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PH 501 B Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

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PH 501 W2: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion, Fall '08
Meeting Rooms: M 302
Meeting Days: Wednesdays
Time: 8:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.
Instructor: Joseph B. O. Okello
Office Hours: 1:00 – 2:00, Tuesdays and Thursdays (or by appointment)
Office Location: Reasoner Hall 119 at Asbury College

Course Description

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.

Specific Course Objectives

By the end of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the different accounts of human freedom in the Christian tradition.
2. Explain the nature of God's attributes, and their implications for the Christian life.
3. Articulate the different traditional arguments for the existence of God.
4. Provide an understanding of the relationship between reason and the Christian faith.
5. Provide an epistemological justification for holding religious beliefs.
6. Provide a philosophical justification for the Christian vantage point on religious experiences.
7. Articulate the philosophical justification for the Christian position on miracles
8. Explain the key issues surrounding the problem of evil in light of God's existence.
9. Explain the basic issues surrounding the dispute between science and religion.
10. Explain the Mind-Body problem, and how this problem bears on personal identity.
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, 4th Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
3. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, 3rd Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Course Requirements

1. The student will read the material assigned for each lesson. An understanding of the readings should be evident in the writing of the assigned term papers.
2. The student is expected to attend all class sessions. 2 unexcused absences are permitted. Unexcused absences beyond these two will affect the student's overall grade.
3. Three papers have been assigned, and all three will be graded. Each paper is to be no more than 1500 words in length and double-spaced. Each student paper should pay attention to the following:
 - a. Grammar and spelling.
 - b. Statement of the thesis upfront, with clarity, and support of the thesis with equal clarity.
 - c. Timely submission of each paper, unless one is under extenuating circumstances (e.g. inclement weather, illness, death, etc).
 - d. Page 3 of the course syllabus provides suggestions for paper topics.

Grading Procedure

1. Attendance and participation: 10%
2. Paper 1: 30%. Due October 2nd 2008 at the end of class.
3. Paper 2: 30%. Due November 6th 2008 at the end of class.
4. Paper 3: 30%. Due December 12th 2008 at the end of class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 3	Introducing Philosophy of Religion	
Wednesday, September 10	Introducing Philosophy of Religion	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 1 <i>Metaphysics</i> , Chapter 1
Wednesday, September 17	Freedom and Determinism	<i>Metaphysic</i> , Chapter 2
Wednesday, September 24	The Divine Attributes	<i>Reason & Rel. Beliefs</i> , Chapter 4 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 131 - 172
Wednesday, September 31	The Existence of God	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 5 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> 173 – 256
Wednesday, October 1	Faith and Reason	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 3 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 89 – 130
Wednesday, October 8	Knowing God w/o Arguments (1st paper Due)	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 6 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Page 259 – 286
Wednesday, October 15	Religious Experience	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 2 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 29 – 87
Wednesday, October 22	Miracles	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 9 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 471 – 496
Wednesday, October 29	The Problem of Evil	<i>Reason and Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 7 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 289 - 377
Wednesday, November 5	Religious Language	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 7 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 427 – 467
Wednesday, November 12	Science and Religion (2nd Paper Due)	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 12 <i>Phil. Of Rel.</i> Pages 547 – 580
Wednesday, November 19	Mind-Body Issues	<i>Metaphysics</i> , Chapter 3 <i>Phil of Rel.</i> Pages 500 – 580
Wednesday, December 3	Religious Diversity	<i>Reason & Rel. Belief</i> , Chapter 13
Friday, December 12	Final Paper Due	

1st PAPER DUE October 8 2008

Assigned Paper Topic:

You may write your assignment on **one and only one** of the following topics:

1. Is it rational to believe in the existence of God? Answer this question in light of the arguments for God's existence presented by at least one of the authors from the assigned readings.
2. What is the relationship between faith and reason? Do they undermine each other? Do they complement each other? With specific reference to the assigned readings, state and justify your opinion.
3. 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.
4. Is God eternal or is God everlasting? That is, is it more rational to believe that God exists outside time, or is it more rational to believe that God exists in and within time? State and justify your position. Explain why you reject the alternative position.

2nd PAPER DUE November 12 2008

Assigned Paper Topics:

You may write your paper on **one and only one** of the following topics:

1. Formulate a philosophical critique of Michael Martin's "Critique of Religious Experience." How would William James or William Alston respond to Martin's rejection of religious experience?
2. Compare two opposing views of miracles (i.e. either Hume's and Swinburne's, or Mackie's and Swinburne's). State your position, in light of the reading, and justify it.

3. Do we need arguments to prove that God exists? In other words, can we know without arguments that God exists? Argue that we can or cannot in light of the readings assigned for this topic.
4. Is religious experience sufficient to ground faith? Using insights from the readings on this topic, argue that it is or that it is not.

3rd PAPER DUE December 12 2008

Assigned Paper Topics

You may choose **one and only one** of the following assignments

1. State the problem of evil as forcefully as you can, and then respond to it.
2. Is there a relationship between science and religion? Answer in light of Gould's, Dawkins' or Murphy's view.
3. Compare either Price and Badham's or Swinburne's and Badham's account of the Soul's survival after death. Does Badham provide a forceful objection to accounts of life after death? In what way(s) could Price's or Swinburne's position be used to critique Badham's account?
4. In John 14:6 Jesus says "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Also, Acts 4:12 states: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." These scriptural passages define the exclusive nature of Christianity. Does Rahner's religious inclusivism and Hick's religious Pluralism undermine the exclusivist claims of Christianity as outlined in these passages? Justify your position.
5. Can we be ethical without God? Answer this question in light of John-Paul Sartre's view.

Each paper will be graded for Logical consistency, explanatory power, factual adequacy and Biblical Fidelity.