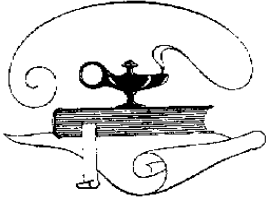


The Lantern



Philosophy Newsletter for Students

Volume 9, Number 2

Spring 2008

Philosophy and Religion: Friends, Foes, or Something Else?

I recently attended a wedding reception and was asked about my work at UWG. After telling the interested party that I taught both philosophy and religion, I received a quizzical look as though I had suggested my favorite musicians were Tchaikovsky and Meatloaf.

“Philosophy *and* religion...really?” (Awkward pause...) “Well, are you religious?”

I am not sure how I answered his question, but his verbal and non-verbal responses represent the view

of many people who cannot understand how these two disciplines could possibly get along. Skepticism about the relation-

Skepticism about the relationship between philosophy and religion is not a new concern.

ship between philosophy and religion is not a new concern. An early Christian theologian, Tertullian (160–235 CE), famously asked “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” There is no love loss from the side of philosophy as well. A perusal of Bertrand Russell’s essay “Why I am not a Christian” suggests many ways in which religion, or Christianity as he understands it, seems incompatible with a life committed to rational inquiry.

In addressing Tertullian’s question and reviewing the many responses offered in the meantime, retired Yale professor Nicholas Wolterstorff notes some of the possibilities for conceiving of the relationship between philosophy and religion. First, disjunction or opposition: pick one or the other, but you cannot have both. Philosophy and religion are two great tastes that don’t taste great together. They are incompatible ways of looking at and living in the world. This is the view of both Tertullian and Rus-

sell. Second, supersession: philosophy supersedes religion, takes up and transcends its truth, as in Hegel, for instance. Or religion supersedes, takes up and transcends the truths of philosophy, as in the thought of one of Tertullian’s contemporaries, Clement, for whom Plato and Socrates were preludes to Christ and Christianity. And third, incorporation: philosophy and religion do not transcend one another but rather borrow from one another. Philosophy and religion are to some extent compatible ways of looking at and living in the world. This is the view of the thousand members of the Society of Christian Philosophers, of whom Wolterstorff was a co-founder. This was also the view of many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers and theologians in the medieval era.

Let us reflect for ourselves on Tertullian’s question. What sort of things do philosophy and religion share? Philosophy means ‘love of wisdom’ and most religious traditions are generally concerned with gaining wisdom. Both involve inquiry aimed at some of the most important questions one can ask—what does it mean to be human? What is ‘out there’?

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Philosophers' Birthdays

Moses Maimonides,
Spanish-Hebrew Philosopher
March 30, 1135–December 13, 1204

Rene Descartes,
French Philosopher and Scientist
March 31, 1596–February 11, 1650

Edmund Husserl,
German Founder of Phenomenology
April 8, 1859–April 27, 1938

Karl Barth,
Swiss Theologian
May 10, 1886–December 9, 1968

Bertrand Russell,
British Philosopher and Mathematician
May 18, 1872–February 2, 1970

What is truth? And how does this truth inform how a human is to live? What is the purpose of a human life? At least ideally, the inquiry of both philosophy and religion is strongly guided by a moral sense, a deep commitment to truth and truth-seeking. One classical definition of theology partly captures this sense: 'faith seeking understanding.'

This phrase, 'faith seeking understanding,' also reveals, however, the profound ways in which philosophy and religion part company. Understanding, truth, human identity and purpose, and even wisdom will for the religious person be closely bound to some intimate relation to the divine, personal or otherwise. And in many, if not most religions, human reason reaches limits of understanding transcended in part by the ceasing of inquiry, by a kind of hope or trust that is in some sense inexplicable.

So does this mean that philosophy and religion are foes? Some say yes, and in practice they often are. God knows that many religious practitioners epitomize anti-intellectualism, blindly following what a priest or parent has told them. The more interesting question to me is whether philosophy and religion must be foes? And I'm not so sure about that.

Professor Mark Tietjen, Ph.D.

Philosopher's Wisdom

"The quite
personal responsibility
of our own true being as
philosophers, our inner personal
vocation, bears within itself at the same
time the responsibility for the true being
of [hu]mankind; the latter is, necessarily,
being toward a telos and can only come to
realization, if at all, through philosophy."

~Edmund Husserl,

Crisis of the European Sciences, 1938.

Summer 2008 Course Descriptions

Phil 2110 01 Critical Thinking

Dr. Mark Tietjen

Session 3. MTWRF 10:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m. HUM 228

This course addresses the basics of how to think critically and how to evaluate arguments. By learning the fundamentals of logical reasoning and addressing contemporary cultural debates, we will focus on how to argue well and how to identify the fallacies of weak arguments. Students will also have the opportunity to apply skills they learn to their particular major

Phil 2110 02 Critical Thinking

Dr. Mark Tietjen

Session 3. MTWRF 3:00–5:15 p.m. HUM 205

Course description same as above.

Phil 2120 01 Introduction to Ethics

Dr. Robert Lane

Session 4. MTWRF 10:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m. HUM 228

Everyone has beliefs about morality, and to some extent we all agree about what actions are right and wrong; for example, we all agree that murder is wrong and that helping those less fortunate than us is right. But there are many moral questions about which people disagree: is abortion immoral? what about human cloning? homosexuality? is it wrong to spend money on expensive cars and homes when people in other parts of the world are dying from malnutrition? This course will enable you critically to evaluate your own beliefs about concrete ethical issues like these. We'll also be dealing with more theoretical questions, such as: where does morality come from? (God? society? or somewhere else?); what makes an ethical argument good or bad?; and what general rules or principles ought we to live by? No prior experience in philosophy is necessary, so if you want to start thinking critically about morality, this course is a great place to begin.

Phil 2120 02 Introduction to Ethics

Dr. Robert Lane

Session 4. MTWRF 3:00–5:15 p.m. HUM 205

Course description same as above.

Fall 2008 Course Descriptions

Phil 2100 01 Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. Janet Donohoe

MWF 10:00-11:00 a.m. HUM 207

This course takes an historical look at major philosophical questions through the primary texts of such important philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche and Camus. Students are exposed to questions of what it means to be a human being, how to live the good life, what we can know, why we are here, whether there is a God, why there is evil in the world, and whether anything at all has meaning. Through the texts we learn not only the way that philosophers attempt to address these questions, but we also learn what it means to engage in philosophical thought and how the process of thinking philosophically can change our understanding of our own existence.

Phil 2100 02 Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. Janet Donohoe

MWF 11:00 a.m.-12:00noon HUM 207

Course description same as above.

Phil 2100 03 Introduction to Philosophy

Staff

MWF 1:00-1:50 p.m. HUM 207

This course takes an historical look at major philosophical questions through the primary texts of such important philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Descartes, Kant, Camus and Foucault. Students are exposed to questions of what it means to be a human being, how to live the good life, what we can know, and why we are here.

Phil 2100 04 Introduction to Philosophy

Staff

MWF 2:00-2:50 p.m. HUM 207

Course description same as above.

Phil 2110 01 Critical Thinking
MWF 9:00-9:50 a.m. HUM 206

Staff

Phil 2110 02 Critical Thinking
MWF 10:00-10:50 a.m. HUM 206

Staff

Phil 2110 03 Critical Thinking
MWF 11:00-11:50 a.m. HUM 206

Staff

Phil 2110 04 Critical Thinking
TR 9:30-10:45 a.m. PAFF 105

Dr. Jeremiah Alberg

It seems a little obvious to say that no one can do your thinking for you, but that insight guides this class. The emphasis of the class is on student activity. A wide variety of exercises are given, both inside and outside the classroom, so that students develop the skills they need for critical thinking. The students learn to identify the conclusion of a piece of reasoning, as well as the reasons given in support of that conclusion. They also learn to make explicit the assumptions of the author. Having learned to identify the conclusion, the reasons, and the structure of an argument, the students are now in a position to make judgments about the validity and soundness of the arguments, as well as constructing some of their own. This is an ideal class for sharpening your studying skills.

Phil 3100 01 Ancient and Medieval Philosophy
TR 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m. PAFF 109

Dr. Mark Tietjen

This course explores philosophers including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas and seeks to make their philosophical thinking relevant to that of their modern and contemporary successors. Required for Philosophy majors

Phil 4100 01 Phenomenology
MWF 1:00-1:50 p.m. HUM 206

Dr. Janet Donohoe

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement of the twentieth century that focuses on descriptive investigations of the ways in which the world appears to consciousness. In this course we will examine the development of the phenomenological method through primary texts of major phenomenologists including Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida, and Ricoeur. We will address such issues as how the phenomenological method attempts to overcome the subject/object dichotomy, and how it lays the groundwork for such contemporary movements as hermeneutics and deconstruction.

Phil 4115 01W Political Philosophy
TR 12:30-1:45 p.m. HUM 206

Dr. Jeremiah Alberg

Political action aims at making the good life possible by achieving a good society. Political philosophy aims at making explicit in what the good life and a good society consists. This course, then, is an exploration of one of the most important attempts at fulfilling these aims. We will begin with a careful reading of the classic article by Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" We will then look at his treatment of natural law. We will also read some of his treatment of important figures in the history of political philosophy. Since this is a WAC course, it will be writing intensive.

Phil 4230 01 Philosophy of Religion
TR 9:30-10:45 a.m. PAFF 109

Dr. Mark Tietjen

In this course we will examine philosophical arguments about religious questions such as the existence of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between faith and reason, religious pluralism, and the relationship between religion and science. Required for Religion-track majors

Phil 4300 01W Senior Seminar
TR 2:00-3:15 p.m. TLC 2237

Dr. Mark Tietjen

The focus of this seminar will be the thought of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and especially his relation to the virtue tradition and Socrates. In particular we will consider Kierkegaard's methods of communication and the degree to which they might be described as 'Socratic.' In this course students will become familiar with several of Kierkegaard's writings and some of the secondary literature concerning how to read Kierkegaard's authorship and what to make of his unorthodox communication styles. Required for Philosophy majors. You must be a senior intending to graduate in the 08-09 school year or summer 09 to enroll in this course.

What is Beauty?

Hear six great philosophers debate their theories.



Thomas Aquinas
played by Shelley Donaldson



Hans-Georg Gadamer
played by Christopher Pollard



Martin Heidegger
played by Matthew Tapley



Immanuel Kant
played by Charles Bauch



Friedrich Nietzsche
played by Philip Brewer



Plato
played by Sepp Helgeson

Moderator Timothy Wright

The Eighth Annual Meeting of the Minds

Date: March 27, 2008

Time: 7:00 p.m.

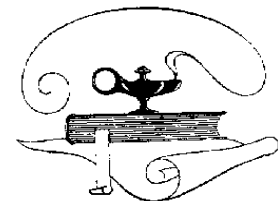
Place: Kathy Cashen Hall

*Sponsored by the West Georgia Philosophical Society
and the Department of English and Philosophy*

Interested in Philosophy?

Join the West Georgia Philosophical Society

Interested in Philosophy? Enjoy open discussions on every imaginable topic? Then you should join the Philosophical Society. The Society is a registered student organization that meets every other week for lively discussions of philosophical topics. So far this year the discussion topics have ranged from the problem of evil (if God is all-knowing, -powerful, and -good, why do innocent beings suffer?), to the apparent incompatibility between determinism and the belief in human free will, to the question whether man is naturally good or bad. Members of the society have also been involved in canned food drives, bake sales, and trivia nights at local restaurants. All students, regardless of their background or experience, are invited to join. In spring 2008 meetings will be held every other Friday at 1:00 p.m. in the Dean's small conference room—TLC 3223. For more information, check out the philosophy bulletin board outside TLC 2254 or the Society's website at <http://www.westga.edu/~philsoc>, or contact Dr. Tietjen (mtietjen@westga.edu).



Spring 2008 Philosophy Awards Ceremony

This year's Philosophy Program Awards Ceremony will take place at The Border on April 11, 2008 at 3:00 p.m. All Philosophy majors are invited to join their professors in celebrating the successes of the Philosophy Program. Awards to be given include awards to all students who have presented their research at an undergraduate conference, those who participated in the "Meeting of the Minds," the inductees to the national philosophy honor's society, and the following:

Gordon Watson Award in Philosophy
Charles Bauch

Burdett and Shirley Wantland Award in Religion
Christopher Pollard

Best New Philosophy Major Award
Anna Potter

Philosophy Program Service Award
Timothy Wright

And the Philosophical Society Officers will be presenting the award for the Philosophical Society Essay Prize.

Congratulations to all students who enrich the philosophy program through fine academic work and commitment to the discipline!

Congratulations on Research Day

Congratulations to this year's Research Day participants! Charles Bauch received recognition in second place for all of the humanities. Research Day participants were:

Charles Bauch
Philip Brewer
Timothy Wright

It's great to see the Philosophy Program so well represented at Research Day!

Research Day happens every spring semester, so keep in mind that if you have a paper that you are proud of and would like to present at Research Day next year, your professors are happy to work with you to turn the paper into an appropriate presentation for the event.

Please direct any questions or comments about this newsletter to Dr. Janet Donohoe, 678-839-4743.

Summer Reading Suggestions

Dr. Lane recommends

Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (Norton, 2004)

David Edmonds and John Eidinow, *Wittgenstein's Poker: The Story of a Ten-Minute Argument Between Two Great Philosophers* (Harper Perennial, 2002)

Dr. Alberg recommends

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press, 2007)

Susan Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 1996)

Dr. Donohoe recommends

Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth* (Humanities Press, 1995)

Andrew Fiala, *Tolerance and the Ethical Life* (Continuum, 2007)

Dr. Tietjen recommends

Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Previously called *The Religions of Man*) (Harper 1991).