

University of London BA Philosophy

Course Schedule 2001-2

Course: Philosophy of Religion

Convenor: Martin Stone

Intended audience: 2nd and 3rd

Year

Undergraduates

Aims of Course:

The Philosophy of religion course contributes to the general aims of the London Philosophy course by giving students the resources to enable them to critically assess the claims made by religious traditions and theological systems. Particular emphasis is accorded to the application of core philosophical subjects (i.e. philosophical logic, metaphysics, ethics and philosophy of mind), to theological problems and dilemmas. Taught over two years, the syllabus aims to cover the following areas of the subject: philosophical theology; the justification of religious beliefs; ideas of the soul and immortality; and religion and morality.

Objectives:

Students will study for this course by means of tutorials, independent study and intercollegiate lectures. Students completing the course will have:

- (a) developed a capacity for philosophical reflection on theological issues.
- (b) acquired a knowledge of the main arguments and problems in the western theological tradition.
- (c) understood the nature of some central problems in the philosophy of religion.
- (d) encountered and evaluated a number of attempts to solve the philosophical problems under discussion.

(e) acquired an understanding of how problems in philosophy of religion relate to personal religious belief/non-belief/agnosticism and everyday life.

(f) acquired an ability to relate the questions discussed to the work of philosophers studied on other papers.

(g) been encouraged to read with great care and reflected upon some difficult texts, as well as introductory and secondary material.

(h) answered questions in finals on both historical texts and areas of contemporary interest.

No of Lectures: 25

Back-up Classes: College tutorials

Term 1

Lecturer Martin Stone (10 weeks):

Topic : Ideas of the Soul and Immortality from the Greeks to the Scolastics.

Term 2

Lecturer Martin Stone (10 weeks):

Topic: Ideas of the Soul and Immortality: Medieval, Modern and Recent conceptions.

This course will survey a variety of philosophical topics that are connected with the separate yet related notions of the soul and immortality. Among the major topics to be considered are: Central aspects of the philosophical debate about the nature of the soul and immortality from Heraclitus to Wittgenstein; mind-body dualism; arguments for the resurrection of the body; recent theories of the mind; the identity and the moral importance of persons.

In the First term, full attention will be given over to the rich history of philosophical discussion about the soul. Beginning with the Ancient Greeks, we shall trace the assorted arguments that philosophers have used in order to establish (i) that the soul exists, and (ii) that it is immortal. Of particular relevance to this part of our enquiry will be the work of Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Neoplatonists, the Church Fathers, and Augustine. Our work for this term will conclude with a study of the medieval contribution to this topic. Here early 13th thinkers will be studied.

Armed with a thorough overview of ancient and early 13th-century discussions of the soul and immortality, we shall devote our attention in the Second term to an examination of late medieval, early-modern, and modern philosophical attempts to make sense of the soul and the issue of immortality. Under this head, we shall consider the work of Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham; Renaissance thinkers such as Pomponazzi, Ficino and Suarez; and Modern thinkers from Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza to Kant and Wittgenstein. We shall also consider the relation of debates about the soul to the issue of personal identity. Here, we shall consider the influential theory of Locke and the famous criticisms of his position by Butler, Reid and Hume. We shall also consider the recent theory of Parfit. The course will conclude with a study of such issues as the possibility of bodily resurrection; and the place of the ideas of the soul and immortality within recent philosophy of religion (here the individuals studied will be those of Swinburne and Geach).

Assessment:

Students will sit a degree examination in this subject at the end of their final year. Tutorial essays will set by and delivered to college tutors.