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PH 501 Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

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PH 501: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion
Draft and Tentative Syllabus for Fall 2004
Instructor: Joseph B. O. Okello

Meeting Days:

**September 4 2004, October 2 2004, November 6 2004,
December 11 2004, December 18 2004.**

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Office Hours: TBA

Meeting Room: TBA

Introductory Remarks

It is a great honor and privilege to know that you will be taking this course. Think of it as a philosophical journey in which you will have an opportunity to explore some fundamental issues in the area of Philosophy of Religion, and think of me as your “tour guide” in this journey.

We will focus, *specifically* on the Philosophy of Christian Religion rather than the Philosophy of Religions in general. Some of the issues we will explore from a philosophical stand-point include: different views (theological) of human freedom, the problem of evil, arguments for the existence of God, the relationship between faith and reason, the justification of religious beliefs, and so on. A comprehensive over-view appears on the course schedule below.

Course Description

Our philosophical journey will comprise a survey of the philosophical method; a study of the mutual impact of the Christian faith and philosophical discourse upon each other; a reflection upon the overlap between Christian and philosophical ethics; and a critical assessment of the relationship between the Christian understanding of reality and other ways of perceiving it.

General Learning Objectives

What we are aiming at here is not only a firm establishment in the philosophy of our theology, but also a clear articulation of the reasons for the hope that we have in us. But most importantly, we aim at developing a deeper and personal relationship with God through the act of loving Him with all our minds. Needless to say, we will find ourselves entering the arena of Christian Apologetics. In fact, “Philosophy of Christian Religion”

and “Christian Apologetics” are quite similar in many ways. It is my hope, therefore, that whether we are doing Philosophy of Religion as defined above, or Christian Apologetics, we will be firmly established in our faith as we allow the Cross of our Risen Lord to be seen clearly.

Specific Course Objectives

It is my hope that by the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Explain the different accounts of human freedom found within the Christian tradition.
2. Explain your understanding of the attributes of God, and their implications for your life.
3. Articulate the different traditional arguments for the existence of God. Provide your understanding of the relationship between reason and the Christian faith
4. Provide an epistemological justification for holding religious beliefs.
5. Provide arguments for and against examined religious experiences, and give a philosophical justification for the Christian vantage point.
6. Explain what miracles are in light of the agnostic’s rejection of miracles, and providing a rational justification for the Christian position.
7. Explain the key issues surrounding the problem of evil, namely, “If God is good, loving and just, why does he allow evil.”
8. Argue for or against the answer to the following question: “Is there a relationship between science and religion.”
9. Explain how finite human language can be used in describing an infinite God.
10. Explain the mind-body problem, and how this problem bears on personal identity, as well as the question of eschatology.
11. Articulate a Theological-cum-Philosophical account of the exclusive claims of Christianity in light of those who have never heard the Gospel.

Required Course Texts

1. Hasker, William. *Metaphysics* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983).
2. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Reason and Religious Belief*. 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
3. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

These books can be ordered from Asbury’s Bookstore. The toll-free telephone number is 1-866-855-8252. The email address is exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu

Recommended Text: Do your best to own a Dictionary of Philosophy of some Kind. Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries are probably the better ones, since they are readily available and at reasonable prices.

Course Requirements

1. You will be expected to read the material assigned for each of the fourteen lessons. Quite a number of the readings are difficult to understand, and may require a “re-read” before you grasp the main thread of argument. It happens to me all the time!
2. Attendance Policy: Since we will only meet 5 times this semester, I will expect 100% attendance from you, unless you are confronted by extenuating circumstances. Three unexcused absences will be permitted. Beyond this, please do your best to inform me of your intent to be absent from class. I will then decide whether you have good reasons to be absent from class. The highest Course Grade you will get for missing a day of class (without prior consent from me) will be a B, provided you get an A grade in all your papers.
3. Three papers have been assigned, and all three will be graded. Each paper is to be between 4-6 pages in length. In grading your paper, I will expect you to do the following:
 - If you choose to compare and contrast different authors, identify each author’s central claim, and show how they support their claim. That is, identify the reasons they give for holding the given claim. You will then formulate your own position, and give your reasons for holding that position. Note: Good philosophers normally state their positions upfront.
 - If you choose to defend your own thesis, be sure to state it clearly, and provide reasons for your answer.
 - Each paper you write will be graded for: Logical consistency, factual correctness and explanatory power.
 - Please use scholarly language in your paper. Pay attention to grammar, spelling and the like. I am quite picky about these.

Methods of Instruction:

1. Formal Lectures.
2. Group Discussions and Debates. For the debates, I will split the class into three groups. One group will be required to argue against a thesis, while another will be required to defend the given thesis. The third group will critique the arguments of both groups, and decide which group presents the most persuasive argument.
3. Video Clips on Specific Topics, where possible.

Grading Procedure

1. Participation and attendance: 10%
2. Paper 1: 30 %. Due October 2nd, at the end of Lesson 6.
3. Paper 2: 30 %. Due November 6th, at end of Lesson 9.
4. Paper 3: 30 %. Due December 18th at end of Lesson 14.

Course Schedule

This course will have five modules, and each module has three lessons. The due dates for the required readings are also given. At the end of this course schedule, I have pasted a summary of schedule to give you an overview of how we ought to proceed during this semester.

MODULE 01 September 4 2004

Lesson 01: Introducing Philosophy of Religion

Reading: Hasker p. 13 – 28; Reason and Religious Belief, p. 5 – 14

Complete the reading for lesson 01 by September 11 2004.

Lesson 02: Freedom and Responsibility

Reading: Hasker p. 29 – 55

Complete the reading for lesson 02 by September 18 2004

Lesson 03 – God's Attributes

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 58 – 76; Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings p. 124 – 129, 139 – 148

Complete the reading for lesson 03 by September 25 2004

MODULE 02 October 2 2004

Lesson 04: Arguments for the Existence of God

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 77 – 106; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 165 – 169, 170 – 218, 241–246).

Complete the reading for lesson 04 by October 2 2004

Lesson 05: Faith and Reason.

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 39 – 57; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 67 – 70, 77 – 108)

Complete the reading for lesson 05 by October 9 2004

Lesson 06: Justification for Religious Belief

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 107 – 127. Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 355 – 365)

Complete the reading for lesson 06 by October 16 2004

1st PAPER DUE October 2 2004:

Assigned Paper topic (Select One):

1. Identify and critique the account of freedom implicit in the Westminster Confession of Faith. State whether or not you think it is an appropriate system of philosophy.
2. Is God eternal or everlasting? Thomas Aquinas contends that God is eternal. Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that God is everlasting. Who is right, and does it make a difference whose position you believe?

MODULE 03 November 6 2004

Lesson 07: Religious experience.

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief, p. 15 – 38, Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 5 – 55)

Complete the reading for lesson 07 by October 23 2004

Lesson 08: Miracles

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief, p. 173 – 193; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 415 – 444)

Complete the reading for lesson 08 by October 30 2004

Lesson 09: The Problem of Evil

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 128 – 153; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (249-314)

Complete the reading for lesson 09 by November 6 2004

2nd PAPER DUE November 6 2004:

Assigned Paper Topics (Select One):

1. Compare two opposing views on Miracles (Hume's *and* Swinburne's, or Mackie's *and* Swinburne's). State your view, in light of the reading, and give reasons for your position.
2. Formulate a philosophical critique of Michael Martin's "Critique of Religious Experience."
3. State the problem of evil as forcefully as you can, and then respond to it. (Hint: The readings will be of help here.)
4. Is Belief in God rational? Using the insights from the readings and from the lectures, state and defend your position.
5. Is there a relationship between faith and reason? Using insights from the readings and from the lectures, state and defend your position.

MODULE 04 December 11 2004

Lesson 10: Science and Religion

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 246 – 266; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 497 – 530).

Complete the reading for lesson 10 by November 13 2004

Lesson 11: Religious Language

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 220 – 245; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 369 – 413)

Complete the readings for lesson 11 by November 20 2004

Lesson 12: Mind-Body Issues

Reading: Hasker p. 57 – 80; Reason and Religious Belief (p. 194 – 219); Philosophy of

Religion: Sel. Rdgs (445 – 488).

Complete the readings for lesson 12 by December 11 2004

MODULE 05 December 18

Lesson 13: Religious Diversity

Reading: Reason and Religious Belief (p.267 – 288); Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 539 – 570)

Complete the readings for lesson 13 by December 18 2004

Lesson 14: Philosophy and Theological Doctrines

Reading: Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 597 – 630)

Complete the Readings for lesson 14 by December 18 2004

3rd PAPER DUE December 18 2004:

Assigned Paper topics:

You may choose *any one* of the of the following assignments:

Is there a relationship between science and religion? Answer this question in light of Nancy Murphy’s “Theology and Scientific Methodology.”

Does Philosophy support or undermine theological doctrines? Present your view, in light of the assigned readings

For the anthology (*Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*), the editors usually provide helpful introductory remarks that would assist you in knowing the main point of each article.

Summary of Schedule

DAY	8 – 9	9 – 10	10 – 11	11 – 12	1 - 2	2 – 3	3 - 4	4 - 5
Sept 4	Introduction	Metaphysics	Metaphysics	Freedom	Freedom	Freedom	God’s Attributes	God’s Attributes.
Oct 2	God’s Existence	God’s Existence	God’s Existence	Faith and Reason	Faith and Reason	Faith and Reason	Religious Belief	Religious Belief 1st Paper Due
Nov 6	Religious Experience	Religious Experience	Religious Experience	Miracles	Miracles	Problem of Evil	Problem of Evil	Problem of Evil 2nd Paper Due
Dec 11	Science and Religion	Science and Religion	Science and Religion	Religious Language	Religious Language	Mind-body Problem	Mind-body Problem	Mind-body Problem
Dec 18	Religious Diversity	Religious Diversity	Religious Diversity	Philosophy and Theology	Philosophy and Theology	CLOSURE 3rd Paper Due	CLOSURE	CLOSURE

Means of Communication

1. Telephone: 859-858-9183
2. Email: joseph_okello@asburyseminary.edu
3. Office Hours: TBA, assuming some place will be provided to facilitate meeting with students.
4. Appointments: Simply send me an email, and we will try and schedule a meeting together. Remember, I will be flying in from the Kentucky campus. That means we can only meet on the dates I am scheduled to be on the Florida campus.