ENHANCED SYLLABUS FOR PHILOSOPHY 402

The Problem of God
Spring 2008

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REQUIRED TEXTS
Leo Tolstoy. The Death of Ivan Ilyich.
Sigmund Freud. The Future of an Illusion.
Jerome Miller. The Way of Suffering.
Edmund Burke. An Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.

Xeroxed material distributed in class.

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS
I. God as a Matter of the Heart (first week; reading: handouts, Miller)
   1. The heart as the core of the person.
   2. Philosophy as an exploration of our deepest realizations.

II. Control as the Governing Principle of Everydayness; Leisure and the Suspension of Control
    (first week; reading: Miller)
    1. Practicality and the will to control.
    2. The primary purpose of techniques in modern life.
    3. Being cool; adult personality and the will to control.
    4. Leisure as letting-be.
    5. The possibility of rapport.

III. The Experience of Crisis in Human Life (second week; reading: Miller, Tolstoy)
    1. Crisis as the loss of control.
    2. Crisis as a breakthrough to the ultimate realities.

IV. The Therapeutic Diagnosis of Religious Belief (third week; reading: Freud)
    1. The therapeutic motive for religious belief: the avoidance of death.
    2. The therapeutic motive of religious belief: God as a father-figure.
    3. The inauthenticity of therapeutic belief.
    4. The encounter with death as the alternative to therapeutic religion.
    5. The necessity of atheism.

V. Common-sense, Science, and Ultimate Realizations. (fourth week; reading: Freud)
   1. The senses and common-sense.
   2. Scientific explanations.
3. The limits of scientific explanation.

VI. The Encounter with Nothingness and the Discovery of God (fifth and sixth weeks; reading: Tolstoy, Miller, Burke)
   1. The encounter with death as an experience of nothingness.
   2. Responses to Nothingness: anger, flight, despair, surrender.
   3. The acknowledgment of one's own nothingness and the discovery of God as Absolute Be-ing.
   4. The difference between God and beings.

VII. The Relationship between God and Creatures. (seventh and eighth week; reading: Aquinas, Burrell)
   1. Emanation theory.
   2. Creation theory.

VIII. The Nature of God (eighth, ninth, and tenth weeks; reading: Aquinas, Burrell)
   1. The way of remotion and analogical predication.
   2. God is unlike creatures; creatures are like God.
   3. Rules governing speech about God.
   5. Is God personal?
   6. Is God intelligent and rational?
   7. Is God loving?

IX. The Three Monotheistic Traditions (eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth weeks; Burrell)
   1. Freedom and creation in the Jewish tradition.
   2. Freedom and creation in the Islamic tradition.
   3. The relationship between the divine and human actor.
   4. Points of convergence, points of divergence in the three traditions.
   5. The concept of sin and redemption in the Western tradition.

X. God and the Possibility of Revelation (fourteenth week; Aquinas, Burrell)
   1. Human openness to the possibility of revelation.
   1.1. God and the Question of Evil
       1. Is God controlling?
       2. Can we know how God responds to evil?
       3. The limits of philosophy and the possibility of revelation.

XI. Exam Week Meeting (15th week)
   Submission of final papers.

REQUIREMENTS

This class, like all classes in the Philosophy Department, is a four-credit enhanced course. The four-credit version of this course will involve more class-time, as well as more extensive reading and writing, than the three-credit version of it offered previously. You should consider these factors when considering your course schedule for this semester. The Philosophy Department believes that students will receive a better philosophical education by taking fewer courses each semester and focusing more intensively on each class.

I. Preparatory papers and Initiation of Class Discussion (20% of grade)

You will write four "preparatory papers." Each should be at least two pages, and you will be writing one of these one before each of the major papers (which are discussed
below). In these preparatory papers you will be asked to grapple with the complexities of the text and the issue which we are discussing. In each class session, a few students will be asked to initiate class discussion by reading the “preparatory paper” they have written. These papers will be preparatory in two senses. They will help you to prepare for class, and they will help you prepare for writing your major papers. Each of these papers will count for 5% of your final grade. A group of 5 to 8 students will be assigned to write preparatory papers for every class session.

II. Major Papers (70% of grade).

There will be three major papers during the course of the semester, each of which should be five pages, and each of which will count for 15% of the final grade.) These papers will require you to develop your own thoughtful reflections on very specific issues being discussed in the readings and in class. Topics will be assigned and will always require a careful reading and re-reading of the relevant texts. Estimated due dates are: February 18, March 20 and April 16

Each student is expected to write a seven to ten page paper at the end of course. The purpose of this major paper is to give you an opportunity to synthesize the insights you have come to throughout the course. This will count for 25% of final grade. The paper will be due on the day and at the time that the final exam is scheduled.

III. Attendance and Participation (10% of grade).

You are expected to attend class regularly and at least occasionally participate. All students will be asked to initiate class discussion two or three times during the semester. 3 or fewer absences is considered "excellent." 7 or more absences is considered "poor." In the event that the results of your paper grades are inconclusive, your attendance and participation record will raise or lower your final grade.

Class will be cancelled once during the week prior to the due-date for the three major papers so that you can focus more intently on writing them.

Grading Criteria for reflections and papers:

A: The paper involves a creative exploration of the issues and exceptional insight into their complexity; it addresses issues not raised in class; it carefully explores the ideas it presents; it typically includes a careful consideration of the assigned readings; it is adventuresome, and faithful to the path of inquiry on which it ventures. Its arguments are well-developed and its conclusions justified.

B: The paper focuses on critically important issues and it intelligently explains conflicting theories regarding these issues; it shows evidence of careful reading of texts; it demonstrates some understanding of the philosophical ramifications of the ideas and texts under consideration, and some effort to explore aspects of issues not directly addressed in class.

C: The paper shows a basic understanding of ideas presented in class and in the readings; it accurately re-presents what has been presented.

D: The paper shows a rudimentary but flawed understanding of ideas that have been presented; it contains minimal insight into texts and issues but makes no serious effort to grapple with either.

F: The paper demonstrates a failure to understand basic ideas; it does not express coherent insights and does not address pivotal issues.
WAC Statement:
This course complies with the University's "Writing Across the Curriculum" policy. All written work will be evaluated both on its content and the quality of writing.

HONOR PLEDGE:
Signing an Honor Pledge is a condition for membership in this learning community. You must return the signed Pledge at the beginning of the second class period to remain enrolled in the course.