

Philosophy of Religion (Prospective Syllabus)

Course Description

Is belief in God rational? If so, on what grounds? If not, why is there belief in God? What is the relation between reason and faith? In this course, we shall take a historical approach to such questions by reading classic philosophical texts concerning religion.

Course Goal

By the end of the semester, you will be able to engage in philosophical dialogue with others. By this I mean that you will do the following:

- * sympathetically reconstruct arguments of other philosophers
- * raise objections to those arguments; and,
- * evaluate whether the original argument(s) can be defended from those objections.

Texts

[RPR] *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: Ancient to Contemporary*. Ed. by Zagzebski and Miller.

Assignments and Grading

- 30% Study Questions and Exercises that Accompany Readings
- 30% 4 Short Papers (approximately 3 pages each)
- 40% Final Paper (approximately 8-10 pages)

Schedule of Readings [each "*" corresponds to 1-2 class sessions]

Unit 1: The Cosmological Argument

The Ancient Greeks

* "Plato's Cosmological Argument"; Aristotle, "The Eternality of Motion and the Unmoved Mover" (RPR 55-65)

Arguments from Monotheistic Perspectives

* Al-Ghazâlî, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument"; Maimonides, "The Existence and Oneness of God"; Aquinas, "The First Three Ways" (RPR 66-72)

Overview and Criticism

* Clarke, "The Argument from Dependent Beings"; Hume, "Critique of the Cosmological Argument" (RPR 73-78)

Paper Prompt

* In a maximum of three pages, present Clarke's version of the cosmological argument and Hume's critique of the cosmological argument. Present reasons for thinking that Hume's critique succeeds or fails.

Unit 2: The Teleological and Ontological Arguments

The Teleological Argument

* Cicero, "The Design Argument"; Aquinas, "The Fifth Way"; Paley, "The Watch and the Watchmaker"; Hume, "Critique of the Design Argument" (RPR 23-38)

The Ontological Argument

* "Anselm's Ontological Argument"; "Kant's Critique of the Three Traditional Proofs" (RPR 79-83, 90-97)

Unit 3: Other Motivations for Believing in God

Morality and Divine Command Theory

- * Plato, "God is the Measure of All Things"; Kant, "The Moral Argument for the Existence of God" (RPR 269-275)
- * Plato, "The Euthyphro Dilemma" (RPR 277-282)

Pascal's Wager

- * Pascal, "The Wager" (RPR 533-537)

Experience and Revelation

- * William James, "The Will to Believe" (RPR 549-558)
- * John H. Hick, "Revelation and Faith"

Naturalistic Explanations and Interpretations

- * Hume, "The Origin of Religion"; Feuerbach, "The Essence of Religion in General"; Freud, "The Future of an Illusion" (RPR 175-190)

Paper Prompt

- * Analyze and evaluate Pascal's Wager. Make sure to identify precisely the aim of Pascal's argument. Evaluate whether Pascal has succeeded in achieving that aim.

Unit 4: Evils and Miracles

The Problem of Evil

- * Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (RPR 342-349)
- * Plato, "God is Not the Author of Evil"; Augustine, "That Which Is, Is Good"; Augustine, "On the Free Choice of the Will"; Leibniz, "Formal Summary of the Theodicy" (RPR 323-324, 327-338)

Are Miracles Possible?

- * Hume, "Of Miracles"; Mavrodes, "David Hume and the Probability of Miracles" (RPR 572-594)

Paper Prompt

- * Identify Hume's overall conclusion concerning miracles. Analyze and evaluate his argument for that conclusion.

Unit 5: Reason and Faith

Fideism

- * Kierkegaard, "Truth is Subjectivity"; Adams, "Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion" (RPR 151-167)

Enthusiasm

- * Locke, "Faith, Reason, and Enthusiasm" (RPR 504-514)

Science and Religion

- * Dembski, "Signs of Intelligence"; Dennett, "Atheism and Evolution"; Haught, "Darwin, Design, and Divine Providence"