

KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
of
The City University of New York

Common COURSE SYLLABUS

1. Course Number and Title:

Philosophy 77: Philosophy of Religion

2. Group and Area:

Group 2; Philosophy

3. Bulletin Description of Course:

Does religion need God? How have human beings experienced the divine in different cultures and historical epochs? Is it possible to choose between rival interpretations of religious experience? Can one be both religious and rational? This course examines such questions from a philosophical perspective. Focus is on a critical comparative analysis of the varying concepts of divinity found in the different religious traditions of the world. Readings are from a variety of religious and philosophical sources.

4. Number of Weekly Class Hours:

Three (3) weekly class hours.

5. Number of credits:

Three (3) credits.

6. Pre or Co-requisites, if any; Basic or Advanced:

None; Basic Course

7. Rationale for course:

This course introduces students to major metaphysical and epistemological issues in philosophy by comparing and contrasting the philosophical and religious approaches to the fundamental questions of human existence. Philosophical analysis of religious concepts and critical examination of various theories of religion (philosophical, sociological, and psychological) is stressed. Since students are likely to have had some previous exposure to religion in their lives, it is believed that the comparative approach facilitates the understanding and appreciation of philosophical methods and problems.

In addition, as an entry-level offering, this course provides students with a general understanding of various perspectives on the human condition and acquaints them with those core concepts, theories, and facts essential to academic and cultural literacy. Through emphasis on comparative conceptual analysis, reading and interpreting texts (primary and secondary sources), and writing clearly and effectively for an audience, the course develops and enhances students' skills in the areas of critical thinking, reading comprehension, and both oral and written communication.

8. Necessitated Course Withdrawals:

n/a

9. Remedial Developmental or Compensatory:

n/a

10. Ratio of Credits to Contact Hours (where credit exceeds contact hours):

n/a

11. Field Work Component; Internship or Independent Study:

n/a

12. Proposed Text Book:

Any text or collection of texts that emphasize primary as well as secondary sources.

Recommended:

Louis Pojman. *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*. 4th ed. Wadsworth, 2002.

Michael Peterson, et. al., eds. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 2nd ed. Oxford, 2001.

John Hick. *Philosophy of Religion*. 4th ed. Prentice-Hall, 1989.

Ninian Smart. *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. 5th ed. Prentice-Hall, 1996.

Irving M. Zeitlin. *The Religious Experience: Classical Philosophical and Social Theories*. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004.

Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth*. Anchor, 1991.

13. Required Course for Majors and/or Area of Concentration:

n/a

14. If open only to selected students (specify):

Open to all students.

15. Learning Goals:

The purpose of this course is to:

1. To expose students to the basic concepts, questions, and problems of the philosophy of religion, including the traditional arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between faith and reason, the problem of religious knowledge, the question of religious pluralism, the nature of religious experience, the problem of death and immortality
2. To foster skills needed to read and critically interpret philosophical texts
3. To foster skills needed to analyze arguments
4. To foster skills needed to write a philosophical essay or paper
5. To enable students to locate and/or develop their own position in relation to important philosophical issues
6. To acquaint students with a wide variety of religious traditions, including and especially those outside of their own tradition or belief system

16. Learning Outcomes:

As a result of taking this course, students will learn or be able to do the following:

1. Read and comprehend primary and secondary source texts
2. Identify and understand key vocabulary terms
3. Identify and analyze arguments
4. Explain and defend their positions on philosophical issues
5. Write clearly, critically, and effectively

17. Assessment:

Strategies (activities, tools, instruments of measurement) to be used in demonstrating that students' learning has been achieved will include:

1. Quizzes
2. Classroom discussion
3. In-class (“low-stakes”) writing assignments
4. Group discussions
5. Group presentations/projects
6. Take-home writing assignments
7. Examinations (essay and objective/factual)
8. Short and/or term papers
9. On-line and web-enhanced exercises and assignments

18. Evaluation:

Based on measurements (17), the following quantitative and qualitative evidence will provide evidence that students have achieved their learning outcomes:

1. 75% passing grades on quizzes
2. Discussions and writing assignments reflect student understanding of texts and facility in explaining and defending their position
3. Writing assignments reflect ability to think and write clearly, critically, and effectively
4. Examinations demonstrate knowledge of basic concepts and ability to analyze arguments

19. Topical Course Outline:

(Instructors may vary the content and organization of their sections.)

I. Introduction: What is the philosophy of religion?

- A. Western philosophy as the critical evaluation of the claims of religion
- B. Eastern (and other non-Western) philosophy as sympathetic interpretation of religious images
- C. Basic Concepts and Terms

II. The roots of religion

- A. Death and dreams as universal religious experiences
- B. The tribal shaman: the first mystagogue
- C. The Mother Goddess: Nature as the first deity

III. Greek polytheism and its critics

- A. Mythos: polytheism and mystery cults
- B. Logos: Socrates, Plato, and the birth of a critical philosophy of religion

IV: Western monotheism and its critics

- A. Biblical Gods: Judaism, Christianity, Islam
- B. Against belief: atheism and antitheism
- C. The mystical way
- D. Problems of religious language

V. Eastern approaches

- A. The ways of India
 1. The idea of yoga
 2. Brahmanism
 3. Early Buddhism
- B. China and the Far East: Taoism and later Buddhism

- VI. New approaches to religion
A. Depth and transpersonal psychology
B. Comparative religion
C. Parapsychology and psychical research
D. Postmodern philosophy

20. Selected Bibliography:

St. Augustine, Confessions. Translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin, 1961.

Ayer, A.J. Philosophy in the Twentieth Century. New York: Vintage, 1984.

The Bhagavad Gita. Translated by Juan Mascaro. New York: Penguin, 1962.

Broad, C. D. Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research. New York: Humanities Press, 1969.

Cahn, Steven M., ed. Philosophy of Religion. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Campbell, Joseph. The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology. New York: Penguin, 1976.

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Eliade, Mircea. The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History. Translated by W.R. Trask. Bollingen Series 46. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. Theories of Primitive Religion. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. The Essence of Christianity. Translated by George Eliot. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989.

Flew, Antony. God: A Critical Inquiry. 2d ed. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court., 1984.

Flew, Antony, and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. New Essays in Philosophical Theology. New York: Macmillan, 1964.

Freud, Sigmund. The Future of an Illusion. Translated and edited by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961.

Guthrie, W.K.C. *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle*. New York: HarperCollins, 1990.

Hegel, G.W.F. Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Edited by Peter Hodgson. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

- Hesiod, Theogony and Works and Days. Translated by M.L. West. New York: Oxford, 1988.
- Hick, John. Death and Eternal Life. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
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- Hyman, Arthur, and James J. Walsh, eds. Philosophy in the Middle Ages. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1974.
- James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: Modern Library, 1936.
- Jung, C.G. Man and His Symbols. New York: Dell, 1968.
- Kant, Immanuel. Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. Revised translation by Lewis White Beck. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976.
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- Keightley, Alan. Wittgenstein, Grammar and God. London: Epworth Press, 1976.
- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching. Translated by D.C. Lau. New York: Penguin, 1963.
- Luther, Martin. Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings. Edited by John Dillenberger. Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1961.
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- Maslow, Abraham. The Farther Reaches of Human Nature. New York: Penguin, 1971.
- Mohanty, Jitendra Nath. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.
- Nagel, Thomas. Mortal Questions. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
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University Press, 1925.

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Pascal, Blaise. Pensées. Translated by A.J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin, 1966.

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Sharpe, Eric J. Comparative Religion: A History. Lasalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986.

Westphal, Merold. God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, Midland Book, 1987.

Zimmer, Heinrich. Philosophies of India. Edited by Joseph Campbell. Bollingen Series 26. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

