

Philosophy of Religion

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Course Description

The course is an overview of some important issues in Western philosophy of religion.

Course Goals

In order to successfully complete this course a student should be able to critically analyze and compare philosophical views. Personal critical thinking is the most important goal to be achieved in this course.

Course Requirements

At the end of the course each student will write a short paper on an argument related to the topics dealt with during the course. Each student will need to obtain approval of his/her topic no later than one month before the due date. The paper due date will be communicated early in the semester.

About the Final Paper

I will give a list of possible paper topics later in the semester. A student can either choose a topic from the list or opt for an independent individually chosen topic (in the latter case the student should obtain approval of the topic).

Readings

The readings are either photocopies or on the web. The students will find photocopies of the readings on reserve in the philosophy department.

1) January 29: Introduction

2) January 31/ February 5: Historical background: from ancient philosophy to Medieval theology to philosophy of religion

Readings:

Blaise Pascal, "The Wager"

William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

William James, "The Will to Believe"

3) February 7/ February 12: Where does modern philosophy of religion come from?

Locke's Letter on Toleration at:

<http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/1/locke/john/181t/>

Immanuel Kant “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason” Book I at:

<http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/rbbr/rbbr1.html>

GOD

4) February 14/ February 26: God: Omniscience

Nelson Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action”

Marilyn McCord Adams, “Is the Existence of God a ‘Hard’ Fact?”

5) February 28/ March 5: God: Omnipotence and omnibenevolence

George I. Mavrodes, “Some puzzles concerning omnipotence”

J. Hoffman, “Can God do evil?” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 17 (1979) 213-20

EXISTENCE

6) March 7/ March 19: The ontological argument

Saint Anselm, “The Classical Ontological Argument” (Proslogion 2)

Gaunilo, “Critique of Anselm’s Argument”

Alvin Plantinga, “A Contemporary Modal Version of the Ontological Argument”

7) March 21/ March 26: The cosmological argument

Thomas Aquinas, “The Classical Cosmological Argument”

J.L. Mackie “Critique of the Cosmological Argument”

Samuel Clarke, “An Improved Version of the Argument”

David Hume, “Criticism of Clarke’s Argument” (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion)

8) March 28/ April 2: The Design argument

William Paley, “The Analogy of the Watch”

David Hume, “Criticisms of the Analogy” (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion)

J.S. Mill, “God’s Attributes and the Argument from Design”

BELIEF

9) April 4/ April 11: The problem of evil

David Hume, “Evil Makes a Strong Case Against God’s Existence”

J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”

Alvin Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense”

SCIENCE

10) April 16/ April 18: Science and religion

Richard Dawkins “Is Science a Religion?”

<http://www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html>

and “When Religion Steps on Science’s Turf. The Alleged Separation Between the Two Is Not So Tidy”

http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=dawkins_18_2

Alvin Plantinga “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible

<http://www.asa3.org/ASA/dialogues/Faith-reason/CRS9-91Plantinga1.html>

Ernan McMullin “Evolution and Special Creation

<http://www.asa3.org/asa/dialogues/Faith-reason/CRS9-91McMullin.html>

ETHICS

11) April 23/ April 25: Ethics and religion

Baruch A. Brody: “Morality and Religion Reconsidered”

Robert Young: “Theism and Morality”

Jean-Paul Sartre: “Ethics Without Religion”

ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

12) April 31/ May 2: Wittgenstein

13) May 7/ May 9: Philosophy of language