

**Philosophy 17 – Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion**  
**Spring 2007**  
**Syllabus**

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**Important Information:**

Lecture: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:07 – 1:00, Emerson Hall 305  
Professor: Jeffrey McDonough  
Office Hours: 314 Emerson Hall, Tuesdays 9:30 - 11:30  
E-mail: [jkmcdon@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:jkmcdon@fas.harvard.edu)  
Course Web Page: <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/6837>

Teaching Fellow: Adrian Kwek

Discussion Sections:

Tuesday 9am-10am, Emerson 104  
Wednesday 3pm-4pm, Lamont 403  
Wednesday 4pm-5pm, Lamont 403

Office hours: by appointment  
E-mail: [kwek@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:kwek@fas.harvard.edu)

**Required Texts** (available at the Coop):

Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, translated by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980). ISBN: 0-87220-188-0

Anselm, *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, translated by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980). ISBN: 0-87220-611-4

Aquinas, *A Summary of Philosophy*, trans. and edited by Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003). ISBN: 0-87220-657-2

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Second Edition*, edited by Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980). ISBN: 0-87220-402-2

Muhammad Ali Khalidi, ed., and trans., *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2005). ISBN: 0-521-52963-8.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998). ISBN: 0-87220-283-6

Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, translated by Samuel Shirley, edited by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992). ISBN: 0-872201-309

## **Course Description:**

This course is both an introduction to philosophy in general as well as an introduction to the philosophical study of religious topics. In it we'll read roughly a half dozen perennial works drawn from the history of philosophy with authors ranging from Augustine of Hippo to Friedrich Nietzsche. Along the way, we'll think, discuss, and write about such topics as the nature of sin, the origin of evil, the fall of the devil, the attributes of God, the argument from design, and the relationship between religion and morality. The first half of the course will be dominated by "the saints" – i.e. philosophers who are in general eager to defend religious doctrine and belief. The second half of the course will be dominated by "the sinners" – i.e. philosophers who are generally cast as heretics and atheists. We will thus be considering arguments not only from various religious, but also from non-religious, viewpoints. Only students willing to engage in well-intentioned, friendly, and good-natured discussion about such matters are encouraged to enroll.

## **Requirements and Grading:**

### *1. Reading*

The ability to read texts carefully and thoughtfully is one of the most important skills the study of philosophy can help to foster. In order to better understand what is being taught, and to promote informed classroom discussions, required readings should be completed before lecture. Those readings are typically fairly short, but also very difficult, and students who wish to do well in the course are encouraged to read the assigned texts more than once.

### *2. Exams*

One of the aims of this course is to help students to gain an overview of some central themes in the philosophy of religion. To promote that aim, as well as to provide students with an alternative means of being evaluated, a mid-term and final exam will be administered. They are intended to test comprehension of the material covered in required readings, lectures, and discussion section, and will not require outside reading or research. Note, the final exam will be cumulative only from the mid-term (i.e. it will primarily test material covered after the mid-term - although comparison questions will be fair game).

### *3. Short writing assignments*

In order to give students a chance to develop their philosophical writing skills ten short writing assignments will be given (typically requiring 1-3 pages of writing). Each student will be given three "free passes" allowing him or her to skip a writing assignment. Free passes can be used during any week, and in any order. Students completing more than seven writing assignments will have their three lowest scores dropped automatically. Students enrolling too late in the semester to complete writing deadlines can use their free passes to make up for missed assignments. Late writing assignments will not be accepted.

#### 4. *Grading*

Student grades will be determined by their performance on their exams, writing assignments, and participation in discussion sections. The mid-term will count for 25% of a student's grade, the final exam 30%, and collective writing assignments 45%. Regular attendance in lecture and discussion section, as well as participation in discussion section, is expected, and grades for most students will not be affected by participation. Exceptionally helpful contributions to discussion, or conversely failure to regularly attend class or become productively involved in discussion, may result in the raising or lowering of a student's final grade by up to a third of a full letter (e.g. from a B+ to an A- or from a B+ to a B).

#### 5. *Special Needs and Emergencies*

Students requiring special assistance are encouraged to inform either the professor or teaching fellow. We will do everything we can to help. Absences from class or exam periods, and late papers, will be dealt with in accordance with the policies described in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences handbooks. Students should expect that failure to attend an exam without an excuse deemed legitimate by those policies will result in a score of zero for that exam. Requests made to the professor or teaching fellow prior to an absence or due date may result in special accommodation – if something is coming up, let us know ahead of time; we must be fair, but we are here to help you.

## **Tentative Schedule**

### *“Saints”*

#### **(1) Thursday, February 1: Plato's *Euthyphro***

Required reading: “Euthyphro” by Plato; available on-line at:  
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html>

#### **(2) Tuesday, February 6: Augustine's *On Free Choice of the Will***

Required reading: Book I of *On Free Choice of the Will*, by Augustine (pages 1-28 in the Williams translation).

#### **(3) Thursday, February 8: Augustine's *On Free Choice of the Will***

Required reading: Book II of *On Free Choice of the Will*, by Augustine (pages 29-69 in the Williams translation).

#### **(4) Tuesday, February 13: Augustine's *On Free Choice of Will***

Required reading: Book III, Chapters 1-9 of *On Free Choice of the Will*, by Augustine (pages 69-91 in the Williams translation)

Optional reading: Book III, Chapters 10-25, (pages 91-124 in the Williams translation)

#### **(5) Thursday, February 15: Anselm's *On Freedom of Choice***

Required reading: “Preface” by Anselm (Williams trans. pp 1-2); “On Freedom of Choice” by Anselm (Williams trans. pp. 31-51)

Optional reading: “On Truth” by Anselm (Williams trans. pp. 3-30)

**(6) Tuesday, February 20: Anselm's *On the Fall of the Devil***

Required reading: "On the Fall of the Devil" by Anselm, Chapters 1-14 (Williams trans. pages 52-82)

**(7) Thursday, February 22: Anselm's *On the Fall of the Devil***

Required reading: "On the Fall of the Devil" by Anselm, Chapters 15-28 (Williams trans. pages 82-100). "Anselm's Ontological Argument" from the Proslogium available at:  
<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/anselm.htm>

**(8) Tuesday, February 27: Al-Ghazali's, *The Rescuer from Error***

Required reading: *The Rescuer from Error*, by Al-Ghazali, pages 59-78 in Khalidi translation.

**(9) Thursday, March 1: Al-Ghazali's, *The Rescuer from Error***

Required reading: *The Rescuer from Error*, by Al-Ghazali, pages 79-98 in Khalidi translation.  
Optional reading: Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, pages 155-180 in Khalidi translation.

**(10) Tuesday, March 6: Aquinas's, *Summa Theologica***

Required reading: *A Summary of Philosophy* (abridged from his *Summa Theologica*), pages 3 - 19 in Regan edition.

**(11) Thursday, March 8: Aquinas's, *Summa Theologica***

Required reading: *A Summary of Philosophy* (abridged from his *Summa Theologica*), pages 20-38 in Regan edition.

**(12) Tuesday, March 13: Aquinas's, *Summa Theologica***

Required reading: no new reading – we'll be catching up

**(13) Thursday, March 15: Aquinas's, *Summa Theologica***

Required reading: *A Summary of Philosophy* (abridged from his *Summa Theologica*), pages 38-60 in Regan edition

**(14) Tuesday, March 20: Pascal's "The Wager"**

Required reading: "The Wager" – available on course web site

**(15) THURSDAY, MARCH 22: MID-TERM EXAM**

**Tuesday, March 27: Spring Break – No Class!**

**Thursday, March 29: Spring Break – No Class!**

“Sinners”

**(16) Tuesday, April 3: Spinoza’s *Ethics***

Required reading: Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part I, and Appendix to Part I (read through for the big picture)

**(17) Thursday, April 5: Spinoza’s *Ethics***

Required reading: Part I, props 1 -15

**(18) Tuesday, April 10: Spinoza’s *Ethics***

Required reading: Part I, props 16-36

**(19) Thursday, April 12: Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion***

Required reading: Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Parts I – III (pages 1-27 in Popkin edition)

**(20) Tuesday, April 17: Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion***

Required reading: Parts IV – VIII (pages 28 – 66 in Popkin edition)

**(21) Thursday, April 19: Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion***

Required reading: Parts IX – XII, (skimming X and XI if you like) pages 67-89 in Popkin edition; [and “Of Miracles” from Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (107-124 in Popkin edition)]

**(22) Tuesday, April 24: Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality***

Required reading: *First Treatise: “Good and Evil,” “Good and Bad”* (pages 9-33 in Clark and Swensen translation)

**(23) Thursday, April 26: Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality***

Required reading: *Second Treatise: “Guilt,” “Bad Conscience,” and Related Matters* (pages 35 – 66 in Clark and Swensen translation) (We’ll focus on sections 1-8 and 16-25, so if pressed for time you might skim sections 8-15.)

**(24) Tuesday, May 1: Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality***

Required reading: *Third Treatise: What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?* (pages 67 – 118 in Clark and Swensen translation)

**(25) Thursday, May 3: Spill Over/Review/Bonus**

-- FINAL EXAM GROUP 14 --