

PHL 18-224, REL 19-514: Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy Department - Spring 2012

Class Times and Location:

M/W 11:00–12:15, KEW 116

Instructor:

Phil Hopkins
RAC 112 – 863-1882 – hopkinsp@southwestern.edu
Office Hours: M/W 3:-4:30, and by appointment

Required Texts:

Augustine – *On Free Choice of the Will*, Hackett
Kierkegaard – *Fear and Trembling*, Penguin Classics
Pär Lagerkvist – *Sibyl*, Random House
Paul Tillich – *The Dynamics of Faith*, Harper Collins
Anonymous – *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Stanford

Note: You will also need a copy of the Old Testament. I recommend *The New English Bible* or the *Oxford Study Bible* both published by Oxford. But you may use any version you wish.

OPTIONAL: **Mark Silk** – *Unsecular Media*, University of Illinois Press

For the gods have not revealed all things to mortals from the beginning; but by long seeking, we may discover better.

— Xenophanes

Human nature has no judgment, but the divine nature does. Yet, for men, their nature is their divinity.

— Heraclitus

...On the other hand a faith that does not perpetually expose itself to the possibility of unfaith is no faith but merely a convenience...

— Heidegger

Course Description and Objectives:

Although there are several interesting ways to approach a course in the philosophy of Religion, this course will be structured as an examination of a central feature of the western religious tradition, the concept and practice of faith. We will examine this concept primarily through an equally ubiquitous feature of religions: religious narratives. We will explore narratives of various sorts, such as those which purport to describe the nature and desires of the divine, or the nature of humanity from the perspective of the divine, that offer explanations for troubling aspects of our world and our existence, and that seek to proscribe aspects of our existence *as problematic*. Religious narratives, which, at times, offer reasoned arguments, and at all times seek to make sense of what is perhaps beyond sense in *sensu stricto*, illuminate a great deal about both what it means to be religious, and, just as interesting, what it means to be human. In examining these narratives, we will take up and explore, philosophically (that is, critically), two particular topics which, in one way or another, figure prominently in such narratives: the relation of faith and reason, and the relation of faith and morality.

Since it is quite difficult to carefully examine more than a single religious tradition in a short time, we will confine ourselves to the western Christian tradition as we can count on everyone being familiar with that tradition, if only by virtue of having grown up in America. As we explore this tradition, we will take care, first of all, that we become clear about the depth and range of the questions. All answers will be tentative and exploratory. Finally, whatever your personal religious dynamics, this course will seek to challenge your convictions and prejudices concerning religion and faith.

Required Work:

PAPERS:

There will be **FOUR take-home essays**, each requiring four to six typewritten pages. They are each worth **15% of your grade** for the course. Each essay will require you to: 1) **Explain** the thinking (i.e. describe the positions of the authors and explain why they might hold such positions) in one or several of the required texts, 2) **Critique** that thinking by discussing where it is weak and where it is strong, and the reasons for your evaluation, and 3) **Engage** that thinking by relating it to your own thoughts concerning the issue(s) under investigation. Each step in this process is progressively more difficult than the one preceding it, and relies upon doing the earlier step well.

For each essay, there will be suggested topics, but students are invited to develop their own topics in consultation with the instructor.

The factors used in grading philosophy essays are as follows:

<i>Accuracy:</i>	The degree to which the student captures and articulates (in his or her own terms) someone else's philosophical position and the arguments used to defend it
<i>Creativity:</i>	The degree to which the student develops his or her own position and supports it
<i>Cogency:</i>	The degree to which the student's explanation and support of the textual positions and his or her own position are reasonable and well-made
<i>Execution:</i>	The degree to which the essay is well written (including such factors as structure, grammar, and spelling)

ONLINE RESPONSE/DISCUSSION:

There will be **FIVE ONLINE RESPONSES** of about one page on the five central themes of the class. These papers will not be graded individually. Full credit will be given if all assignments are completed in a candid and thoughtful manner. These papers are designed to give the student the opportunity to get the expressive/analytic juices flowing, so to speak, and to practice thinking and articulating the texts in a philosophical manner, and to prepare for each of the essays. They are also intended to give the instructor insight into the reactions and thoughts of the students concerning the texts. **These papers together will count for 15% of your grade.** Missed assignments will reduce credit proportionally.

DISCUSSION:

The best way of being a student in such a class as the one in which you find yourself is to engage the texts enough to be troubled by them, and then to relentlessly pursue understanding concerning those problems, while remaining open to the distinct possibility that more than one resolution is possible and that the problems may be ultimately irresolvable. Therefore one of our main efforts in the class will be not only to wrestle some understanding out of these texts, but to foster and maintain a tenacious spirit with respect to our puzzles and questions. As Aristotle has said many times, the puzzles themselves can be quite illuminating. Participation in discussion will count for **25% of your grade.**

Course Schedule:

The material listed for a given date is to be read at least once by that date.

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on Moodle.

Religious Experience and Religious Language

1/10 – Introduction to course: Reason and Faith	<i>Viewing: Holy Ghost People</i>
1/12 – The Human Experience of Faith	<i>Reading: James, <i>Varieties of Religious Experience</i>*</i>

1/16 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	
1/18 – What Faith is	<i>Reading: Tillich, <i>Dynamics of Faith</i>, Ch. I</i>

1/23 – Faith in Practice	<i>Reading: Tillich, <i>Dynamics</i>, Ch. II-III</i>
1/25 – The Edges of Language	<i>Reading: Van Buren, Ch. 4 and 2</i> <i>Assign: Online Response Paper Due</i>

1/30 – Religious Argument	<i>Reading: Hume, <i>Dialogues</i>*</i>
2/1 – The Contemporary Debate	<i>Reading: Online resources</i>

2/6 – The Contemporary Debate	<i>Reading: Online resources</i>
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******FIRST PAPER DUE******

Good and Evil

2/8– Job: A good man gone bad...	<i>Reading: <i>The Book of Job</i>, Chapters 1-21</i>
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2/13 – The chasm between God and man...	<i>Reading: <i>The Book of Job</i>, Chapters 22-42</i>
2/15 – The divine spark: Freedom as the root of all evil	<i>Reading: Augustine, <i>On Free Choice</i>, Book I</i>

2/20 – The ‘Inner Sense’: Wisdom and God	<i>Reading: Augustine, Book II, Parts 1-17, 20</i> <i>Assign: Online Response Paper Due</i>
2/22 – Evil: The best of all possible worlds...	<i>Reading: Augustine, Book III, Parts 5-18, 25</i>

In Between Heaven and Earth

2/27 – To Be Wise and Mortal	<i>Reading: <i>The Book of Genesis</i>, Chapters 1-3, 6-8, and 11:1-10; <i>The Adapa Myth</i>*</i>
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******SECOND PAPER DUE******

2/29 – In Between Animal and God	<i>Reading: <i>The Gilgamesh Epic</i>, pp. 61-119</i>
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3/5 – The Quest to be Divine	
3/7 – The Wholly Other	<i>Reading: Otto, from <i>The Idea of the Holy</i>*</i> <i>Assign: Online Response Paper Due</i>

SPRING BREAK

3/19 – The Blessing and the Curse
3/21 – Fearing God

Reading: Lagerkvist, *Sibyl*, pp. 1-75
Reading: Lagerkvist, *Sibyl*, pp. 76-end

Absolute Faith

3/26 – A man of faith...not without reason...

Reading: *The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 12-26

****THIRD PAPER DUE****

3/28 – A man of passion...without doubt...

Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*,
Preface, Attunement, Speech in Praise

4/2 – Faith and the Ethical

Reading: Kierkegaard, *Problemata*: Preamble
From the Heart

4/4 – The monstrous dimensions of faith

Reading: Kierkegaard, *Problemas I and II*
Assign: **Online Response Paper Due**

Contemporary Faith Practices

4/9 – MegaChurch: Faith and the Market

Reading: Applebee's *America* *

4/11 – MegaChurch: Faith and the Human Good

Viewing: Megachurch videos

4/16 – MegaChurch: Faith and Ethics

Viewing: Megachurch videos

4/18 – Mass Moralizing

Reading: Silk, *Unsecular Media* *

4/23 – The Power of Stories

Reading: Silk, *Unsecular Media* *

4/25 – Final thoughts and evaluation

Assign: **Online Response Paper Due**

5/3 – **FINAL PAPER DUE in my office by 11:30 a.m.**

Other policies:

Late Essays: In order to be fair to those who turn in their work on time, late essays will be penalized five points per day. Final Papers will not be accepted after the due date.

Attendance: Since much of the success of this class will depend upon active participation in the class discussion and questioning, attendance is **expected**. Absences cannot help but damage your final grade.

Scholastic Dishonesty: (NOTE: Since the pledge is required on all assignments, e-mail submissions of term papers WILL NOT be accepted.) For the purposes of this course, scholastic dishonesty signifies primarily the act of borrowing ideas from others (whether those of your classmates or those found in a book or any other source whatsoever) and claiming them as your own. It is my desire that the kind of questioning and discussion that this class seeks to practice will be continued between students outside of class. I encourage students to discuss their papers with each other and seek critical assistance from classmates and from the instructor. However, all such assistance must be noted in the work itself and credit for ideas and other help must be assigned to the source of those ideas or other assistance in the form of citations in one's paper. Any confusion or uncertainty concerning this matter should be discussed with the instructor.

Communicating with the Instructor: Students unable to make office hours should ask for an appointment, and a convenient time can easily be arranged. You should not hesitate to call on me to help you clarify your thinking and to discuss whatever confusions, questions, ideas and problems you may have.

Accommodations: Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should register with the Office of Academic Services, located in the Prothro Building. Professors must be officially notified by the Academic Services Coordinator that documentation is on file at least two weeks before the accommodation is needed.