

ST5400 Christian Thought and Philosophy Syllabus
Reformed Theological Seminary
Fall 2026—Atlanta Campus (Nashville Extension)

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Course Description

This course trains students to understand and interact with the major questions asked and answers offered by Christian and non-Christian philosophers throughout western history. Students will engage with primary texts and learn to think theologically about the place and practice of philosophy in rightly understand both the Creator and His creation.

Course Objectives

As a result of having taken this course, students will be able to:

- describe the discipline of philosophy and its major concerns
- understand the habits, practices, and virtues of philosophical thinking
- engage philosophically *and* theologically with classic, foundational texts
- sketch the broad development of philosophy from the ancient world to the present
- identify the influence of philosophical concepts and methods on theology
- think critically about the utility of philosophy in doing theology
- articulate an approach to philosophy from a Reformed Christian perspective

Course Requirements and Evaluation

I. Required Reading (20%)

1. Weekly Reading Assignments

Students will be required to complete the assigned reading (see below) **in advance of each session**. Students should come prepared to discuss and apply the material during class. At the end of the course, students will submit a reading report indicating whether they completed the reading as assigned.

2. Class Reading Presentations

Each student will have at least one opportunity to facilitate a discussion surrounding the week's reading. Students will be required to submit a two-page **maximum** (one sheet, front and back) report including a high-level outline of the reading.

II. Class Attendance and Participation (20%)

Committed engagement is vital to success in studying with and for the Church. Students will be expected to attend and bring the following to class: the week's reading, a Bible, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*.

III. Research Paper (35%)

Students will be required to write a research paper that further explores one of the topics discussed in this course. **Topics must be submitted and approved by 10/1.**

The paper must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Every paper must include a clear, precise thesis statement that articulates a position to be defended. A good thesis should ordinarily be falsifiable (i.e., capable of being refuted).

Bad: "In this paper, I will explore the doctrine of predestination."

Better: "In this paper, I will argue the doctrine of unconditional election makes better sense of the biblical data than its conditional alternative, specifically as articulated by Roger Olson."

2. Substantiate your position using biblical, theological, philosophical and historical arguments. Each paper should anticipate and respond to at least 3 objections/attempts to falsify its thesis.
3. Orthodoxy (right thinking) should never be divorced from orthopathy (right feeling) and orthopraxy (right acting). Each paper must demonstrate, not only why the thesis is true, but how the goodness and beauty contained therein constitute a gift to God's people for them to embrace. Imagine a member in your church gets to the final page of your paper and asks, "So what?" Answer that question; only, begin answering it from page one!
4. Each paper must consult at least 8 books and/or articles, primarily of a scholarly nature. Don't just reference or quote these sources. Interact with them and their arguments. Ultimately, the paper should convey *your* voice in conversation with the sources—not their voices as a stand-in for your own.
5. Each paper must have a title page that includes the student's name, name/year/number of course, professor's name, paper title, and date of submission. All text must be 12-point Times New Roman font. All lines are to be double-spaced and margins set to one inch. All citations must be footnoted (**no endnotes**), according to the standards set forth in Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* (9th ed.). The paper must include a complete bibliography formatted according to the same guidelines.
6. Papers must be 10-12 pages long, **not** including front/back matter (title, abbreviations, bibliography, etc.). Shorter papers will receive an automatic 5-point deduction per page

under the limit. Longer papers will receive a 5-point deduction per page over the limit.

7. Late papers will receive an automatic 5-point deduction for each day past the due date.

In addition to the guidelines specified above, papers will be graded for clarity, cogency, and style. If we are called to know God *and* make Him known, then we must make every effort to prevent our good arguments from dying at the hands of bad writing.

IV. Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will be designed to test students' mastery of the material covered in both the course lectures and reading. Students should come prepared to articulate the concepts discussed and how to address them from a distinctively Christian worldview.

Course Lecture and Reading Schedule

[8/20/26] Lecture 1 - Introduction: What Has Athens to Do With Jerusalem?

Evans, 1-11
H. Bavinck, All

[8/27/26] Lecture 2 - Greeks Bearing Philosophical Gifts

Evans, 12-92
Allen, 1-16, 59-66

[9/3/26] Lecture 3 - Early Church: Plundering the Egyptians

Evans, 93-148
Allen, 16-38

[9/10/26] Lecture 4 - Medieval Synthesis: Augustine to Abelard

Evans, 149-172
Allen, 83-90

[9/17/26] Lecture 5 - Middle Ages: Aristotle Redux

Evans, 173-227
Allen, 91-110

[9/24/26]] Lecture 6 - Renaissance and Reformation

Evans, 228-248

[10/1/26] Lecture 7 - Early Modern Philosophy: Bacon to Leibniz

Evans, 249-300

Allen, 111-152

[10/15/26] Lecture 8 - The Enlightenment(s)

Evans, 301-387

Allen, 153-171

[10/22/26] Lecture 9 - Kant and the Copernican Revolution

Evans, 388-443

Allen, 172-209

[10/29/26] Lecture 10 - Romanticism, Idealism, Existentialism

Evans, 444-536

Allen, 210-244

[11/5/26] Lecture 11 - Late Modernity and the Death of God

Evans, 537-565

Allen, 244-304

[11/12/26] Lecture 12 - The Philosophy of Language and Postmodernism

Evans, 537-586

J. H. Bavinck, 1-78

[11/19/26] Lecture 13 - Christian Philosophy Today

Plantinga's "Advice to Christian Philosophers" **[PDF]**

J. H. Bavinck, 79-178

[12/7/26] Final Exam and Paper Due

Required Books

Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, eds. *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.*

*Be sure to purchase the **first edition** of this book and not the second.

Herman Bavinck. *Christian Worldview*. Translated and edited by Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory Brock. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.

J. H. Bavinck. *Personality and Worldview*. Translated by James Eglinton. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023.

C. Stephen Evans. *A History of Western Philosophy: From the Pre-Socratics to Postmodernism*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

Alvin Plantinga. "Advice for Christian Philosophers." *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1984): 253–271. PDF e-book. [PDF]

Recommended (Not Required) Introductory Books

Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Baker Academic, 2013).

T. Ryan Byerly. *Introducing Logic and Critical Thinking: The Skills of Reasoning and the Virtues of Inquiry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.

Frederick Copleston (Doubleday, 1944 -), multiple volumes. [Alternatively, Anthony Carroll, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Condensed Copleston*]

Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *The Love of Wisdom* (Broadman & Holman, 2009).

Stephen T. Davis and Eric T. Yang. *An Introduction to Christian Philosophical Theology: Faith Seeking Understanding*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

C. Stephen Evans, *History of Western Philosophy* (IVP Academic, 2019)

John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2016)

Zoom Policy

Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class. Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 46 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 18) Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 49)

Artificial Intelligence Policy

RTS has instituted the following policy pertaining to the use of AI-enabled tools (including, but not limited to, generative chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude, writing assistants like Grammarly, and other AI-enabled assistants like Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Apple Intelligence).

It is noted that the policy below does allow for a limited use of AI. This will be the default RTS policy. *A professor, however, has the right to modify this policy, including denying the use of AI altogether. Any modifications to these policies by a professor for a specific RTS course will be explicitly noted by the professor.*

Gathering research leads: AI-enabled tools *may* be employed in a manner similar to using Wikipedia, blogs, social media, or other online sources in generating basic raw material (e.g., “What verses in the Old Testament use the word ‘covenant’?”) or leads for further reading (e.g., “What recent books deal with the topic of divine simplicity?”). Such uses *do not generally have to be disclosed*, but the student is encouraged to consult with the professor of record if there are any questions or doubts. Note: even the best AI tool is not infallible and often generates junk data; the student is, therefore, fully responsible for vetting the accuracy or validity of any such information generated.

Generating or analyzing content: AI-enabled tools *may* be used to generate small portions of content that would be used in a manner equivalent to quoting a commentary or other written or digital sources. Any use of such information in an assignment, either through direct quotation or indirect summarization, *must be fully disclosed* in keeping with the guidance provided by the Chicago Manual of Style and APA. The following examples illustrate appropriate methods of citation.

Footnoting direct usage (e.g., quotation) of the result generated by an AI tool:

1. Text generated by ChatGPT, Open AI, March 7, 2024 (<https://chat.openai.com>).
2. Text generated by Claude, Anthropic, March 20, 2024 (<https://claude.ai>).

Footnoting indirect use of AI results that are further modified/summarized by student:

3. ChatGPT, response to “What are the differences between Calvinists and Arminians concerning regeneration?” OpenAI, March 12, 2024.

4. When given a prompt of “What is the traditional Reformed view of church discipline,” the Claude-generated text outlined three reasons: “Obedience to God’s word,” “protection of the church,” and “restoration of the sinner” (<https://claude.ai>, April 2, 2024; see Appendix A for the full transcript).

Bibliographic entry

CMS/SBL: OpenAI, *ChatGPT* [large language model]. March 7, 2024.

<https://chat.openai.com>.

APA: OpenAI (2024). *ChatGPT* (March 7 version). [Large language model].

<https://chat.openai.com>.

Proofreading: AI writing assistants (e.g., Grammarly) *may* be used for standard help with basic spellchecking and grammatical proofreading; such uses *do not have to be disclosed*. However, AI *may not* be used to *fully rewrite* sentences or paragraphs.

Creative process and textual composition: All writing in every course assignment must be, for all intents and purposes, the original work of the student. Thus, AI *may not* be used to generate key components of a writing project that are aimed at cultivating certain competencies in the student, such as thesis/topic sentences, outlines, critical engagement with other views, and so forth. In addition, AI *may not* be used to write full sentences or paragraphs.

Other: AI-enabled tools *may not* be used in any way for online-discussion forum posts (e.g., TDQs), response papers, quizzes, and examinations.

Penalties

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.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST5400 Christian Thought and Philosophy
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<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <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> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		<u>Rubric</u> Strong Moderate Minimal None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
Articulation (oral & written)	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	Students will learn to describe major concepts and movements and philosophy and to speak (orally and in writing) into them from a Reformed Christian perspective. They will also learn the skills of critical thinking and careful argumentation.
Scripture	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.)	Moderate	Students will learn to bring biblical truths to bear upon philosophical questions and concerns, finding in Scripture the answers to questions that ought to have been found by non-believing philosophers.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Students will bring a distinctively Reformed Christian worldview to bear upon both the form and matter of philosophical thinking.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	Though not so much focused on Christian praxis, this course will emphasize the Spirit's

			sanctifying work with respects to the life of the mind.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	Students will think critically about their own worldview as well as that presupposed by the various thinkers covered in the course.
Winsomely Reformed	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	Students will learn to appreciate rigorous thinking, common grace insight, and the utility of philosophical tools and concepts for clarifying and articulating theology.
Pastoral Ministry	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-Xns.	Strong	Students will be equipped with greater clarity in thinking through and articulating concepts, as well as more tools for critical thinking about the world in which we live will.