In this seminar, “western religion” refers to Christianity in the first five centuries of its history, and “philosophical foundations” refers to the Platonic philosophers and thematics that were most influential in shaping the structures of early Christian theological, cosmological, ethical, and hermeneutical thinking.

Requirements: Each week you are responsible for reading the ancient texts and contemporary scholarly discussions as listed in the outline of the seminar. Most readings are on reserve in the Graduate Student lounge and available for copying in the Department. In addition, each week you will prepare a (typed) statement of one-to-two pages (double-spaced, please) in which you articulate what you view as the most important theme, image, concept, or problem in the relevant ancient texts (using contemporary readings to help you formulate your topic and enhance your discussion). At least one member of the seminar will be asked to read her or his statement to the seminar as a way of opening and setting the format for discussion by all seminar members. Statements will be collected by the instructor, commented on, and returned. You are also required to do one report; depending on the size of the seminar, one of these will be given during each session; the seminar member giving the report will conduct the discussion for that portion of the session.

There is also a final project, a research paper (25 pages maximum). Within the purview of the subject matter of the seminar, choose a topic relevant to your own interests, and be sure to formulate a succinct thesis or argument, defended by research in scholarly sources. Paper topics and preliminary bibliographies are due on Nov. 8.

Due date for the paper: Friday, Dec. 16, by 5 p.m., in my mailbox. I do not accept late papers.

Outline of Readings

Note: The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy (B171.A79) is an excellent resource for basic introductions to authors and topics in the Platonic tradition. For Christian authors, consult the Encyclopedia of Early Christianity (shelved in the Religion seminar room); The Cambridge History of Christianity: Constantine to c. 600 (BR200.C66); and The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies (BR121.3.099).

1. Plato

Sept. 6 The Symposium (in Cobb, Plato’s Erotic Dialogues)

Charles Kahn, Plato and the Socratic Dialogue, 258-81
Martha Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness, Ch. 6

Heman Sinaiko, *Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato*, 119-84


Sept. 20

*The Republic*, Book X


Sept. 27

*The Phaedrus* (in Cobb, *Plato’s Erotic Dialogues*)


Report: Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, Ch. 7

2. *Plotinus*

Oct. 4

*Enneads* (Enn.) III.8, V.8, V.5, II.9 (metaphysics)

Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, 17-22, 35-47
R. T. Wallis, “Νοῦς as Experience,” in R. Baine Harris, ed., *Significance of Neoplatonism*, 121-43


Oct. 11

*Enn.* I.1, V.1, VI.4, VI.5, VI.7.30-42 (the soul and the self)

Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, 23-24, 64-96

Reports: Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, Ch. 4 (“Introspection in the Dialectic of the *Enneads*”)
A. H. Armstrong, “The Apprehension of Divinity in the Self and the Cosmos in Plotinus,” in his *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, Ch. XX

Oct. 18

*Enn.* I.3, I.6, III.5, V.3.10-17, VI.9 (language, “mysticism”)

Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, 48-63, 97-113

Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 14-33


Armstrong, “Beauty and the Discovery of Divinity in the Thought Of Plotinus,” in his *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, Ch. XIX

Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty*, Ch. 6 (“‘Go On Up’: The One and Contemplation”)

3. Origen

Oct. 25  
*On First Principles* (*De principiis*/*Peri archon*), Book I; Book II.1-3, 8


Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 181-92

Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, 64-72


Kannengiesser, “Divine Trinity and the Structure of the *Peri Archôn*,” in Kannengiesser and Petersen, 231-49

Nov. 1  
*On First Principles*, Book IV; *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue

Skim *Homily XXVII On Numbers*, all in *Origen* (Classics of Western Spirituality volume)

Crouzel, *Origen*, 61-84

John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*, 47-64, 194-206

Reports: Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture*, 244-57, 265-71

Miller, “Poetic Words, Abysmal Words: Reflections on Origen’s Hermeneutics,” in Kannengiesser and Petersen, 165-78

4. Gregory of Nyssa

Nov. 8  
*De opificio hominis* (On the Making of the Human Being)


Nov. 15  

On the Life of Moses


Alden A. Mosshammer, “Disclosing but not Disclosed: Gregory of Nyssa as Deconstructionist” (1990)


Nov. 22: No class – Thanksgiving

5. Augustine

Nov. 29  

Confessions, Books I-IX

Brian Stock, Augustine the Reader, 23-42

Report: Stock, Augustine the Reader, 75-111 (“Reading and Conversion”)

Recommended: Website of James J. O’Donnell: click on “Worlds of Late Antiquity,” then on “Augustine,” then on “Augustine’s Life and Works,” then on “Confessions,” then on “Detailed Introduction to the Confessions” (read only the pages on the Confessions)

Dec. 6  

Confessions, Books X-XIII


Stock, Augustine the Reader, 207-42

Books available for purchase at Follett’s Orange Bookstore

Plato, The Republic
Origen, Origen (Classics of Spirituality volume)
Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Moses (trans. A. Malherbe and E. Ferguson)
Augustine, Confessions (trans. Henry Chadwick)
Hadot, Pierre, Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision
Cobb, William, Plato’s Erotic Dialogues

These books are also on reserve in Bird Library. To get the call numbers, go to Blackboard, click on the Fall 11 version of this seminar, click on “course tools” and then on “course reserves.”