PHST 5415 DOES GOD EXIST?

Anselm Ramelow, O.P.
Fall 2010
TH 12:40-3:30pm
MUDD: 204
3 units
[20 max enrollment; Auditors excluded]

Office Hours:
Monday, 1-3 p.m., or by appointment; I can be reached under (415) 567 7824 (St. Dominic’s parish, ask for Fr. Anselm) or aramelow@dspt.edu.
I am also generally available after class.

Course description:
More recently a kind of “evangelical new atheism” has gained momentum and wishes to present a challenge to all those who believe in God or have religion. In response, the case has been made that this atheism is its own kind of religion. In this seminar, however, we do not want to take on the current polemics (although we will not avoid them either), but rather take it as an occasion to revisit the rational resources that are available to people of faith. We will study arguments for and against the existence of God in their historical development and explore their argumentative force.

The format of the class is a seminar; attendance and participation in the discussion is therefore important.

As an outcome, the student will have gained an understanding of the various types of proofs for the existence of God, their historical context and the status of such proofs in general. The student will be able to defend or articulate critically various arguments orally as well as in research and writing.

The student will demonstrate this knowledge through
a) Class participation and contribution to the discussions.
b) Taking turns in preparing texts that are to be discussed in class.
c) a 15-20pp research paper (75%)

Students will take turns in the class preparation: this preparation should articulate the argument of the text in a brief and concise manner, so as to give the participants a starting point for discussion. It should make the text’s logic as clear as possible and might offer some reflection questions for discussion. It is always helpful to use handouts.

paper guidelines:
The content of the paper is subject to approval. I would expect something like the following:
a) choose one proof
b) explain the argument and its context (historical and textual)
c) make an argument for or against it
   o for it: how would you defend it/explain it/make it intelligible to a
     contemporary uneducated audience (e.g. Richard Dawkins)?
   o against it: your arguments, but also other’s objections

Or:
   a) take an atheist objection
   b) try to answer it by using other philosophers/secondary sources

For this purpose, I ask you to give me a paper proposal by TH 11/4. This proposal should consist of a short paragraph, describing the topic of your choice, and a bibliography. The bibliography is most important. Please make your bibliography as specific as possible. Do not quote general handbooks or the textbooks of the class. As one possible research tool I recommend as a starting point the “philosopher’s index” that is available on the GTU library website. The deadline for the paper is TH 12/16. Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance and participation will impact the grade.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Required
  - Reader
    o available soon at Vick Copy shop (1879 Euclid, corner of Hearst + Euclid)
  - Michael Palmer: The Question of God: An Introduction and Sourcebook
    o Paperback: 384 pages
    o price: $41.95
    o Publisher: Routledge (July 6, 2001)
      (Palmer is an atheist, but this appears to be the most substantial selection of
       primary texts, and the introductions are comparatively fair)

  - Richard Swinburne: Is there a God
    o Paperback: 144 pages
    o price: 13.45 $  
    o Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA; rev. edition (February 1, 2010)
      (this is the easy version of Swinburne’s “The Existence of God”,
       which you also might want to consult)

Recommended:
  - for a contemporary theist:
    o Alvin Plantinga: God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational
  - for Aquinas:
    o John F. Wippel: The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas

- for an atheist analysis:

For additional **background information** you might consult:
  *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards
  (New York: Macmillan [1967])

And on the **internet**:
  *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*  
  *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

**CLASS SCHEDULE**  
The class schedule is subject to revision.

**TH 9/9**  
**Introduction:** what counts as evidence, what is a valid argument?  
**Hermeneutics of Suspicion and the Genetic Fallacy**  
 a) Accusation and Counteraccusations  
  i. Reader p. 1-75 (Freud, Sam Harris, D’Souza and Feser)  
 b) Naturalism and Genetic Fallacy  
  i. Reader p. XX (Freud, Dennett (*Spell* and on Burkert), Holt on Dawkins, Hahn/Wiker)  
 c) Positivism and Verification  
  i. Reader p. XX (Logical Positivism text and Flew/Hare)  
**Faith and Reason**  
Reader: p. XX (Ramelow¹, Dulles, Vat. I, CCC and Bible)  
recommended: Swinburne p. 3-19 on God

**TH 9/16**  
(...introductory discussions continued as needed)  
**Cosmological Proofs**  
 a) **motion and causality:** Aquinas, Hume and Kant  
  a. Palmer p. 49-89  
  b. Reader p. 96-105 (Aquinas: 5 ways, ScG)  
  c. recommended: Reader p. 75-96 (Plato and Aristotle)  
 b) **Big Bang and Creation from Nothing**  
  a. Reader p. 105-126 (Craig, Aquinas, Leibniz)

**TH 9/23**  
**Cosmological Proofs** continued

**TH 9/30**  
**“Alethological” proofs**  
Reader p. 126-166 (Augustine, Bonaventure, Descartes, Spaemann)

**TH 10/7**  
**Proofs from Perfection**  
 a) **participation**  
  a. Reader p. 166-189 (Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm;

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¹ Read the whole article, but focus on part 2-4 of this article; we will return to the first part later.
b) **necessary being**
   a. Reader p. 189-207 (Aquinas: 3rd way, ScG, Richard of St. Victor, Clarke, Plantinga, Maimonides, Dewan, Leibniz)²

**TH 10/14**

**Ontological Proof**

Palmer p. 1-45
Reader p. 207-274 (Anselm, Aquinas, Bonaventure³, Scotus, Spinoza and Leibniz; Hegel, Plantinga)

**TH 10/21**

**Ontological Proof** continued

**TH 10/28**

**Reading Week**

**TH 11/4**

**paper proposal due**

**Argument from Design**

a) **teleological proofs**
   a. Palmer p. 92-166
   b. Swinburne p. 20-68
   c. Reader p. 275-278 (Aquinas), and reread p. 55-61 (Ramelow I)

b) **anthropic principle**
   a. Reader p. 279-307 (Lemley on Rees, a chart, Dennett, Craig)
   b. Swinburne p. 69-94

**TH 11/11**

**Argument from Design** continued

**TH 11/18**

**Design and Theodicy**

Swinburne p. 95-113
Reader p. 307-326 (Aquinas, Leibniz, Craig)

**TH 11/25**

**Thanksgiving, no class**

**TH 12/2**

**Moral Arguments**

Palmer p. 227-281
Reader p. 326-331 (Aquinas)

**TH 12/9**

**Pragmatic Arguments**

Palmer p. 285-340

**TH 12/16**

exam week, we will have class

**paper due; evaluations**

**Religious Experience and Miracles**

Palmer p. 170-223
Swinburne p. 114-139
Reader p. 331-348 (MacIntyre on Reinach, Maritain, Spaemann)

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