PHST 4811 DOES GOD EXIST?
Anselm Ramelow, O.P.
Fall 2015
Time: TH 12:40-3:30pm
Location: DSPT #3
3 units
[15 max enrollment; Auditors excluded]

Office Hours:
M 1:15pm-3:15pm 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 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%)
      This will include an evaluation of the student in the following areas:
      a. Deep Learning (Institutional Goal A.1 and 2): based on the paper, according to the published rubrics of assessment.
      b. Collaborative learning (Institutional Goal B.1); based on
         i. class participation
         ii. the paper proposal you are submitting and integration of feedback
         iii. your contribution to the common good of the class:
            1. class preparation
            2. class participation
      c. Self-direction (Institutional Goal A.3):
         finding your own paper topic will demonstrate this ability
      d. Leadership (Institutional Goal B.1)
         Your paper and its topic can be an opportunity to show that you can identify relevant issues and address them.
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.

**Guidelines for paper topic:**
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 11/5. 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. Please also consult the paper guidelines at the end of this syllabus. The dead line for the paper is TH 12/17.

Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance and participation will impact the grade. *I would like you to forgo the use of laptops during the class sessions.*

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Required**

- **Reader**
  o available soon at **Vick Copy shop** (1879 Euclid, corner of Hearst + Euclid)  
  o estimated cost (by Copy Shop): $ 27.20 + tax

- **Michael Palmer: The Question of God: An Introduction and Sourcebook**
  o Paperback: 384 pages  
  o price: $45.95  
  o Publisher: **Routledge** (May 24, 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: $16.95
Recommended:
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 9/10**
**Introduction:** what counts as evidence, what is a valid argument?

**Hermeneutics of Suspicion and the Genetic Fallacy**

a) Accusation and Counteraccusations
   Reader p. TBD (Freud, Sam Harris, D’Souza and Feser)

b) Naturalism and Genetic Fallacy
   Reader p. TBD (Freud, Dennett (*Spell* and on Burkert),
   Holt on Dawkins, Hahn/Wiker)

c) Positivism and Verification
   Reader p. TBD (Logical Positivism text and Flew/Hare)

**Faith and Reason**

a) Reader: p. TBD (Ramelow¹, Dulles, Vat. I, CCC and Bible)

b) recommended: Swinburne p. 3-19 on God

**TH 9/17**
(...introductory discussions continued as needed)

**Cosmological Proofs**

a) **motion and causality:** Aquinas, Hume and Kant
   a. Palmer p. 49-89
   b. Reader p. TBD (Aquinas: 5 ways, ScG)
   c. recommended: Reader p. 75-96 (Plato and Aristotle)

b) **Big Bang and Creation from Nothing**
   Reader p. TBD (Craig, Aquinas, Leibniz)

**TH 9/24**
**Cosmological Proofs** continued

**TH 10/1**
**“Alethological” proofs**
Reader p. TBD (Augustine, Bonaventure, Descartes, Spaemann)

**TH 10/8**
**Proofs from Perfection**

a) **participation**
   Reader p. TBD (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.
Aquinas: 4th way, De potentia, ScG, In Ioannem; on Bonaventure; Norris Clarke

b) necessary being
   Reader p. TBD (Aquinas: 3rd way, ScG, Richard of St. Victor, Clarke, Plantinga, Maimonides, Dewan, Leibniz)²

TH 10/15  Ontological Proof
   Palmer p. 1-45
   Reader p. TBD (Anselm, Aquinas, Bonaventure³, Scotus, Spinoza and Leibniz; Hegel, Plantinga)

TH 10/22  Ontological Proof continued

TH 10/29  Reading Week

TH 11/5  paper proposal due
   Argument from Design
   a) teleological proofs
      a. Palmer p. 92-166
      b. Swinburne p. 20-68
      c. Reader p. TBD (Aquinas), and reread p. 55-61 (Ramelow I)
   b) anthropic principle
      a. Reader p. TBD (Lemley on Rees, a chart, Dennett, Craig)
      b. Swinburne p. 69-94

TH 11/12  Argument from Design continued

TH 11/19  Design and Theodicy
   Swinburne p. 95-113
   Reader p. TBD (Aquinas, Leibniz, Craig)

TH 11/26  Thanksgiving, no class

TH 12/3  Moral Arguments
   Palmer p. 227-281
   Reader p. TBD (Aquinas)

TH 12/10  Pragmatic Arguments
   Palmer p. 285-340

TH 12/17  paper due; evaluations
   Religious Experience and Miracles
   Palmer p. 170-223
   Swinburne p. 114-139
   Reader p. TBD (MacIntyre on Reinach, Maritain, Spaemann)

**Paper Guidelines**

As to the topic, you will find my suggestions above. There is flexibility, and I do encourage you to use topics of your own interest or background. There are many graduate student conferences now; you might want to write a paper with an eye to presenting it in such a venue. An increasing number of students have done so successfully. The topic is, however, subject to approval. You can talk to me before or after your proposal.

The paper is a **research paper (15-20 pages, 12pt, double space)**. Hence I expect you to research and use secondary literature. This is to be documented in the use of footnotes (not endnotes!) and in a bibliography.

The **bibliography** is most important. Please make your bibliography *as specific as possible*. I would like to see at least **three pertinent journal articles** in your bibliography; this is more important than generic books. As a help: please use the “**philosopher’s index**” at the GTU library, although this might only provide you with a starting point. Topics without pertinent literature are not viable; if it requires very extensive research on primary texts, you should leave it for your dissertation.

To avoid some common pitfalls: please **focus on your topic**. There is no need for biographical introductions on philosophers. (Biographical details can, of course, be brought in, if they explain some subject matter.)

Please avoid flowery or cryptic **language**. Be as sober as possible. Building literary smoke screens will not make your paper appear more profound, but only less intelligible. Focus on making arguments and positions clear.

Do some **proofreading**. If English is your second language, it can be a good idea to ask someone else to help you. Please do write complete sentences that have a proper grammatical structure. (Unfortunately that does not always seem to be self-understood.) Shorter sentences can make that easier. Grammatical correctness is more important than political correctness (e.g. do not use “they” as a singular).

**Subdividing it into chapters** (with headlines) can help the structure of your paper. It will help the clarity of your own thought process – as well as that of the reader. Please use page numbers.

**Plagiarism** is unacceptable and will result in a failing grade.

**Proposal**

The proposal is due the class after reading week. It consists in 2 or 3 sentences, stating your topic, plus a pertinent bibliography. (Please do not include the textbooks of the class.) This exercise is meant to help you to clarify your topic and focus your bibliography; after that, the paper should come easy. It is also a good exercise for a future thesis proposal. The topic is subject to approval.