1-1-2003

PH 501 Philosophy of Christian Religion

George Ille

Follow this and additional works at: http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi

Recommended Citation
http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi/2127

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the eCommons at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. For more information, please contact thad.horner@asburyseminary.edu.
Introduction

Welcome to the Philosophy class! I am delighted you have decided to register for this course. I hope it will be a challenging and thought provoking experience as we try to look together at reality in general, Christianity in particular from a ‘philosophical’ standpoint. Now, as I hope will become apparent, looking at things ‘philosophically’ is not that different from just trying to reflect a bit deeper upon things and trying to situate such reflections within a tradition of thought, that is to say, realizing that other people, before us, thought about such, or similar problems.

There is an old saying that Philosophy cannot and should not be edifying. What is often inferred from such a claim is that being as it is, only concerned with cold reasoning and detached and abstract descriptions, Philosophy is necessarily tiring and boring. As I hope you will soon realize, not so with true Philosophy! I still have a vivid recollection of the moment when, as a young student, living in a Communist totalitarian regime, I acquired (for the first time in my life) a little Christian philosophy book. It was that little booklet that effectively opened my eyes to the rich and profound explanatory power of the Christian view of reality. As an enquiring student trying to resist the Marxist propaganda, I really needed a sound and well constructed case for Christianity. Well, I got that, and much more... It was a somewhat surprising experience of freedom and joy... Suddenly the ‘facts’ about the world, what one could ‘scientifically’ claim about reality appeared not only intelligible but also profoundly meaningful!

I shall only add one more thing at this point. I promise you excellent company in your attempt of climbing the heights of critical reason, argumentation and logic, and you are certainly justified in your expectation of becoming more confident and ‘better situated’ at the end of our journey together. Nonetheless, we should not forget that there is a sense in which the Christian Philosopher remains fragile as he or she attempts to reconcile philo-sophia (love of wisdom) with Paul’s reminder that it is in Christ that we witness ‘the manifold wisdom of God’. From this perspective, love of wisdom entails an unwavering
exercise of uncovering a rationality that also proclaims the ‘folly of the Cross’, that requires divestment of self and a moment of decided ‘No’ to the principles and standards of the world in which we live... A Reason that comes against our consumerist society and its promise of well-being and success. It is the never-ending pursuit of this Reason that remains the paramount concern of the Philosophy of Christian Religion.

**Learning Goals**

‘Formally’, upon completion of this course the student will be expected to use philosophical argumentation, logic and critical thinking. More specifically, he or she will be expected to:

1. Understand and develop the ability to use central philosophical categories
2. Be able to produce different types of arguments (inductive; deductive, cumulative)
3. Be able to identify the scope and the limits of an argument
4. Be able to formulate and test an hypothesis
5. Be able to assess and critique various philosophical positions

As ‘good stewards of the manifold grace of God’ we all need to be able ‘to give a reason of the hope that is in us’. Indeed, when properly used, Philosophy, as Luther noted, may well function as the ‘hand-maiden’ of Theology. Unfortunately however, philosophy is not a neutral ‘tool’ whose only raison d’etre is to enable us some kind of ‘direct access’ to reality. Even as it functions as ‘method’, more often than not, philosophy implicitly carries with it its own agenda. That is why, a second major goal of this course is learning to evaluate and critique not only the explicit content of a particular philosophy but also its implicit assumptions, by looking at its main concerns and its historical expression. We will especially focus on three major topics: the problem of evil, the problem of freedom and the problem of religious language.

Accordingly, our more specific learning goals here are as follows:

1. To gain initiation in the Philosophical tradition of the West (its history and concerns) and in Philosophy of Religion in particular (its object and specificity).
2. To examine the ‘historical’ nature of philosophical interpretation and to give an account of the main features of modernity/post-modernity.
3. To analyze and critique the alleged autonomy of Philosophy and to develop an account of the problematic of reason and the nature of validation and criteria in general (epistemology and meta-epistemology).
4. To examine the problematic of evil and to develop an adequate response to the problems it poses.
5. To analyze and critique competing accounts of human freedom and to be able to produce and defend our own account.
6. To offer an adequate account of language in general, religious language in particular from a Christian perspective.
7. To get a better understanding of the relationship between Philosophy and Theology, Faith and Reason.

Course Description
Module 1
February 15, 2003

Introduction

The ‘Object’ of Philosophy: Method, Truth, Meaning.
Philosophical categories; Philosophical argumentation; The nature of explanation; Foundation; Starting point and horizon of expectation; The ongoing dialectic of ‘form’ and ‘content’, ontology and epistemology; The specificity of Philosophy of Religion;

Required reading
Peterson (Reason and Religious Belief) 7-17;
Hasker (Metaphysics) 13-28;
Evans, (Philosophy of Religion) 11-30;

Additional bibliography
Kolakowsky, L, Religion: If There Is No God: On God, the Devil, Sin, and Other Worries of the So-Called Philosophy of Religion; St Augustine Press, 2001.

Reflection questions:
1) Is Philosophy a science? Discuss
2) Insofar as philosophical discourse retains its critical dimension, it remains unaffected by one’s religious commitments. Discuss.
Module 2
March 1

Epistemology. The Problematic of Reason and the Nature of Knowledge

The Nature of Validation; Evidentialism
Foundationalism; Objectivism; Realism
Reformed Epistemology; Plantinga, Wolterstorff, Alston
Post-Modernity and the ‘Death of Metaphysics’
Post-Enlightenment and ‘Post-Critical Reason’.

Required reading
Peterson (Reason and Religious Belief) 146-165;
Wolfe, D (Epistemology) 19-66
Pannenberg, W. (Metaphysics and the Idea of God) 3-21

Additional Bibliography
Plantinga, A. & Wolterstorff, N., *Faith and Rationality*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983 Introduction; Chapter 1

Reflection Questions: TBA
Module 3
March 15

The Problem of Freedom;
Introduction, Legitimacy, Definition
Libertarianism vs. determinism (logical, scientific, theological)
Is a synthesis possible? Philosophical and Theological problems;
Validating freedom. Freedom, responsibility and authentic living; (Freedom between ontology and epistemology);

Required reading
Hasker (Metaphysics) 29-55;

Additional Bibliography
Chapter 13
Chapter 8
(Physics and Freedom)
Introduction
Chapter 4
Carson, D., Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility, Grand Rapids: Baker
Book House, 1994 Chapter 13
Kenny, A., Free Will and Responsibility, London: Routledge, Keegan & Paul,
1979. Chapter 2; 9

Reflection Questions: TBA

Module 4
April 5

The Problem of Evil;
Stating the problem;
Theodicy; The free will defense; Irenaeus, Plantinga
Alternative answers (Swinburne; C.S. Lewis);
Biblical theodicy; The problem of Hell; 
The limitations of theodicy; Knowledge and Praxis; Evil between justification and solution; (Forsyth, Surin, Moltmann, Ricoeur);

Required reading
Peterson (Reason and Religious Belief) 116-135; 
Evans, (Philosophy of Religion) 130-137; 
Plantinga, Alvin (God, Freedom and Evil) 7-58; 
Paul Ricoeur, Evil, a Challenge to Theology and Philosophy in Figuring the Sacred, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. 249-261

Additional Bibliography
Kolakowsky, L, Religion: If There Is No God: On God, the Devil, Sin, and Other Worries of the So-Called Philosophy of Religion; St Augustine Press, 2001. 
Vardy, P., The Puzzle of Evil, ME Sharpe, 1997 

Reflection Questions: TBA

Module 5
April 26

The Problem of Language; 
The Relationship between Faith and Reason;

Language and reality; Language and truth; Analogy; Metaphor 
Classical distinction; Theory of speech-acts; 
How can our language of God be truthful? 
Faith and Reason; History, present discussions; 
Knowledge as foundation? Knowledge and praxis. 
Conclusions

Peterson (Reason and Religious Belief) 166-189; 
Plantinga, A. & Wolterstorff, N., (Faith and Rationality) 1-15;
Bibliography


Requirements and expectations

The student will complete the required reading prior to class session and will produce brief answers to the corresponding questions (no more than 300 words for each answer).

During the course, three additional essay questions/topics will be posted. The student is expected to treat ONE topic or answer ONE question only (at his or her choosing). The length of the essay will not exceed 2,000 words.

The reading assignments and the short essays will make 40% of the final grade while the final essay will make the rest of the 60%.

The due date for the final essay is May 15.

For a grade of ‘A’, at the long essay, apart from soundness of argument and clarity of expression, the student will be expected to display a broader familiarity with the subject in question (i.e. that would go beyond the required reading) and a certain degree of interaction (that is, assessment/critique of particular issues) with at least 3 titles from the additional bibliography.