?* October 29-November 7
 - a. "Faith and Reason," Thomas Aquinas
 - b. "Belief in God is Natural," John Calvin
 - c. "The Numinous," Rudolf Otto
 - d. "Mysticism and Religious Experience," William J. Wainwright
 - e. "The Wager," Blaise Pascal
 - f. "The Ethics of Belief", W.K. Clifford

- g. "The Will to Believe," William James
- 9. *Philosophical Conceptions of the Divine*, November 12-26
 - a. "The Final Cause," Aristotle
 - b. "The Divine Darkness," Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite
 - c. "Perfect Being," Anselm
 - d. "Feminism and Pantheism," Grace M. Jantzen (online)
 - e. "Omnipotence," Peter Geach
 - f. "God's Timeless Knowing," Boethius
 - g. "Eternity and God's Knowledge," Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (online)
- 10. *Death and Immortality*, November 28-December 5
 - a. "The Separation of the Soul from the Body," Plato
 - b. "The Future Life," Ibn Rushd (Averroes)
 - c. "The Possibility of Immortality," René Descartes
 - d. "Personal Identity and Consciousness," John Locke

Metaphysics and Mysticism in Ancient and Medieval Western Philosophy

Caleb Cohoe

Course Description:

What are the implications different views of ultimate reality have for conceptions of, speech about, and attitudes towards the divine? In this course we will examine the connection between Western metaphysics and mysticism by closely looking at the role that the divine plays in the metaphysics of a number of key figures in the Western tradition. We will see the diverse ways in which mysticism is understood and practiced, from philosophical and theological theorizing to visions and sensory experience to systematic ways of organizing one's life. We will also examine disputes about the nature and import of mystical experiences. While mystical theology is sometimes opposed to rational philosophy, we will see that three of the most important ancient Greek philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, all advocated the superiority of the divine over the human and put forward conceptions of the divine that were influential not just in philosophy but also in the theology of the three Abrahamic religions. We will examine several important mystics and metaphysicians in the Islamic tradition, the Jewish tradition, and both Eastern and Western Christianity.

Texts:

1. *The Essential Plotinus*, Plotinus, Trans. Elmer O'Brian, (Indianapolis: Hackett, Second Edition 1964), ISBN 978-0-915144-09-9
2. *The Journey of the Mind to God*, Bonaventure, Trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), ISBN 978-0-87220-200-9
3. Course Packet
4. Selected Online Resources

Reading/writing assignments:

Required weekly readings will typically amount to about 15-60 pages. The required readings will all be primary texts taken from metaphysicians and mystics. Optional readings will include modern commentary as well as additional historical material. Although the readings are relatively short, they are difficult, requiring close study and multiple readings. The best approach is to read each text both before and after we discuss it in class. Reread each piece several times if necessary.

You will be asked to write two short papers (1000-1750 words) and one longer paper (3000-4000 words). You will also be asked to complete a number of short reading responses, consisting of (1) a brief one paragraph summary of the main claims of the reading and the evidence offered in support of them and (2) a question you have in response to the reading. Several classes during the semester will be set aside for group discussion and presentations. These presentations will form a large part of your course participation grade.

Grading:

Short Papers: 30%, Long Essay: 40%, Course Participation: 30%

Course Outline:

1. Introduction:
 - a. Preliminary characterizations of metaphysics and mysticism
 - b. Overview of the history of metaphysics and mysticism in the West
 - c. Documentary on the monks of Grand Chartreuse: *Into Great Silence*
2. The Nature of Mysticism
 - a. Types of Mystical Texts
 - i. Vision or Revelation: Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Selections)
 - ii. Theological Treatise: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology* (Selections)
 - b. Interpretations of Mysticism
 - i. "The Numinous," Rudolf Otto
 - ii. "Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics," Grace M. Jantzen
3. Ancient Greek Philosophy and Mysticism
 - a. Xenophanes' Critique of Traditional Greek Religion
 - b. Metaphysics and Mysticism in Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*
 - c. Divine Intellect in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Lambda
 - d. Plotinus's *Enneads*
 - i. Beauty (I, 6 [1])
 - ii. The Intelligence, The Ideas, and Being (V, 9 [5])
 - iii. The Descent of the Soul (IV, 8 [6])
 - iv. The Three Primal Hypostases (V, 1 [10])
 - v. The Post Primals (V,2 [11])
 - vi. The Good or the One (VI, 9 [9])
 - vii. Contemplation (III, 8 [30])
4. Eastern Christian Mysticism
 - a. Maximus the Confessor (Selections)
 - b. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (Selections)
5. Medieval Islamic Metaphysics and Mysticism
 - a. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), *Metaphysics of the Healing* (Selections)
 - b. al-Ghazali', *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (Selections)
 - c. Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Decisive Treatise* (Selections)
6. Medieval Jewish Metaphysics and Mysticism
 - a. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Selections)
7. Western Christian Mysticism
 - a. Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*
 - b. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle or the Mansions* (Selections)
8. What are the Implications of Mystical Experience?
 - a. "Mysticism and Religious Experience," William J. Wainwright
 - b. "Mysticism and Experience," Grace M. Jantzen