

DVPR 31400:
Introduction to Philosophy of Religion
Winter Term, 2005
Swift Hall 400
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:50

Instructor: Dan Arnold
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Objectives of the Course:

This course is meant to introduce students to some of the main figures, topics, and trajectories of thought in modern and contemporary “philosophy of religion” – which requires, among other things, that we consider just what that might be. The course is, moreover, intended to do so particularly in such a way as to help facilitate preparations for doctoral qualifying exams in Philosophy of Religion.

These tasks are, it seems to me, most usefully thought of in terms of joining a particular conversation – which requires learning what kinds of things people who do “philosophy of religion” have talked about, what have been thought to count as good answers to the kinds of questions typically asked, and who is talking to whom. It is, then, good to think of each of the readings on this syllabus as a point of access to broader conversations.

Not only can this small selection of philosophical texts thus be understood to open up a much wider field, but approaching the material this way can facilitate the appreciation that what we’re up to here is not so much learning the philosophy of, say, Kant and Wittgenstein (for we could spend all year just beginning to comprehend the thought of any one of these thinkers), as we are developing *tools*. The point, then, is not so much to learn what Kant says about religion, as it is to learn how to read books like his *philosophically*. This means learning to recognize just what issues are at stake (and for whom); what would count as good arguments for or against the various positions; and what all might be *entailed* by (though not yet explicitly said either for or against) the positions considered. Another way to say the latter is to say that we can always ask *what else must be true* in order for any particular claim to be possibly true – which means considering (something addressed by many of these thinkers) just what something’s being “true” could mean, and how (or whether) we could know that.

Required Readings:

The following titles are available at the Seminary Coop Bookstore, and on reserve at Regenstein Library:

- **David Hume**, *Principal Writings on Religion, including Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion* (ed. J. C. A. Gaskin).
- **Immanuel Kant**, *Religion and Rational Theology* (trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni)
- **John Dewey**, *A Common Faith*

- **Ludwig Wittgenstein**, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*
- **D. Z. Phillips**, *Philosophy's Cool Place*
- **Charles Hartshorne**, *The Divine Relativity*
- **William Alston**, *Perceiving God*
- **Pamela Sue Anderson**, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*
- **Nancy Frankenberry**, ed., *Radical Interpretation in Religion*

Course Requirements:

In addition to regular attendance and spirited participation in discussion, two written exercises will be assigned. The first will be a 5-10-page paper, due at the beginning of the sixth week; the second will be a 10-15-page paper, due during the exam week.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week 1 (Tue., 1/4; Thur., 1/6)

Course introduction: What do we mean by “philosophy of religion”? **Reading:** Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (e-reserve); Merold Westphal, “The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion” (e-reserve); Paul Griffiths, “Comparative Philosophy of Religion” (e-reserve).

Week 2 (Tue., 1/11; Thur., 1/13)

David Hume’s challenge. **Readings:** 1), Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (Hume, pp.134-193); 2), Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hume, pp.29-130).

Week 3 (Tue., 1/18; Thur., 1/20)

Kant: Awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Hume. **Reading:** Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (in *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp.57-215).

Week 4 (Tue., 1/25; Thur., 1/27)

John Dewey and American pragmatism. **Reading:** Dewey, *A Common Faith*.

Week 5 (Tue., 2/1; Thur., 2/3)

“I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view” – Ludwig Wittgenstein. **Reading:** Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, pp.53-72; D. Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*.

Week 6 (Tue., 2/8; Thur., 2/10)

Process philosophy and transcendental arguments: **Reading:** Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*; Jean-luc Marion, “Is the Argument Ontological? The Anselmian Proof and the Two Demonstrations of the Existence of God in the *Meditations*” (e-reserve).

Week 7 (Tue., 2/15; Thur., 2/17)

Reformed epistemology and the category of “religious experience.” **Reading:** William Alston, *Perceiving God*.

Week 8 (Tue., 2/22; Thur., 2/24)

What might a feminist philosophy of religion look like? **Reading:** Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*.

Week 9 (Tue., 3/1; Thur., 3/3)

Truth, justification, and meaning: Some contemporary thinking on the differences between these (and the difference it makes). **Reading:** Nancy Frankenberry, ed., *Radical Interpretation in Religion*.

Week 10 (Tue., 3/8; Thur., 3/10 is optional)

Concluding reflections: Some implications and applications of all this. **Reading:** Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues” (e-reserve); Stanley Fish, “Why We Can’t All Just Get Along,” “Faith Before Reason” (e-reserve)