

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

PR 324
Spring 2009

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Skidmore College

An investigation of the fundamental paradoxes of religious belief. Questions to be considered will include the arguments for the existence of God, the problem of suffering and evil, the nature of mystical knowledge, and the rise of modern religious skepticism. We will explore religious skepticism, religious faith, religious knowledge, religious diversity, and religion and evolution. We will emphasize Western religions, especially Christianity, but will give attention to other religious traditions.

Texts:

1. Dewey, John, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University, 1934).
2. Flew, Antony, There Is A God: How the Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).
3. Freud, Sigmund, The Future of an Illusion, tr. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961).
4. Haight, John F., God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).
5. Harris, Sam, The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).
6. Hick, John H., Philosophy of Religion, Fourth Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).
7. Kierkegaard, Soren, Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de silentio, tr. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1985).
8. Rowe, William, & Wainwright, William (ed.), Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, Third Edition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973). [PRSR]
9. Smith, Huston, Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).
10. Tillich, Paul, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

RELIGIOUS SCEPTICISM

20: Introduction.

22: What is the Philosophy of Religion?--The Judaic-Christian Concept of God (Hick pp. 1-14); also:

1. Design (or Teleological) Argument (Hick pp. 23-26; 155-172). P#1
2. First Cause & Cosmological Argument (Hick pp. 20-23);

- optional: PRSR 126-132, 137-140. P#2
3. Moral Argument (Hick 28-29);
optional: PRSR 194-196. P#3
4. Ontological Argument (PRSR 95-97; Hick pp. 15-20);
optional: PRSR 97-108. P#4
- 27: Freud, The Future of an Illusion (all: pp. 5-71)); P#5
Arguments against the Existence of God (Hick, Ch 3). P#6
- 29: Dewey, A Common Faith (all: Ch I-III). P#7
- 3: The Problem of Evil (Hick Ch 4).
- 5: The 'Soul-Making' Theodicy (PRSR 251-259); P#8
reread Hick, pp. 39-48;
Introduction to Section III (PRSR pp. 210-215);
Hume and Dostoyevsky on the Problem of Evil (PRSR 224-241);
Problem of Evil & Varieties of Atheism (PRSR 242-247, 249-251)
- 10: Harris, The End of Faith, Reason in Exile (Ch. 1, pp. 11-49);
Harris, The End of Faith, Epilogue (pp. 223-227);
Harris, The End of Faith, After word (pp. 229-237); P#9
Harris, The End of Faith, The Nature of Belief (Ch. 2, pp. 50-79)
- 12: The Problem of Verification (Hick Ch 8); P#10
Flew, My Denial of the Divine (Ch. 1-3) & A Pilgrimage of
Reason (Ch. 4).
- 17: Flew, My Discovery of the Divine (Ch. 5-10).

RELIGIOUS FAITH

- 19: Pascal, Clifford, James on Faith (PRSR 444-446, 456-472); P#11
Revelation and Faith (Hick pp. 56-62 & 64-67 & 80-81
only);
Hume & Tillich on Miracles (PRSR 492-499, 433-435, 507-509).
- 24: Introduction to Section V (PRSR pp 358-359 on Alston & 430-435
Rational Belief without Proof (Hick Ch 6).
- 26: Immortality & Resurrection (PRSR 540-545; Hick Ch 10).
- 3: Karma & Reincarnation (Hick Ch 11).
- 5: Essay #1 due at start of class; discuss topic in class.
- 10 Spring
- 12 break
- 17: Dynamics of Faith (Tillich Ch I-II, V-VI);
Tillich's Conception of Faith (Hick, pp. 62-64 only).
- 19: Religious Language (Tillich Ch III; Hick Ch 7;
handouts).

- 24: God, Abraham, Isaac (Genesis handout; Kierkegaard 41-95). P#1
26: God, Abraham, Isaac (Kierkegaard 96-147). P#2

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

- 31: Religious Diversity (Hick Ch 9); P#3
The Pluralistic Hypothesis (PRSR 313-327); P#4
A Religious Theory of Religion (PRSR 327-352). P#5

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

- 2: Smith, Forgotten Truth (Ch. 1-5). P#6

7: Stace, Zaehner, Smart (background for Katz in PRSR
pp.356-383)
Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" (handout). P#7
9: Forman, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity,
and the Perennial Psychology" (handout).
P#8

RELIGION AND EVOLUTION

- 14: Haight, God After Darwin (Ch. 1-4). P#9
16: Haight, God After Darwin (Ch. 5-7). P#10

21: Haight, God After Darwin (Ch. 8-10 & Conclusion). P#11
23: Essay #2 due; discuss topics in class.

28: Concluding reflections.

Course Requirements:

1. **Participation** in class discussion is essential to your learning in this course, and I encourage you to participate in discussions actively.
- a. **ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED AT EVERY CLASS.** Missing even one class will severely damage this component of your grade. The following guidelines express my expectations about attendance and participation:

A or A- = attend all classes and make useful contributions
To discussion in nearly every class.
B+ or B = attend all classes and make regular
contributions.
B- = attend all classes but seldom speak.
C or D or F = one or more absences no matter how much you
talk.

Please don't arrive in class late. Please do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely necessary. (Leaving class is rude and distracts me and other students. It also suggests a lack of concentration or lack of interest on your part.) Please be sure that your cell phone is turned off.

Your understanding of class discussions, and the quality of class discussion itself, depends on how well you have prepared the reading assignments, so read the assignments carefully. Readings about philosophy and religion are difficult, so I strongly recommend underlining or highlighting passages and outlining or taking notes on the reading. Often you will need to read the assignment, or part of it, more than once. Read actively, not passively, by raising questions and criticisms about the readings.

Note that this course earns four, not three, credits. This means that this course involves considerable more work than a three credit course. Compared to a three credit course, each of our classes will meet an extra 30 minutes longer (1 hour 50 minutes instead of 1 hour 20 minutes). The Skidmore College guideline is that students should study two hours outside of class for every hour of class time. Thus I expect you to spend about 3 1/2 hours preparing for each class, and I have assigned work based on that expectation. I suggest that you work out a study schedule that sets aside a regular 3 1/2 hour period of time to prepare for each class.

b. **Study Guides** (brief written assignments on the readings) will be due regularly, usually once each week. These will be graded pass/fail. Late Study Guides will not be accepted--have them finished and ready to turn in at the beginning of class.

c. **Provocations:** Twice during the semester I will ask you to pair up with someone else in class, preferably with someone you don't know. After reading the assignment, you must meet with your partner before class meets and think of at least one point about the reading which you will bring up in class to 'provoke' discussion. The point might be a criticism that sparks a controversy, or you could simply raise a question or offer a comment or highlight an important subtle point. Offer a point that goes beyond what the casual reader would normally get from the reading. Make connections to other readings from our course, if possible. Class periods with Provocations are marked P#.

The combination of the above three requirements will count 20% of your final course grade.

2. **Two essays** (80%): Two essays (due on March 5 and April 23) will

each count 40% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed instructions for each essay later. Each essay must be typed (double-spaced) and about 8-10 pages long.

There is no final exam for this course.

I would be delighted to talk with you outside of class. Make an appointment to see me or drop by during my office hours.

Office hours: Monday & Wednesday: 4:00- 5:00
Tuesday & Thursday: 2:00- 3:00
Friday: 11:00-12:00
(other times by appointment)

Office: Ladd 217 Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu
Office phone: 580-5407 (Please don't call me at home.)