

# ST5400 – Christian Thought & Philosophy

Reformed Theological Seminary, Houston

Summer 2026

## I. Details

- A. Dates: June 22–26
- B. Times: Mon–Fri 12:00pm–9:00pm (including one-hour dinner break)
- C. Professor: Dr. James N. Anderson
- D. Contact: [janderson@rts.edu](mailto:janderson@rts.edu)
- E. Availability: If you wish to discuss some aspect of the course, feel free to email me or speak to me after class.

## II. Goals

- A. To introduce the student to the discipline of philosophy, including its major topics, terminology, techniques, and tools.
- B. To develop a distinctively Christian approach to philosophical thinking.
- C. To familiarize the student with some of the most influential thinkers in the history of Western philosophy and Christian thought.
- D. To illustrate the application of philosophy to issues in Christian/Reformed theology.
- E. To develop the student's critical thinking skills through the close reading and analysis of primary sources.
- F. To help the student to appreciate the importance and utility of philosophical thinking.

## III. Course Overview

- A. Introduction: What is Philosophy? Why Does It Matter?
- B. The Tools of Philosophy: Analysis and Argumentation
- C. Six Influential Thinkers: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Hume, Kant
- D. Topics in Christian Philosophical Theology

## IV. Course Requirements

- A. *Class attendance and thoughtful participation.*
  - 1. As per seminary policy, you are required to attend all the lectures. If you know that you will be unable to attend class on a particular date, please inform me in advance, otherwise you may be penalized for your absence. Since this is an intensive one-week course, attendance is particularly important; missing one day of class entails missing up to *eight* lectures.
  - 2. There will be opportunity for class participation and questions during the lectures.
  - 3. You will be expected to use the internet in the classroom *only for appropriate class-related activities*.
  - 4. A proportion of your final grade (see below) will depend on your attendance record and your participation in the classes (thoughtful interaction with the professor and other students).

5. **Important:** If you want to ensure that you receive the credit for participation that you deserve, please update your Canvas profile (<https://rts.instructure.com/profile>) to include a recent, recognizable headshot.
- B. *Reading assignments.*
1. A proportion of your final grade will depend on how much of the required reading you have completed.
  2. A reading report indicating the *percentage completed* of each required reading item is due on **August 7**. The report should be submitted via the course website (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.
  3. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.
  4. **Important:** You should complete the six primary source readings *before the week of class*, because we will be discussing them during the class. Give some thought in advance to the “Discussion Questions” provided with each of the readings.
- C. *Research paper.*
1. You are required to write a critical research paper (3500–4500 words, excluding footnotes) on any topic addressed in the lectures or readings. If you’re in any doubt about whether your topic is a suitable one, please check with me first.
  2. **Important:** Your paper topic must be *approved by me* before you start writing.
  3. If your paper focuses on the work of a specific thinker, you will be expected to interact with some primary sources.
  4. **Pro-tip:** Don’t try to impress me by writing a paper on Cornelius Van Til. You will almost certainly fail (to impress me, that is).
  5. Whatever topic you choose, make sure that your paper has a clear, focused thesis.
  6. Your paper will be graded according to the following criteria, in no particular order: responsible use of Scripture, responsible use of sources, extent of research, creativity, clarity, structure and coherence, cogency of argument, evidence of critical thinking, and good writing style (inc. grammar, spelling, and punctuation).
  7. The paper should cite *at least 8 scholarly sources*.
    - i. For the purposes of this paper, a scholarly source is a book or article by a recognized expert in the field (and not aimed at a popular level for a general audience)—ideally one that has been peer-reviewed.
    - ii. Wikipedia is clearly *not* a scholarly source.
    - iii. That said, with sufficient discernment, Wikipedia can be a *useful pointer* to scholarly sources and is generally reliable for fact-checking on uncontroversial issues.
    - iv. Please consult me if you have any doubts about whether a source is scholarly.
    - v. You should not rely heavily on internet sources. Use the library!
    - vi. The paper should include a properly formatted bibliography.
  8. The paper should be word-processed, not hand-written.
    - i. Use a 12-point font and double line-spacing for the main text.
    - ii. Use section headings where applicable to improve readability.
    - iii. Use footnotes (10-point font) rather than endnotes.
    - iv. Use a recognized scholarly style for citations (e.g., Chicago, Turabian, SBL).
  9. The paper should be submitted with a title page containing all of the following: the name and year of the course; your name; the professor’s name; the title of the

paper; and the *exact word count* for the main text of the paper (obtained from your word processor's word-count feature).

10. You will be penalized if you do not observe the requirements and guidelines above.
11. For good examples of scholarly papers using scholarly sources, take a look at the online papers from the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* ([here](#)) and the *Westminster Theological Journal* ([here](#)). For good examples of research papers from RTS Charlotte students, visit the *Pen and Parchment* webpage ([here](#)).
12. Your paper is due on **August 7**. It should be uploaded to Canvas (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.
13. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.

D. *Final exam*.

1. The final exam should be completed by **August 7**.
2. The exam should be taken with a proctor using the [LockDown Browser](#).
3. The exam will consist of three short-essay questions based on all of the class material and all of the required reading. You will have three hours to complete it.
4. You may refer to an English translation of the Bible (but not one with study notes, etc.). You may not refer to any class notes or other study resources.
5. You will be asked to sign a declaration that you have not discussed the content of the exam with anyone who has previously taken the exam.

## V. Course Documents

A. *Instructions for accessing course documents*.

1. Log in to the RTS Canvas website (<https://rts.instructure.com>).
2. Select “Christian Thought & Philosophy” from the **Courses** menu.
3. All of the course documents will be accessible from the **Modules** page.

B. *Course outline*.

1. Other than the syllabus, the course outline is the most important document. You will need a copy (either electronic or printed) in front of you throughout the class.
2. You are strongly encouraged to supplement the outline with your own notes.
3. The outline will be uploaded to Canvas the week before class.

C. *Supplementary documents*.

1. The reading schedule and some of the required reading items (see below) will be available on Canvas.
2. You should also consult the documents “Research Paper Checklist” and “Guide to Annotations on Graded Papers” *before* you write your paper.

## VI. Academic Policies

A. *Policy on extensions for assignments*.

1. In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of **up to one week** may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of **more than one week** must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor.
2. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied.

3. *All extension requests must be made **prior to the assignment deadline**. No retrospective extensions will be granted.*
- B. *Policies on plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence for coursework.*
  1. Please note RTS's plagiarism policy in the [RTS Catalog](#).
  2. Please consult the document "Artificial Intelligence Policy Students Feb 2025" on [MyPortal](#) for details of RTS's AI policy. Bottom line: "Illegitimate uses of AI are subject to penalties in line with the severity of the violation, ranging from letter-grade reductions, a grade of F for a course, or academic probation."

## VII. Grading

- A. Class attendance and participation — 10%
- B. Reading assignments — 20%
- C. Research paper — 40%
- D. Final exam — 30%

## VIII. Required Reading

You should obtain copies of all the items below. You are also required to read a selection of primary source texts, which will be discussed in class. These will be available on the course website prior to class, and you should read them **before the week of class** (see IV.B.4 above).

- A. James K. Dew and Paul M. Gould, *Philosophy: A Christian Introduction* (Baker, 2019).
- B. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (P&R, 2015).
- C. John M. Frame, "How to Write a Theological Paper," Appendix F in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (P&R, 1987).  
[A copy of this will be made available on Canvas.]

## IX. Recommended Supplementary Reading

You are not *required* to read any of the items below, but you may find them useful to consolidate the course material and for further study as your interests dictate. For many of these, the table of contents can be viewed on Amazon.com or Google Books. Further recommendations for specific topics are included in the course outline.

- A. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Westminster John Knox, 2007).  
[Written for seminarians, the authors have aimed to focus on those philosophical issues of greatest relevance to Christian theology, although often the relevance to evangelical Reformed theology is hard to discern. Not exactly a page-turner.]
- B. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Baker Academic, 2013).  
[A fine introduction to the history of philosophy from a broadly Reformed perspective. See my brief review [here](#).]
- C. Colin Brown, *Christianity & Western Thought, Volume 1* (IVP Academic, 1990).  
[Covers figures and movements from the pre-Socratics to Kant that have influenced Christian thought.]
- D. T. Ryan Byerly, *Introducing Logic and Critical Thinking: The Skills of Reasoning and the Virtues of Inquiry* (Baker Academic, 2017).

- [This is my first recommendation for students who need an introduction to logic and critical thinking. Especially valuable is the section on intellectual virtues.]
- E. Kelly James Clark, Richard Lints, and James K. A. Smith, *101 Key Terms in Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology* (Westminster John Knox, 2004).  
[A helpful little reference book for deciphering those ‘isms’ and other ten-dollar words.]
- F. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols (Image Books, 1993–94; originally published 1946–74).  
[A very thorough history of Western thought by a Roman Catholic (Thomist) philosopher. The set published by Continuum in the UK has two additional volumes.]
- G. Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom* (Broadman & Holman, 2009).  
[A topically-arranged introduction to philosophy (not a history of philosophy) by two Calvinist philosophers. It follows the recent trend in Christian philosophy books toward encouraging worldview awareness. Chapter 9 on aesthetics is particularly good.]
- H. Stephen T. Davis and Eric T. Yang, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophical Theology: Faith Seeking Understanding* (Zondervan Academic, 2020).  
[An accessible and admirably even-handed survey of the state of the art in Christian philosophical theology that covers a wide range of topics.]
- I. C. Stephen Evans, *A History of Western Philosophy: From the Pre-Socratics to Postmodernism* (IVP Academic, 2018).  
[A readable and reliable one-volume survey of Western philosophy from a broadly evangelical Christian perspective. Worth adding to your personal library.]
- J. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, eds., *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
[A free, online, peer-reviewed encyclopedia of philosophy; contains good articles on many of the figures and concepts discussed in the course. <https://www.iep.utm.edu>]
- K. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009).  
[A fine introduction to issues in contemporary philosophical theology with articles by a pantheon of leading scholars in the field. Focuses mainly on the Christian tradition.]
- L. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (P&R, 1987).  
[An insightful treatment of epistemology from a biblical perspective by a Reformed theologian.]
- M. Paul M. Gould and Richard Davis, eds., *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy* (Zondervan, 2016).  
[Three Christians and one atheist (!) debate different views on the relationship between Christianity and philosophy. Oliphint represents a covenantal Reformed view.]
- N. Lee Hardy, Del Ratzsch, Rebecca K. DeYoung, and Gregory Mellema, *The Little Logic Book* (Calvin College Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2013).  
[A helpful introduction to modern logic and argumentation. Unlike many other intros to critical thinking, the authors don’t have an ax to grind against religion!]
- O. Anthony Kenny, *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2006).  
[A reliable one-volume history of philosophy from a highly respected Oxford scholar. Wittgenstein gets a whole chapter, while Heidegger doesn’t even get a mention, which tells you something about the author’s biases—although I can’t help but sympathize. Nice glossy pictures.]

- P. W. Andrew HOFFECKER, ed., *Revolutions in Worldview* (P&R, 2007).  
[A helpful collection of essays from a Reformed perspective on major periods and movements in the history of Western thought.]
- Q. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (IVP, 2003).  
[A comprehensive systematic introduction to philosophy (not a history of philosophy) from a conservative Arminian/Molinist perspective. It follows the recent trend in Christian philosophy books toward encouraging worldview awareness.]
- R. Ronald H. Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions* (Zondervan, 1999).  
[A clear and engaging introduction to philosophy by an evangelical philosopher and apologist (former RTS-Orlando professor) that attempts to blend topical, historical, and worldview/system perspectives. Good illustrations of philosophical concepts and a helpful glossary.]
- S. Louis P. Pojman and Lewis Vaughn, *Classics of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2010).  
[An excellent anthology of writings in Western philosophy.]
- T. Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy* (Penguin, 1996).  
[An introduction to modern-era philosophy; topical rather than chronological. Contains a study guide.]
- U. Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser, *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond* (McGraw-Hill, 2007).  
[A popular and well-written introduction to the history of philosophy, now in its 8<sup>th</sup> edition. The main downside is the price!]
- V. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).  
[A compendium of essays on major topics in Christian philosophical theology by scholars from a range of Christian traditions. See my review in [Themelios 35:3](#).]
- W. Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett, *Christianity & Western Thought, Volume 2* (IVP Academic, 1990).  
[Sequel to Brown's book (see above); extends the survey to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.]
- X. Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett, *Christianity & Western Thought, Volume 3* (IVP Academic, 2016).  
[Completes the series (see above) by extending the survey through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.]
- Y. Edward N. Zalta, ed., *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
[A free, online, peer-reviewed encyclopedia of philosophy; contains good articles on many of the figures and concepts discussed in the course. <https://plato.stanford.edu>]

### Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Christian Thought and Philosophy  
 Professor: James N. Anderson  
 Campus: Houston  
 Date: Summer 2026

<b>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</b>		<b>Rubric</b>	<b>Mini-Justification</b>
<i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <small>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</small>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong</li> <li>• Moderate</li> <li>• Minimal</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>	
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	1. Research paper with emphasis on theological application 2. Exam tests knowledge and articulation of course topics 3. Class discussions test understanding and application
<b>Scripture</b>	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Minimal	1. Evaluates philosophical ideas and movements in light of Scripture 2. Explores relationship between reason and revelation
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	1. Explores use of philosophy for understanding and defending Reformed doctrines
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	1. Encourages application of Matthew 22:37 ("with all your mind")
<b>Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	1. Emphasizes use of philosophy for developing and defending biblical worldview
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Moderate	1. Appreciation for insights from non-Reformed traditions and non-Christian philosophies (common grace)
<b>Pastoral Ministry</b>	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Minimal	1. Develops critical thinking skills, with application to all areas of Christian ministry