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PHL 367W – Philosophy of Religion
MWF 11 – 11:50 am
AB4 301

Spring 2008
Office: LDB 332 L
Office Hours: MWF 1-2
or by appointment

Course Description: An examination of the nature and meaning of religion and religious expression. Philosophical and scientific critiques of religious faith and experience are considered. The nature of faith and reason, the question of the existence and nature of God, and the relation of religion and value are typical course topics.

Course Objectives:

- Introduce the students to the main issues and ideas of Western philosophical reflections on religion.
- Become acquainted with various religious traditions and their philosophical assumptions and implications.
- Acquire the skills to
 - read texts carefully
 - analyze arguments
 - question assumptions
 - evaluate various philosophical and religious positions, especially the student's own
 - express complex ideas with accuracy, both orally and in writing

Required Texts:

- (1) *God Matters* --an anthology of readings edited by Raymond Martin and Christopher Bernard (GM)
- (2) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* by Brian Davies (IPR)
- (3) *Finding Darwin's God* by Kenneth R. Miller (FDG)
- (4) *Essential Sufism* edited by James Fadiman and Robert Frager
- (5) Other material to be made available on Blackboard or on Library Reserve.

Recommended Readings:

- (1) *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings* by D. T. Suzuki
- (2) *The Tao is Silent* by Raymond Smullyan
- (3) *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* edited by Norman J. Cohen
- (4) *Walking the Bible* by Bruce Feiler
- (5) *The Genesis of Justice* by Alan Dershowitz
- (6) *Religion Explained, the Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* by Pascal Boyer
- (7) *Can A Darwinian be a Christian?* by Michael Ruse
- (8) *The Koran*
- (9) *The Bhagavad Gita* translated by Franklin Edgerton
- (10) *Genesis, Exodus, and The Book of Job*
- (11) *The Gospel According to Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and First Corinthians*

Attendance Policy: In accordance with University policy, I expect students to attend class, and will take roll. A student's attendance requires consciousness and attention, not mere physical presence. I will mark absent students not in attendance at the time I take roll. Absences do not directly affect students' grades, but students are responsible for material covered in their absence. I consider unconscious or inattentive students a disturbance and will ask them to leave.

Grades: Final grades will be determined from the average of the grades earned throughout the semester.

A. Exams (4) – 80% There are **three unit exams** and a comprehensive **final exam**, each worth 20% of the final grade. Exams questions are taken from the study guides provided a week before the exam, and there will be time for review in class before each exam.

B. Book Reports (2) – 10% (5% each): Describe the main points, along with your thoughtful reactions to those points, of (1) a book (or set of books) from the recommended reading list above, and (2) *Essential Sufism*

C. Religious Discovery Project – 10%: Write a report on a religious tradition other than your own by sharing in experiences of those who follow that tradition by direct observation, through conversation and/or through reading.

D. Opinion Questions: For each unit, there will be opinion questions to which thoughtful and well reasoned responses are required. Each set of questions answered well will add up to 10 points to the exam for that unit. Questions not answered, or not answered well, will subtract up to 10 points from that unit's exam.

I use the grading scale: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, and below 60 = F.

Exams: Exams will consist of short answer and essay questions. The amount of essays will increase as the semester progresses. A study guide from which all exam questions will be taken will be made available to

students one week before each exam, and class time will be given for review. Generally make-up exams are not given, and when they are, they are longer and more difficult. Exceptions to this general rule are possible only in **the most extreme** of circumstances, only if notification is received before or on the day of the exam, and only if appropriately documented. Another exam, over-sleeping or simply not being prepared are not acceptable reasons for being granted a make-up exam.

Schedule (subject to change)

Week I

January

Wed 16 – Course Overview
Fri 18 – Religion and Philosophy:
Read Plato's *Apology*

Week II

Unit I – The Idea of God and the Problem of Evil

Mon 21 – MLK Jr. Holiday
Wed 23 – Omnipotence, Read *God Matters*
(GM) #1, #2,
*Introduction to the Philosophy or
Religion* (IPR), c. 1
Fri 25 – Omniscience, GM #3, #4, IPR, c. 9
Eternity, GM #5, #6

Week III

Mon 28 – GM #33, #34, IPR, c. 10
Wed 30 – GM #35, #36, #37

February

Fri 1 – The Free Will Defense, GM #38

Week IV

Mon 4 – Evidential Argument, GM #39
Wed 6 – Conclusions on Evil, GM #40
Fri 8 – Review

Week V

Mon 11 – Exam I

Unit II – Religion and Rationality

Wed 13 – IPR Chapter 2
Finding Darwin's God (FDG), c.1-2
Fri 14 – FDG, c. 3-4

Week VI

Mon 18 – FDG, c. 5-6
Wed 20 – FDG, c. 7-8
Fri 22 – FDG, c. 9

Week VII

Mon 25 – Faith and Evidence: GM #21, #22
Wed 27 – GM #23
Fri 29 – GM #32

Week VIII

March

Mon 3 – GM #32
Wed 5 – Review
Fri 7 – Exam II – **LAST DAY TO DROP**

Spring Break, March 10 – 14

Week IX

Unit III – Proofs for God's Existence

Mon 17 – Moral Argument, GM #18
Wed 19 – GM #19

BOOK REPORT DUE

Discovery Project Proposal Due

Fri 21 – Good Friday: No Class

Week X

Mon 24 – Ontological Argument, GM #7, #8,
IPR, c. 5
Wed 26 – GM #9
Fri 28 – Cosmological Arguments, GM # 10,
IPR, c. 3

Week XI

Mon 31 – GM #11

April

Wed 2 – GM #12
Fri 4 – Design, GM #15, #16, IPR, c. 4

Week XII

Mon 7 – GM #17
Wed 9 – Review
Fri 11 – Exam III

Unit IV – Life after Death, Religion and Ethics

Week XIII

Mon 14 – Death and Immortality, GM #51,
IPR, c. 13
Wed 16 – Life after death, GM #52
Fri 18 – Morality, GM #53, #54, IPR, c. 12

Week XIV

Mon 21 – GM #55, #56
Wed 23 – Essential Sufism Pts 1 & 2
SUFISM BOOK REPORT DUE
Fri 25 – Essential Sufism, Pts 3 & 4

Week XV

Mon 28 – Essential Sufism, Pts 6 & 7
Wed 30 – Pluralism, GM #57

May

Fri 2 – Exclusionism, GM #58

Week XVI

Mon 5 – Diversity & Tolerance, GM #60
Discovery Project Due
Mon 7 – Wed 5 – Review
Fri 9 – Study Day

Final Exam
Wednesday, May 14, 2008
11 am – 1 pm

General Policies

Academic Dishonesty – All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

“Cheating” includes, but is not limited to copying from another student’s test paper, or using other unauthorized materials or devices during the completion of an exam. “Plagiarism” means the inclusion of unacknowledged words or ideas as one’s own work offered for credit. Electronic resources will be employed for the detection of plagiarism. The first instance of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for that assignment or exam. A second instance will result in the a failing grade for the course and referral to the University for disciplinary action.

Americans with Disabilities Act – It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Religious Holidays – Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). This request must be made in the first fifteen days of the semester or the first seven days of a summer session in which the absence(s) will occur. The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed

Visitors in the Classroom – Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

Instructor Evaluations – Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

Classroom Rules of Conduct – Students are expected to behave in ways conducive to learning. Students failure to abide by The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline or creating a disturbance as defined by Section 5.2.22 will be asked to leave. Students whose electronic devices, including cell phones, are audible, will be asked to leave.