

Tutorials: Theology

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Augustine's Life and Thought

Augustine is one of the giants of Western thought. He has exerted a tremendous influence on both the Church and the culture at large. A prolific writer known best for his works, *The Confessions* and *The City of God*, he provides significant and far-ranging reflections on the nature of the world and the implications for engaging the society at large. Questions will be pursued about Augustine's dependence on Late Antique philosophy and, in particular, strands of Platonism, his changing views on the relationship between the Church and the broader culture, the nature of institutions, the nature of the will, the problem of evil, the relationship between Church and state, implications for political philosophy, and the issues of perfectionism and holiness. This tutorial will address his thought in a way that is both synthetic and sensitive to the development of his understanding as it evolved during his life and thought.

Augustine, Early Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy

The period from Philo of Alexandria in the first century to Boethius in the sixth was critical to both the development of philosophy in its own right and the Christian intellectual tradition. One of the most important and influential of these thinkers was Augustine but he did not stand alone. Giving particular attention to Augustine, this tutorial will look at his thought in the context of a variety of philosophers and ideas (including Jewish and pagan), such as Philo, Origen, Plotinus, and Boethius.

Biblical Hebrew

The teaching of this tutorial will be adjusted to adapt to the student's level of Biblical Hebrew at the start of the semester. It is possible to undertake the tutorial without any prior knowledge of Hebrew, or to select it in order to continue with the study of Hebrew begun previously. The goal is to become adept at reading Hebrew of increasing complexity, from simplified sentences to Biblical passages. Students will also learn how to make observations on the grammar and syntax of Hebrew text and to compose sentences in Hebrew that reflect the linguistic concepts learned. The Biblical texts used will be from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), published by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (Stuttgart, 1967–77). Students, in particular those who have already studied Hebrew, may wish to obtain their own copy.

Bonhoeffer

The Bonhoeffer tutorial offers students the opportunity for in-depth reading of one of the twentieth century's most important and influential theologians. The tutorial will focus on the full range of texts from his short career, including his most well-known spiritual classics, such as *Life Together*, and *Discipleship*, and such foundational works as *Sanctorum Communio*, *Creation and Fall*, and *Ethics*, as well as

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his final *Letters and Papers from Prison*. In addition, students will be able to read a variety of texts drawn from his lectures, sermons, and diaries. Although Bonhoeffer was rarely at rest, or given the opportunity to write systematically, students will be able to consider a wide range of themes concerning questions of Christology, ecclesiology, hamartiology, and the nature and development of soteriology and the path to salvation, as well as the epistemological engagement that rests at its foundation. We will also study the development of Bonhoeffer's ethical theory, and the justification for his involvement in the assassination attempt against Hitler. As well as considering his clearly theological writings, the tutorial will also explore Bonhoeffer's engagement with his philosophical context that provided such a fertile foundation for his thought. Bonhoeffer's works were written in the heat of one of the most traumatic periods in Western history, and throughout the tutorial we will aim to gain an understanding of his life and its context in order to better explore the dynamics and development of his thought.

Christian Ethics

This tutorial introduces students to key principles and themes of Christian ethics. It will offer students a broad overview of Christian ethical practice, in order to better understand its sources and historical development, and also how it is currently expressed and relates to modern life. The subject is approached through primary texts as well as exploration of the history, theory and methodology of the field and its significant figures. Through reading, analysis, and discussion, students will develop their ability in Christian moral reasoning. Core concepts include justice, love, the highest good, freedom, virtue, natural law, and revealed law. These are explored theoretically, as well as through specific applications in modern life, including examples in medical, political, and sexual ethics.

The tutorial is divided into two sections. The first will consider some of the fundamental issues of ethical thought, including areas such as natural law and conscience, virtue and narrative, and love and consequences, as well as their scriptural and ecclesial roots. Armed with this methodological foundation, the second section of the tutorial is dedicated to questions of applied ethics. Students will have the opportunity to choose from a range of topics in medical, political and sexual ethics, such as marriage, divorce, sexuality, abortion, euthanasia, disability, genetic engineering, just war and pacifism, and punishment. In addition to considering Christian responses to these problems, we will study philosophical and 'secular' texts in order to consider alternative perspectives that influence society, and the light that the Christian position may shed on them.

The Early Church: From Acts to Nicaea

This tutorial examines the first three centuries of the history and development of Christianity from its earliest churches until just after the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Students will read key primary sources while exploring the contexts of the

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communities and individuals that produced them. Tutorial topics may include the social background of the surrounding cultures, early Christian worship, the 'parting of the ways' with Judaism, persecution and martyrdom, asceticism and monasticism, church—state relations, evolving forms of ministry and church structure, and the emergence of the Biblical canon, as well as the diversity of beliefs and the development of orthodoxy. Figures studied include the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Eusebius of Caesarea, Arius, and Athanasius.

The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism

This tutorial traces the origins and development of rabbinic Judaism from the first century CE to the end of the Early Modern period, introducing its foundational texts, key figures, and major historical developments. We will examine central texts such as the Midrash, Mishnah, and Talmud alongside the contributions of influential figures like Maimonides.

Students will gain an understanding of the nature and origins of these pivotal rabbinic writings, exploring the ideas, attitudes, and theological significance they convey. We will also examine how these texts shaped Jewish religious life, offering insights into key historical events such as the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the subsequent evolution of Jewish thought and practice.

By the end of the tutorial, students will have gained a deeper appreciation of the role of rabbinic literature in shaping Jewish theology and daily life over the centuries, as well as its lasting impact on Jewish religious identity. The tutorial provides a comprehensive introduction accessible to all learners, and no prior knowledge of rabbinic texts is required.

Gender in the Bible

This tutorial explores the issues of gender in the Biblical world from a variety of perspectives, including historical, literary, theological, and ideological approaches. Students will engage with a selection of Biblical and extra-Biblical texts ranging from narrative and law to poetry. They can choose from a range of topics and approaches, including but not limited to gender theory, the comparative method, and cultural, socio-political, anthropological, and archaeological issues.

Students will explore the intersections of gender, power, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and social class in the ancient world, and will consider contemporary debates concerning these issues. By taking this tutorial, students will gain a familiarity with Biblical and other texts that address issues of gender within their social and cultural contexts, examining how Biblical women and other marginalized figures both operated within and challenged societal expectations.

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The Gospels

In this tutorial students will read the Gospel of John and one of the synoptic gospels (typically Matthew), exploring their histories and the relationships between the Johannine and synoptic traditions. The sessions will explore various scholarly approaches and issues, and will include discussion of the Gospels' place within the canon and the wider scope of the Bible. The ways in which particular passages of these books have been interpreted and understood through church history and contributed to the development of doctrine will also be considered.

Islam and Modernity

This tutorial will assess developments within Islam from the nineteenth century to the present day. Interactions with Modernist and Postmodernist thought will frame the discussion, and the sessions will explore tensions between modernizing movements within Islam and the rise of fundamentalist sects such as Wahhabism will be explored. The variety of views within various schools of contemporary Islam will be discussed in relation to such topics as women, political engagement, war, democracy, blasphemy, morality, and non-Muslims.

Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard, Danish Christian philosophical and theological writer of the early nineteenth century, can seem as though he belongs to a much later era. He anticipates, for example, elements of Existentialism and Postmodernism. To read Kierkegaard is to take a deep dive past assumptions into the core of Christian doctrine as expressed in the lived experience of faith. He critiqued the social and political conformity of the state church and its corrosive effect on real Christianity: 'Where everyone is a Christian "just like the other", no one is truly confessing Christ.'

This tutorial will examine some of Kierkegaard's key works in context, as well as their influence on the development of Christian thought up to today. These will include such texts as *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as well as later works such as *Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*.

The tutorial will provide a range of tools to help students grapple with this enriching but often complex thinker. This includes understanding the style and methodology of his writing, such as his use of pseudonyms and his commitment to an indirect communication. We will consider the key psychological and epistemological themes that run throughout his work that help to build his existential thought. We will also look at how his philosophical and theological writings work together towards his overarching aims. To support these studies, we will aim to gain an understanding of Kierkegaard's life and the political, theological, and philosophical context into which he was born.

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Mysticism

In this tutorial students will explore key theoretical topics related to the nature and classification of 'mystical experiences', as well as major authors in various religious traditions. These are likely to include Christian authors from both the Orthodox Church and the Latin West, alongside representatives of Sufism and Hinduism. During the course of the tutorial, students will be encouraged to reflect on the relation of mystical thought and experience to historical context, cultural influences, gender issues, metaphysics, and morality. There will be an opportunity to focus on some of the following authors: Denys the Areopagite, a selection of Desert Fathers (based on readings from the *Philokalia*), Bonaventure, St John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Ibn Arabi, and the early *Upanisads*.

The Nature of Religion

This tutorial provides an opportunity to explore a number of key aspects of the study of religion. There are three possible tutorial components, from which students should select two:

Approaches to the Study of Religion

This section examines some of the main classical and contemporary approaches to the study of religion. These may include sociological, anthropological, phenomenological, psychological, or philosophical approaches. We will consider the methods and goals of each approach, and their respective strengths and disadvantages. We may also look at the emergence of Religious Studies as an academic discipline.

Themes within the Study of Religion

This section offers a chance to explore some important topics and debates in the field of religious studies. These may include the insider/outsider problem, the role of myth, symbol, and ritual, gender issues, religious violence, Orientalism, post-colonialism, religious pluralism, science and religion, and the new atheism.

Comparative Religion

This section allows you to explore some central elements of the beliefs and practices of some major religious traditions. Typically, you will study two non-Christian religions, selected from Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Whichever of the three components of this tutorial you select, you will be encouraged to engage critically with the works of major theorists from the field, to think carefully about the place of religion in the modern world, and to consider the benefits and limits of adopting a comparative approach.

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New Testament Greek

Depending on their level of prior study, students taking this tutorial can either start their study of the language of the New Testament text or continue to improve their linguistic skills. For those starting from the beginning, the tutorial will equip them to be able to read basic sentences, use a lexicon effectively, and follow some discussions in exegetical commentaries on the books of the New Testament. Those who already have a year or more of Koiné Greek can work on more advanced topics in grammar and syntax, as well as reading and analysing texts from the New Testament and Septuagint. All students will learn essential skills for studying the Greek New Testament and gain valuable insight into the complexities of reading ancient texts in their historical contexts.

Core textbook: Jeremy Duff, *The Elements of New Testament Greek*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Patristics

Patristics is the theological subdiscipline dealing with the Church Fathers, early Christian theologians who had an especially important role in shaping Christian theology. Examples include figures such as Ignatius, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, and Dionysius. In this tutorial, students will learn about a selection of Church Fathers, their historical contexts, and the theological concerns to which those contexts gave rise. Students will have the opportunity to suggest a particular theologian or theme on which they would like to focus, though how much weight the suggestion can be given will depend on the particular case and the available resources. For example, a student might suggest a focus on a theological locus such as creation, Christology, trinitarian theology, or the sacraments; a particular period or event such as the debates surrounding Nicaea; scriptural hermeneutics; or an in-depth look at a particular Church Father or group of Fathers.

The Pauline Epistles

One of the most widely circulated letter collections in antiquity was the Pauline epistles. This tutorial will examine the apostle Paul's life and work, with a particular focus on the content and theology of several of the major letters. Students will learn to situate the Pauline corpus in the wider context of early Christianity, Judaism, and the surrounding culture of the Mediterranean world. Issues of interpretation, ethics, historicity, and epistolary style will be examined. Students will have the possibility to explore more recent developments in Pauline studies. Exegetical tasks will develop their analytical abilities, with the option of interpreting the Greek text (language skills permitting).

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The Pentateuch and the Historical Books: Narrative in the Hebrew Bible

This tutorial provides an encounter with the first two corpora in the Hebrew Bible: the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and the books recounting the history of Israel (Joshua to Esther). Students will discuss particular passages and study a range of methodological issues, such as source criticism, redaction criticism, the ancient Near Eastern context, archaeology, narrative criticism, history and historiography, postcolonial criticism, and feminist criticism. While there is a particular focus on the narrative sections that pervade these books, we will also explore other genres of text — legal material and inset poetry, for example — as well as their relationship to the surrounding narratives.

The tutorial gives students the opportunity to dive deeply into particular texts from the Pentateuch and historical books, drawing on various analytical and interpretive tools to set the texts in their historical, literary, and cultural contexts. Students taking the tutorial will learn to think critically about methods of studying the Hebrew Bible, and will gain a good overall knowledge of its first two corpora. Those with a year or more of Hebrew will have the opportunity to study the texts in Hebrew, but this is not a requirement.

Psalms, Proverbs, Prophets: Poetry in the Hebrew Bible

This tutorial explores the poetic landscape of the Hebrew Bible, both in the better-known hymnody of the Psalms and in the lyrical passages throughout the Old Testament. Students will learn the form and content of classical Hebrew poetry, wisdom literature, and prophecy and place them in the context of the literature of the wider Ancient Near East. The use and interpretation of Old Testament poetry in later Jewish and Christian environments will be assessed. The main texts under consideration will be sections of the Psalms and Isaiah. While the main exegetical tasks will work with the texts in English translation, students with some facility with Hebrew will be able to put that to use.

Religions in Late Antiquity

This tutorial will examine the religious matrix of the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity, approximately AD 250–750. Particular focus will be on the various forms of Jewish faith and scholarship that developed during this era, as well as the growth and diversity of Christianity. In this multicultural context, traditional Greek, Roman, and Egyptian religions may have been waning, while other less well-known religions such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism also played a role. The emergence of Islam towards the end of Late Antiquity and its interaction with the surrounding religions may also be explored as one of the topics. The focus will be on primary sources from these groups as well as on inter-religious polemic which arose.

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Science and Religion

For much of the twentieth century, claims of science's and religion's mutual incompatibility were asserted without much evidence or debate, other than stating which one should be supreme. Today, however, much attention is being given to the way the two relate to each other, among both scientists and theologians. Oxford is a prime place to explore this burgeoning field, with the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion and an endowed chair, the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion. This tutorial will assess the history of the relationship between science and religion, from the origins of the scientific method in principles of Christian theology right up to recent debates instigated by the 'New Atheists'.

Key themes explored may include creation and cosmology, epistemology and cognition, transhumanism, and the nature of the soul. We will also discuss the methodology for assessing various models and constructs. Students will learn how to engage in nuanced historical analysis around key issues such as the debates in Cosmology around the Galileo affair, Darwinism and evolution, and nineteenth-century Natural Theology. They will also engage in more theoretical discussions about the methods, models, and narratives relating science to religion. They will explore key issues such as the implications of cognitive science for a Christian view of the soul; the possibility of miracles and divine action, given the Laws of Nature; and whether or not Christian doctrines of Creation have had a negative impact on the contemporary ecological landscape. Finally, we will look at whether there are methodological limits to science and discuss the models of interaction which underly any discussion of 'science-and-religion'.

Systematic Theology: Trinity, Creation, Church

This tutorial will explore key themes of Systematic Theology regarding the doctrines of God as Trinity, Creation and Theological Anthropology, Christ and Salvation, and the Holy Spirit and the Church. The main approach is through reading and discussing set texts that focus on one or more of each of these core concepts, drawn from a range of Christian thinkers. The approach is grounded in historical understandings of the development of doctrine while also teaching students to analyse the inherent connectedness of these parts in the varying structures of different theological systems. Students will learn to assess sources and to think in terms of larger theological frameworks.

Theology and Religious Experience in the Nineteenth Century

This tutorial explores on the one hand the growing emphasis on the importance of experience and transcendental thought on religion and literature of nineteenth-century America and Europe, and on the other hand the rise in rational and scientific approaches to the study of theology during the same period. Students will focus on

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two to four primary texts, with some abbreviated readings in other sources. Key authors may include Kierkegaard, Hegel, Feuerbach, James, Otto, Schleiermacher, the New England Transcendentalists, Dostoevsky, Marx, and Nietzsche. Topics may include science and religion, Romanticism, the rise of historical criticism in interpreting Scripture, secularization and industrialization, empire and interaction with non-Western religions.

Varieties of Judaism

This tutorial offers an accessible exploration of the early development of Judaism during the Graeco-Roman period, with a focus on how Jewish thought and practice evolved in response to the surrounding cultural and historical context. The tutorial explores how Judaism expressed itself creatively and innovatively across different regions and languages, with attention to key sites in the Land of Israel (such as Jerusalem, Qumran, and Masada) as well as diaspora communities like Alexandria and Rome. The aim is to encourage a broad understanding of the rich diversity of early Jewish traditions.

The tutorial introduces key Jewish texts in translation (from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), tracing the roots of rabbinic Judaism and other religious expressions. No prior expertise in ancient languages or Jewish history is required.

Students who take the tutorial will gain a deeper appreciation of the foundational texts and ideas that shaped Judaism during this period. They will develop skills to engage with primary sources in translation and understand their significance within Jewish theological development. Finally, they will acquire a critical awareness of the historical and cultural context that influenced the evolution of Jewish religious practices.

Women in the Bible and the Early Church

Few women, if any, make it into the pages of church history textbooks. Yet women comprised at least half of early Christian communities. This tutorial looks at the women who have been hiding in plain sight in texts and archaeological evidence of the first five hundred years of the expansion of Christianity across the Mediterranean world and beyond. Who were their role models in Scripture? What avenues were open to them to use their gifts in serving their communities? Did Christianity mean conformity or revolution in regards to agency and social norms? Were there women priests? How did views of female embodiment affect their experience as wives, mothers, virgins, widows? What can archaeology, inscriptions, and papyri reveal about their daily lives?

These women will be studied in the wider context of their surrounding cultures as well as that of the Scripture and practices that informed their faith. Students will assess primary sources and consider what information can be gleaned from the art

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and material culture of the era. A wide variety of women will be studied: saints and sinners, scholars and empresses, wives and monastics. Students will gain skills in critical analysis of text, integration of source material, and learning to locate the overlooked.