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PH 501 Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

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PH 501 W1: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion, Spring '08

Meeting Rooms: TBA

Meeting Days: Wednesday & Friday

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

Instructor: Joseph B. O. Okello

Office Hours: 10:30 – 12:00, Mondays and Fridays.

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 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.
4. Provide your understanding of the relationship between reason and the Christian faith.
5. Provide an epistemological justification for holding religious beliefs.
6. Provide arguments for and against examined religious experiences, and give philosophical justification for the Christian vantage point.
7. Explain what miracles are in light of the naturalistic objection to miracles, and provide justification for the Christian position.
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. Demonstrate how finite human language can be used in describing an infinite God.
11. Explain the Mind-Body problem, and how this problem bears on personal identity.
12. 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*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

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- Peterson, Michael, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 3rd Edition. New York. Oxford University Press, 2006.

These books can be ordered from Asbury Seminary's Bookstore. The toll-free telephone number is 1-866-855-8252.

Course Schedule

This course will have seven modules. Each module has two lessons. And each lesson will have one assignment. The due dates for the required readings are also given. Also, I will post complete module assignments in the course information center at least one week prior to assignment due dates. These assignments will involve study questions to guide you through the reading, and enable you to flesh out the claims of different authors.

MODULE 01: to be completed by February 15 2008

Lesson 01: Introducing Philosophy of Religion

Reading Assignment:

- Hasker's *Metaphysics*: Chapter 1
- Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 1

Complete readings for Module 01 lesson 01 by February 08 2008

Lesson 02: Freedom and Responsibility

Reading Assignment:

- Hasker's *Metaphysics*: Chapter 2

Complete readings for Module 01 lesson 02 by February 15 2008

MODULE 02: to be completed by February 29 2008

Lesson 01: God's Attributes

Reading Assignment:

- Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 4
- Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Four)
 - Hick: God's necessary Existence
 - Maimonides: Negative Theology
 - Aquinas: God is omnipotent
 - Mavrodes: Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence
 - Pike: Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action
 - Boethius: God is Timeless
 - Wolterstorff: God is Everlasting

Complete readings for Module 02 Lesson 01 by February 22 2007

Lesson 02: Arguments for the Existence of God

Reading Assignment:

- Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 5
- Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Five)

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- a. Anselm: Classical Ontological Argument
- b. Gaunilo: Critique of Anselm's Argument
- c. Plantinga: A Contemporary Version of the Ontological Argument
- d. Aquinas: Classical Cosmological Argument
- e. Craig: The Kalam Cosmological Argument
- f. Mackie: Critique of the Cosmological Argument
- g. Paley: The Analogical Teleological Argument

Complete readings for Module 02 lesson 02 by February 29 2008

MODULE 03: to be completed by March 14 2008

Lesson 01: Faith and Reason

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 3
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Three)
 - a. Aquinas: The Harmony of Reason and Revelation
 - b. Pascal: The Wager
 - c. Clifford: The Ethics of Belief
 - d. James: The Will to Believe
 - e. Kierkegaard: Truth is Subjectivity
 - f. Evans: Critical Dialog in Philosophy of Religion

Complete readings for Module 03 Lesson 01 by March 07 2008

Lesson 02: Knowing God without Arguments

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 6
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Six)
 - a. Plantinga: The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology
 - b. Pargetter: Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God
 - c. Hasker: The Case of the Intellectually Sophisticated Theist

Complete readings for Module 03 Lesson 02 by March 14 2008

1st PAPER DUE March 14 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.

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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.

MODULE 04: to be completed by March 28 2008

Lesson 01: Religious Experience:

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 2
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Two)
 - a. Saint Teresa: Religious Experiences
 - b. James: Religious Experience as the Root of Religion
 - c. Alston: Religious Experience as Perception of God
 - d. Proudfoot: Religious Experience as Interpretative Accounts
 - e. Martin: Critique of Religious Experience

Complete readings for Module 04 Lesson 01 by March 21 2008

Lesson 02: Miracles

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 9
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Ten)
 - a. Hume: The Evidence for Miracles is Weak
 - b. Swinburne: Miracles and Historical Evidence
 - c. Mackie: Miracles and Testimony

Complete readings for Module 04 Lesson 02 March 28 2008

MODULE 05: to be completed by April 11 2008

Lesson 01: The Problem of Evil

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 7
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Seven)
 - a. Augustine: Evil is Privation of Good
 - b. Hume: Evil Makes a Strong Case Against God's Existence
 - c. Mackie: Evil and Omnipotence
 - d. Plantinga: The Free Will Defense
 - e. Hick: Soul-Making Theodicy

Complete readings for Module 05 Lesson 01 by April 04 2008

Lesson 02: Science and Religion

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Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 12
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Twelve)
 - a. Gould: Two Separate Domains
 - b. Dawkins: Science Discredits Religion
 - c. Murphy: Theology and Scientific Methodology

Complete readings for Module 05 Lesson 02 by April 11 2008

2nd PAPER DUE April 11 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. State the problem of evil as forcefully as you can, and then respond to it.
4. Is there a relationship between science and religion? Compare either Gould's view with Murphy's; or Dawkins' view with Murphy's. Formulate your position.

MODULE 06: to be completed by April 25 2008

Lesson 01: Religious Language

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 11
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Nine)
 - a. Aquinas: The Doctrine of Analogy
 - b. Flew and Mitchell: The Falsification Debate
 - c. Tillich: Religious Language as Symbolic
 - d. Alston: Speaking Literally of God

Complete the readings for Module 06 Lesson 01 by April 18 2008

Lesson 12: Mind-Body Issues

Reading Assignment:

1. Hasker's *Metaphysics*: Chapter 3
2. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 10
3. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Eleven)
 - a. Price: The Soul survives and functions after death
 - b. Swinburne: The Soul Needs a Brain to Continue to Function
 - c. Badham: Problems with Accounts of Life after Death
 - d. Hick: Resurrection of the Person

Complete readings for Module 06 Lesson 02 by April 25 2008

MODULE 07: to be completed by May 09 2008

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Lesson 01: Religious Diversity

Reading Assignment

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 13
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Thirteen)
 - a. Griffiths: The Uniqueness of Religious Doctrines
 - b. Rahner: Religious Inclusivism
 - c. Hick: Religious Pluralism

Complete readings for Module 07 Lesson 01 by May 02 2008

Lesson 02: Religious Ethics

Reading Assignment

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 14
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Fourteen)
 - a. MacIntyre: Which God Ought We to Obey
 - b. Sartre: Ethics Without Religion
 - c. Aquinas: Ethics and Natural Law

Complete readings for Module 07 Lesson 02 by May 09 2008

3rd PAPER DUE May 09 2008

Assigned Paper Topics

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

1. Summarize Flew's critique of religious Language and Mitchell's response to Flew. Do you think Mitchell's response survives Flew's attacks?
2. 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?
3. 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.
4. Can we be ethical without God? Answer this question in light of Kai Nielson's view.

Course Requirements

1. You will be expected to read the material assigned for each of the fourteen lessons. A number of these readings are difficult to understand, and may require a "re-read" before you grasp the line of argument.
2. You will be expected to attend all class sessions. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. You will also be expected to participate in class discussions and debates.

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3. Three papers have been assigned, and all three will be graded. Each paper is to be no more than five pages in length, of regular font. As you write your paper pay attention to the following:
 - a. State your thesis upfront and clearly. That is, I must not be in doubt as to the position you are trying to defend.
 - b. Support your thesis with equal clarity. Be sure the reasons for your positions are clearly stated. If you reject a specific position, state clearly why you reject it.
 - c. Hand in your paper on time!!! An “A” quality paper submitted a day late will, at most, receive a B+ grade. Penalties will be waived only under “academic emergencies” such as serious illness, death of family member (God forbid!), funeral engagements for student pastors, and so on. If you suspect you will submit your paper late, please let me know well in advance.

Grading Procedure

1. Attendance and participation: 10%
2. Paper 1: 30%. Due March 14 2008 at the end of class.
3. Paper 2: 30%. Due April 11 2008 at the end of class.
4. Paper 3: 30%. Due May 09 2008 at the end of class.

Means of Communication:

Online (VIRTUAL Classroom) Communication Guidelines

The Virtual Classroom is built upon the open-source Moodle platform. By logging into <http://virtual.asburyseminary.edu> you will have access to this course and be able to collaborate with participant-colleagues and me throughout the course. The following are functions with which you should familiarize yourself:

1. The Course Information Center, in the center of your Moodle screen, contains many features to be used throughout the semester, including:
 - a. Course News and Announcements, where I will post items important for the entire class;
 - b) Syllabus, where a copy of the syllabus is provided;
 - c) To Professor, which is a way for you to post a message directly to me and we can discuss an issue privately;
 - d) Course Questions, which is a public forum where you can publicly post any questions you have regarding the course so others may see your message and respond. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the schedule, the assignments, or anything else that may be of interest to other participants and me you should post it to the Course Questions Forum;

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- e) Prayer Forum, which is a public forum where you can post prayer concerns and praises for all to see. This is a way for us to build community;
 - f) Open Forum, which is a public forum where you can post anything that is not course-related for all to see. Examples include someone getting married, an upcoming birthday, discussions on topics not course-related, etc. This is a way for us to build community.
2. Modules, which are located below the Course Information Center, will contain forums where e-group discussions will take place, documents or other files to download, and assignment links where you will post your assignments to me. Modules will be clearly labeled so you can follow along during the semester.
 3. Resources, a section located on the left side, provides links to items you will want to use often in the semester.

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