

# BRENTON G SMITH

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**AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION:** Ancient Greek Philosophy; Philosophy as a Way of Life

**AREAS OF COMPETENCE:** Ethics; Medieval Philosophy

## EDUCATION:

Ph. D. Philosophy, Fordham University (May 2024)

Dissertation: The Religiosity of the Philosophical Life: Plato on *Eros* and the Human Soul

Committee: Dr. Daryl Tress (Chair)

Dr. Christopher Cullen, S.J.

Dr. Gary Gurtler, S.J. (Boston College)

M.A. Philosophy, Boston College; MA (December 2017).

M.A. Bible and Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary, MI (May 2016).

B.A. English Literature; Film Studies, Calvin College, MI (May 2007).

## PUBLICATIONS:

Forthcoming, "Receptivity and Conversion to the Teachings of the Illuminating Principle in Plato and Augustine", chapter in *Theandrites Studies in Byzantine Philosophy and Christian Platonism 284-1453*, by Franciscan University Press.

Submitted and Under Review, "Converting the *Eros* of Soul: Towards a New General Method of Plato Interpretation", *Ancient Philosophy*

## AWARDS:

Senior Teaching Fellowship at Fordham University, Fall 2022-Spring 2023

- Annual Fordham GSAS award based on excellence in teaching

Raymond Grontkowski Prize for Excellence in Teaching, Fall 2022

- Fordham Philosophy department award given to one graduate student instructor annually who demonstrates excellence in teaching

High Pass: Reading List Oral Examination at Fordham University, Spring 2021

Pass with Distinction: Oral Comprehensive Examination at Boston College, Fall 2017

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE:**

Instructor of Record, Aquinas College

- Know Thyself
  - Spring 2025, Spring 2025

Instructor of Record, Fordham University

- Philosophy of Human Nature
  - Spring 2024; Spring 2024; Summer 2022; Spring 2022; Fall 2021; Spring 2021; Fall 2020; Spring 2020; Fall 2019
  - All-Online Instruction: Summer 2023; section designed from the ground-up to be taught entirely online asynchronously, with full-feature lecture videos
- Philosophical Ethics:
  - Fall 2022; Fall 2022

Teaching Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Western Michigan University

- Introduction to Ethics (1<sup>st</sup> half Spring 2015)
- Bioethics (2<sup>nd</sup> half Spring 2015)
- Philosophy of Art (Fall 2014)
- Ancient and Medieval Philosophy (Fall 2014)

## **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

International Society of Neoplatonic Studies Conference – Athens 2021

- Presented on the Topic “Receptivity and Conversion to the Teachings of the Illuminating Principle in Plato and Augustine”
- Part of a panel on the topic “Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity and Byzantium: Rivals, Alliances, or merely a Continuum?”

## **WORKS IN PROGRESS:**

- Reworking dissertation (“The Religiosity of the Philosophical Life: Plato on *Eros* and the Human Soul”) for publication as a book
- “Failed Ascent: Augustine’s Neoplatonism and the Moment he Learned God”

## **SERVICE AND PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY**

- Creator and Host of Podcast, "The Heart and the Head" , Spring 2024-Present; host of podcast about taking up a philosophical life of seeking wisdom, considered in context of teachings of philosophers throughout history.  
(<https://www.theheartandthehead.brentongsmith.com/>)
- Leader of Book Study on the Stoics - Grand Haven, MI, Spring 2024-Present; leader of sessions of independent group dedicated to studying and applying ancient stoic teachings
- Jesuit Pedagogy Seminar - Fordham University, Spring 2022; Invitation-only training seminar on pedagogy in the Jesuit tradition

- Video Production and Editing for Fordham Philosophy Department, Summer 2020; Co-creator, co-producer and sole editor of a series of recorded interview lectures used by Fordham philosophy professors during the COVID pandemic.
- Workshop organizer for Fordham Philosophy Department, Summer 2020: co-organized series of workshops to prepare philosophy instructors for teaching during COVID pandemic
- Website Development and Consultation - Fordham University, Summer 2019; Recipient of GSAS Summer Graduate Assistantship; Developed the Fordham Philosophy Pedagogy Resources website, an internal resource for pedagogy resources within the department.
- Software Skills and Certifications: Significant familiarity with Adobe Premiere Video Editing Software; Familiarity with Java programming language

## REFERENCES:

Dr. Daryl Tress, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Brian and Kathleen MacLean Fellow – Fordham University – [tress@fordham.edu](mailto:tress@fordham.edu), 718-817-3311

Dr. Gary Gurtler, S.J., Professor of Philosophy – Boston College – [gurtlerg@bc.edu](mailto:gurtlerg@bc.edu), 617-552-3872

Dr. Christopher Cullen, S.J., Associate Professor of Philosophy – Fordham University – [ccullen@fordham.edu](mailto:ccullen@fordham.edu), 212-636-7926

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT:

Title: "The Religiosity of the Philosophical Life: Plato on *Eros* and the Human Soul"

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Daryl Tress, Ph.D.

Readers: Dr. Christopher Cullen, S.J., Dr. Gary Gurtler, S.J.

Abstract: In this dissertation, I argue that Plato understands the nature of philosophy to be a religious discipline in which love (*eros*) is what determines, in absolute fashion, what we know and how we act. In Chapter 1, I argue that for Plato, reason is a human faculty which images the Divine. The divine Ideas represent structures within our mind which reveal the Divine to human beings. Thus, reason, in granting self-knowledge, also grants knowledge of the Divine. I argue in Chapter 2 that Plato believes two simple desires run within human nature. One represents an innate rational desire to better know the Divine, the other an irrational desire to satisfy the desires of the body for their own sake. In Chapter 3, I look at the analogy of the charioteer in *Phaedrus*. I argue the analogy reflects the aforementioned bifurcated desires set before the intellect, and that in the analogy, *eros*, represented as a choice between these desires, is what determines what a person believes absolutely: granting knowledge (*episteme*) or opinion (*doxe*). In Chapter 4, I discuss philosophy as the religious life for Plato. This life begins with conversion, in which the soul comes to erotically desire the Divine, but it is also one of slow, continual growth towards knowledge of the Divine. In chapter 5, I discuss the nature of knowledge for Plato. I argue that knowledge represents a moment of insight into the Divine. Real knowledge is "existential knowledge": something so deep and abiding that we never act contrary to it. In Chapter 6, I argue that since knowledge is only derived from what we love, and since *eros* is a sovereign act of the soul, knowledge is incommunicable. Thus a soul can be aided by a teacher towards knowledge, but the teacher cannot instigate or control it. A final takeaway which I open up for future research follows: it is unsurprising that Plato as writer would take on the role of the teacher, and not to communicate knowledge directly, but rather to simply spur the reader to "convert" and to take on the philosophical life themselves.

## **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:**

American Association of Philosophy Teachers (2018-Present)

Ancient Philosophy Society (2017-Present)

International Society for Neoplatonic Studies (2020-Present)

## **LANGUAGES:**

- Greek (Attic: Intermediate Level)
- Latin (Medieval: Intermediate Level)
- Hebrew (Ancient, Beginner Level)

## **GRADUATE COURSEWORK:**

### **Philosophy - Ancient**

Plato's *Timaeus* (Vogt, 2019)

Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Presocratics (Babich, 2018)

Platonic Pedagogy (Johnson, 2018)

The Aristotelian Ethics (Madigan, 2017)

Plato's *Republic* (DeChiara-Quenzer, 2016)

Contemporary Aristotelian Ethics (Lott, 2016)

### **Philosophy - Medieval**

Bonaventure's Metaphysics (Cullen, 2020)

Medieval Theories of the Fall (Pini, 2019)

Augustine & Neoplatonism (Cullen, 2019)

Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (Kreeft, 2016)

### **Philosophy of Religion or Philosophical Theology**

PhD Seminar: Apologetics of Despair [Deep Reading of Kierkegaard and Pascal] (Hardy, 2014)

Philosophy of Religion (Dolson, 2014)

PhD Seminar: Christian Anthropology and the Body Soul Debate (Cooper, 2014)

### **Philosophy**

Psychoanalysis (Baur, 2019)

Phenomenology (Drummond, 2020)

Introduction to Phenomenology (Staiti, 2017)

Existentialism (Kreeft, 2016)

Logic I (Tan, 2021)

Self Cultivation Philosophies (Gowans, 2020)

The Limits of Thought in Kant and Post-Kantian Philosophy (Winegar, 2018)

Metaphysics (Gurtler, 2017)

Graduate Seminar: Kant's First Critique (Stan, 2017)

Independent Study: Philosophy & Film Studies (Dilworth, 2015)

Freedom and Responsibility (Glatz, 2014)

### **Theology and Church History**

Old Testament Prophetic Literature (Benckhuysen, 2016)

The Church in Historical Context: 1500-Present (Bratt, 2016)

1 Corinthians (Gombis, 2015)

PhD Seminar: Theological Biographies (Rylaarsdam, 2014)

PhD Seminar: Classic Texts in the History of Christianity (Woodbridge, 2013)

Biblical Theology and Interpretation (Johnson, 2013)

Apologetics (McCall, 2013)

Christian Ethics (McCall, 2013)

Theology I: Intro to Theology (Luy, 2013)

The Church in Historical Context: 1-1500 AD (Rylaarsdam, 2013)

Christian Theology in Reformed Confessions (N. Plantinga, 2013)

### **Languages**

Intermediate Greek I (Sat-in on Class - Peirce, 2021)

Elementary Greek II (Peirce, 2021)

Elementary Greek I (Peirce, 2020)

Hebrew Fundamentals (2013)

Greek Fundamentals I (Biblical Greek) (Weima, 2013)