**Platonism and Catholicism**

(For Fall Semester 2022: Cross-listed as PHIL 380 and 454)

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Office hours: Thursdays 1-3 pm

**Course description:** In this course you will explore the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions and the ways in which these traditions have been integral to Catholicism. This will provide a framework which can serve as a way of seeing and an approach to the Catholic intellectual tradition.

We will begin the course reading portions of Plato’s *Phaedo*, *Republic,* *Meno, Phaedrus, Symposium, Philebus*, and *Sophist*, as well as certain pagan Neoplatonists: Plotinus and Proclus, who provided a systematic rendering of the central aspects of Platonic philosophy. The purpose of this part of the class is to bring out some major themes from the writings of Plato and the Neoplatonists: the immortality of the soul; memory or intellect as access to the eternal realm; nature, materiality and becoming vs. being; the triad of procession from, immanence in, and return to the One.

We will then move on to look at some of the more influential early Christian Neoplatonists: Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena and Bonaventure. This will give us a sense of how Platonism was taken up by these early Christian philosophers, and the ways in which they appropriated and modified his work to make it more consonant with Catholicism. We will then look at Platonism as present in the writings of the Renaissance Neoplatonists. There is a lot we are not covering in this section of the course, and I’ve assigned some secondary material to summarize some major aspects of the gap for us.

We will end by discussing some works by Edith Stein (Sr. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, saint and martyr), Thomas Merton, and William Lynch. We will in this final section of the course discuss the ways in which Platonism and Neoplatonism continue to influence Catholic asceticism, mysticism, metaphysics, and doctrine. I’ve left this portion of the class relatively open to allow for student interests to dictate the content and direction of the final couple of weeks.

**Texts (buy a physical copy of these books):**

Please purchasethe following books. All should be available for purchase at the bookstore, on amazon.com and many other online book retailers. **Please purchase *these exact versions***, since translations and page numbers vary.

*Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings,* ed. Gerson et al. (Hackett, 2004) ISBN: 9780872207073

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Chadwick(Oxford, 2009), ISBN: 9780199537822

Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (Paulist Press, 1987), ISBN: 9780809128389

**Other texts will be provided to you as a pdf, on sakai under ‘resources’:**

Plato, selections from *Phaedo, Republic, Meno, Phaedrus, Symposium, Philebus*, and *Sophist*

Philo of Alexandria, *On Creation*, selections

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*

Eriugena, *Periphyseon*

SEP entry on Eriugena: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scottus-eriugena/>

Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey into God*

Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*

Cecilia Muratori and Mario Meliadò “Northern Renaissance Platonism from Nicholas of Cusa to Jacob Böhme” in *Christian Platonism: A History*

Edith Stein, “Actual Ideal Being, Species, Type and Image”(fragment)

Edith Stein, “Ways to Know God: The ‘Symbolic Theology’ of Dionysius the Areopagite and Its Factual Presuppositions”

Thomas Merton, “Poetry and the Contemplative Life” *Commonweal,* (1947)

William Lynch, “Theology and the Imagination” *Thought* 29: 61-80 (1954).

Lloyd Gerson “The Perennial Significance of Platonism” in *Christian Platonism: A History*

*Possibly:*

Joseph Ratzinger “The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty”, online at vatican.va

Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* online at vatican.va

**Graduate Papers (50%+30%=80% of grade):**

We will have weekly 1-2 page papers, based on the reading for that week. I will send out potential topics and instructions. These will (collectively) be worth 50% of your grade. You can skip once (for a total of 12 short papers).

You will also have a final paper, worth 30% of your grade. This will be short: 6-10 pages (*maximum* 10 pages).

**Undergraduate Papers (80% of grade):**

We will have weekly 1-2 page papers, based on the reading for that week. I will send out potential topics and instructions. These will (collectively) be worth 80% of your grade. You can skip once (total 12 papers).

**Participation/Attendance/Presentations (20% of grade):**

20% of your grade will be based on attendance, participation, and class presentations, which will involve reading your weekly paper aloud. You must attend class regularly, notify me in advance if you are going to miss, and participate in class discussion.

All grading will be done with letter grades/a four-point scale (A=4.0, A-=3.67, etc.).

**Academic Integrity**

Familiarize yourself with the Loyola academic integrity policy: <https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml> Anyone who plagiarizes will fail the class.

**Please feel free to approach me about anything regarding the course. I will do my best to help you succeed, whatever your circumstances.**

**Tentative Schedule:** *come to class having done the reading assigned for that day.*

Below is a schedule of the core readings. My primary method of communication with you (apart from in class) will be via email. This schedule might change.

*Date Reading due*

**From Plato to Neoplatonism**

Thurs. 9/1 Gerson, “The Perennial Value of Platonism”; Plato, selections from *Phaedo, Republic*

Thurs. 9/8 Plato, selections from *Meno, Phaedrus, Symposium*

Thurs. 9/15 Plato, selections from *Philebus, Sophist*

Thurs. 9/22 Philo, Genesis 1, John 1; Plotinus, selections from *The Enneads*

Thurs. 9/29 Plotinus (cont.)

**Augustine and** **Medieval Catholic Neoplatonism**

Thurs. 10/6 Gregory of Nazianzus, sel.; Augustine, *Confessions* Books VII, X

Thurs. 10/13 Augustine, *Confessions* Book XI-XII

Thurs. 10/20 finish up Augustine; Proclus, selections from *Elements of Theology*

Thurs. 10/27 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* and *On Divine Names* (selections)

Stein, “Ways to Know God: The ‘Symbolic Theology’ of Dionysius the Areopagite”

Thurs. 11/3 John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (selections); Moran and Guiu, SEP entry on Eriugena: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scottus-eriugena/

Thurs 11/10 Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey Into God*

**Neoplatonism in the Renaissance**

Thurs. 11/17 Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance* (selections)

“Northern Renaissance Platonism from Nicholas of Cusa to Jacob Böhme”

**Contemporary Platonism in the Catholic tradition**

Thurs. 12/1 Stein“Actual Ideal Being, Species, Type and Image”(fragment)

Merton, “Poetry and the Contemplative Life”

Lynch, “Theology and the Imagination”

Thurs. 12/8 TBD; maybe paper topic presentations

**Final paper due the date and time of the final (emailed)**