

PHIL 402 - The Problem of God
Syllabus
Fall 2005

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REQUIRED TEXTS

Tolstoy. *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.
Freud. *The Future of an Illusion*.
Miller. *The Way of Suffering*.
Burke. *An Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*.
Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles, Vol. I*.
Pieper. *The Silence of St. Thomas*.
Xeroxed material distributed in class.

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

- I. God as a Matter of the Heart (one week; reading: handouts, Miller)
1. The heart as the core of the person.
 2. Philosophy as an exploration of our deepest realizations.
 3. The ultimate human experiences: love and death.
- II. Control as the Governing Principle of Everydayness; Leisure and the Suspension of Control (one 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 (one 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 (two weeks; 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. (one 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 (three 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. (one week; reading: Aquinas, Pieper)

1. Emanation theory.
2. Creation theory.

VIII. The Nature of God (three weeks; reading: Aquinas, Pieper)

1. The way of remotion and analogical predication.
2. God is unlike creatures; creatures are like God..
3. Rules governing speech about God.
4. Ontological predicates: Being, One, Eternal.
5. Is God personal?
6. Is God intelligent and rational?
7. Is God loving?

IX. God and the Possibility of Revelation (one week; reading: Aquinas)

1. Human openness to the possibility of revelation. 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.

REQUIREMENTS

I. Issue papers (60% of grade).

There will be approximately 6 papers, each 3 to 4 pages in length, due during the course of the semester--approximately one every two weeks. 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. However, you may, with my permission, write a paper on issues which have arisen in class or the readings, instead of writing on the assigned topics. *All papers must* engage the assigned texts.

Each of these papers will count for 10% of grade. *If a paper is submitted after it is due, the grade will be lowered. A paper will not be accepted at all if it is handed in more than a week after it is due.*

II. Synthesis Paper (30% of grade).

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 30% of final grade.

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

You are expected to attend class regularly and at least occasionally participate. Three or fewer absences is considered "excellent." Seven or more absences is considered Apoor.@ In the event that the results of your paper grades are inconclusive, your attendance and participation record will raise or lower your final grade.

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.