



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies

Axial Age Philosophy and Theology

Georgetown University
School of Continuing Studies, Bachelor and Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

Spring 2023 BLHV 441 and LSHV 441

Instructor: John Shook, PhD

Contact: jrs384@georgetown.edu, cell = 703-801-3645

Semester: Jan 11 – May 13, 2023– first class is January 17th

Class Meetings: Tuesdays 6:30pm – 9:00pm online

Class Online: Classes are live Zoom and recorded

Office Hours: Tue 4pm – 6pm, or by appointment

Course Description

The Axial Age from 1100 BC to 400 BC witnessed the origins of most of the world's great religions and philosophies from Europe and the Middle East to India and China. Monotheistic, transcendental, and nature religions arose and competed with idealistic, materialistic, and ethical philosophies. Reading their foundational texts of wisdom about God, creation, human nature, the good life, and the civic order will provide a comparative survey of philosophy and theology.

Course Narrative and Learning Objectives

Students have the opportunity to ask interdisciplinary questions and consider research programs trying to answer them. Major questions include these:

How did prominent religions, such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, get founded and propagated during the early Iron Age?

Why did the world's first philosophical and ethical systems, from Greece and Mesopotamia to India and China, all originate during that same early Iron Age period?

How has Karl Jaspers's original theory about the "Axial Age" 2500 years ago been understood and interpreted since his formulation 70 years ago?

How have academic disciplines such as history, anthropology, economics, sociology, political theory, theology, and philosophy offered their examinations of the Axial Age theory?

What are the reasons for disagreements among different disciplines about whether the Axial Age really occurred, and whether it affected subsequent historical developments?

Can the "Axial Age" theory be upgraded to explain why so many major religions and philosophies – from Egypt, Canaan, and Greece to Iran, India, and China – were founded during the same era?

Required Texts

Robert Bellah. 2011. *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Harvard University Press. ISBN 9780674975347

Daniel Hoyer and Jenny Reddish eds. 2019. *Seshat History of the Axial Age*. Beresta Books. ISBN 9780996139564

Mark Muesse. 2013. *The Age of the Sages: The Axial Age in Asia and the Near East*. Fortress Press. ISBN 9780800699215

Christopher Peet. 2019. *Practicing Transcendence: Axial Age Spiritualities for a World in Crisis*. ISBN 9783030144340

Recommended for graduate students

Christopher Gowans. 2021. *Self-Cultivation Philosophies in Ancient India, Greece, and China*. ISBN 9780190941024

Additional Readings

Lectures and Handouts are provided within the Canvas course during the semester.

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation. Regular attendance in class, and participation in online discussion. 200 points possible. 20% of total grade.
2. Issue Brief. 1000 words, fully referenced. This Brief will outline the origin of an Axial religion discussed in the class, explaining (a) how it emerged within its historical and cultural context, and (b) why this new religion attempted to diverge away from earlier religious ideas around it at that time. The best sort of paper will incorporate the research of multiple academic disciplines. 100 points possible. 10% of total grade.
3. Analysis Paper. 3000 words, fully referenced. This paper will recount the origin of a Axial philosophical system discussed in the class, explaining (a) how it emerged within its historical and cultural context, and (b) why this new system attempted to gain independence from religious ideas around it at that time. You will first develop a one-page prospectus outlining your paper's plan, to be approved by the instructor. 300 points possible. 30% of total grade.
4. Research Paper. 4000 words for undergrads / 6000 words for grads, fully referenced. This paper will be about three different philosophies and religions from the Axial Age – at least one of each, and no two from the same region. Your paper will develop an exposition and comparison among them on these topics: (a) how should moral knowledge be attained, (b) why (or why not) a god is necessary for ethics, (c) which one of the three Axials fits today's knowledge of the world, and (d) which one of the three Axials can offer the most reasonable approach to contemporary global problems. A successful paper synthesizes relevant information gained throughout the course (lectures and readings), information from secondary literature from several disciplines, and the student's academic background and interests. 400 points possible. 40% of total grade.

Citation Style: The APA Style (APA Publication Manual 6th Edition) is used widely in SCS courses. Consult <http://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp/APA>

Final Grade

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF TOTAL GRADE	POSSIBLE POINTS
Participation	20%	200
Issue Brief	10%	100
Analysis Paper	30%	300
Research Paper	40%	400
	TOTAL	1000 points

Total Points	Grade	Quality Points
920-1000	A	4.00
900-919	A-	3.67
881-899	B+	3.33
800-880	B	3.00
781-799	B-	2.67
761-780	C+	2.33
700-760	C	2.00
690-699	C-	1.67
680-689	D+	1.33
660-679	D	1.00
Less than 660	F	0.00

Course Policies

Announcements: Announcements related to this course will be posted in Canvas regularly. They will appear on your Canvas dashboard when you log in and/or they will be sent to you directly through your preferred method of notification. Please make certain to check them regularly.

Email: In this course you can use Canvas to send email, or directly email the instructor at the georgetown.edu address. You can either check your messages in the Canvas system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages at least once per day. When submitting messages, please do the following:

- Put a subject in the subject box that describes the email content with your name and module
- Do not send messages asking general information about the class, please post those in the "Ask the Instructor Discussion Form" in the Canvas course

Academic Support: Services and resources may include an online orientation; access to library resources; a readiness assessment or survey; testing services; tutoring; non-native language services; writing and/or math centers; tutorials or other forms of guidance on conducting research, writing papers, citing sources, using an online writing lab, and using institution-specific technology; supplemental instruction programs; and teaching assistants.

Writing Center: The Georgetown University [Writing Center](#) is a free resource open to all enrolled Georgetown students and offers online appointments.

Technical Support for Students:

- Canvas - Students have 24/7 access to <http://canvas.georgetown.edu/getting-help>, including live chat and a support hotline at (855) 338-2770
- Zoom - For support with Zoom, email: zoom@georgetown.edu
- Use of [Georgetown University-issued accounts](#) for Google Mail, Calendar, Groups, Talk, Docs, Sites, Video, and Contacts is governed by the contract between Georgetown University and Google. For help managing your Google Documents, visit [Google Drive Help Center](#).
- Contact the UIS Service Center at help@georgetown.edu if you have a question regarding:
 - your GU netID and/or password
 - your GU email account
 - any connectivity issues

Support Services:

SCS offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed online, at the School of Continuing Studies downtown location, and on the main Georgetown campus:

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
- 202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
- [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#)
- 202-687-6985
- [Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action \(IDEAA\)](#)
- (202) 687-4798

Students' Religious Observances: The following is university policy: Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu. Individuals with disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services among others. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website. Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity: During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will meet through distance means such as online videoconferencing; check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings. The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

Georgetown Honor System: All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at <http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code>, and in

particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking. Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge: *In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

Plagiarism: In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail. If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student may receive a grade of F for the course.

Turnitin.com: Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers can be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Sexual Misconduct: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX") prohibits discrimination based on sex in any educational programs, which includes sexual harassment or any acts of sexual misconduct. Title IX requires the University, upon becoming aware of any incident of sexual harassment and misconduct to respond appropriately to protect and maintain the safety of the University community, including students, faculty, and staff. Georgetown University prohibits sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking. Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Please know that as a faculty member I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. However, University policy also requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

Jen Schweer, MA, LPC

Associate Director of Health Education Services for
Sexual Assault Response and Prevention

[\(202\) 687-0323](tel:(202)687-0323)

jls242@georgetown.edu

Erica Shirley

Trauma Specialist
Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

[\(202\) 687-6985](tel:(202)687-6985)

els54@georgetown.edu

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at:

<https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help>.

Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations: Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. Specific adjustments will be handled on a case by case basis and will depend on medical need and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out at: <https://titleix.georgetown.edu/student-pregnancy>.

Class Schedule

This tentative schedule is subject to change as necessary.

Week	Topic	Readings, Events
Week 1. Jan 17	<u>The Axial Age</u> Jaspers and a philosophy of history When did humanity get control over religion?	READINGS will be added with the next update
Week 2. Jan 24	<u>Hinduism</u> From the Vedas to the Upanishads Idealistic Absolutism	
Week 3. Jan 31	<u>Buddhism</u> The Quest for the Historical Buddha Impermanent Phenomenalism	
Week 4. Feb 7	<u>Zoroastrianism and Judaism</u> From Polytheism to Monolatry Duotheism and Monotheism	
Week 5. Feb 14	<u>Egypt, Phoenicia, and Babylon</u> Immanent Cosmotheism, Logocosmism, Nomotheism Their merger by Plato in Greece	
Week 6. Feb 21	No class, Monday classes on Tuesday	Issue Brief due Feb 21
Week 7. Feb 28	<u>European and Central Asian Myth</u> Freedom for the many, or for just one? Romantic Individualism and Divine Despotism	
Week 8. Mar 7	No class, Spring break	
Week 9. Mar 14	<u>Philosophical Naturalism</u> Anaximander, Democritus, Aristotle The Greek scientific worldview	
Week 10. Mar 21	<u>Taoism and Confucianism</u> Closer to nature, or closer to humanity? The Way of Yin-Yang versus the Way of Civility	
Week 11. Mar 28	<u>Axial Worldviews</u> Comparing the Twelve Axials for their shared core ideas	Analysis Paper due Mar 28
Week 12. April 4	<u>The Origin and Evolution of Religion</u> New hypotheses from anthropology and cognitive science	
Week 13. April 11	<u>Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics</u> Comparing religions and philosophy on ethics	
Week 14. April 18	<u>Axial Age Spirituality</u> Transcendence for a world in crisis?	
Week 15 April 25	<u>Philosophy – Worldviews</u> Categorizing and comparing views on ultimate reality, to design a worldview of your own	
Week 16 May 2-13	Work on final assignments	Research Paper due May 13