

## Philosophy of Religion – 332 (Winter Term, 2014)

2 sessions per week, 90 minutes each (Tue. & Thu. 13:05-14:25).

No Prerequisite

Expected Enrolment: 60 to 70

Professor George di Giovanni, Leacock 930, 514-398-6062

[george.di\\_giovanni@mcgill.ca](mailto:george.di_giovanni@mcgill.ca) (office hours to be posted on my door)

Evaluation: Two short essays (1,000 words approximately; due dates to be posted on MyCourses), 30% of final mark each. One take-home examination, 40% of final mark. Students will have a choice of topics for both essays and examination questions.

**Description:** The assumption motivating this course is that religion is an essential and irreducible dimension of human existence. The task is to establish the nature of this aspect of human existence: how does it differ from such other aspects as, for instance, scientific curiosity or artistic creativity? Just as Plato sought to establish the concept of ‘virtue’, we seek to establish the concept of ‘religion’. This search will require a reflection on the historical practices of religion that will entail an element of criticism. Just because religion is irreducible, it does not follow that all that is normally associated with it, such as belief in God or in an after-life for instance, is necessary. Can there be a religion without belief in God? We shall try to separate the essential from the unessential in the concept of religion.

Historically, the practice of religion has been shaped by these factors: faith, cult (ritual), feeling, community. Such factors give rise, in order, to the following question:

- (1) How does religious belief differ from scientific certitude. Given the proposition: ‘I believe in God, the creator of heaven and earth’, does its meaning differ according as the proposition is asserted in a religious as contrasted to a scientific context?
- (2) Religious ritual is based on otherwise mundane practices. How do these practices change in meaning when performed in a religious context? For instance, how does the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine in the Christian liturgy differ from the same practices in daily eating?
- (3) Religious individuals seem to display feelings specific to their religiosity in the course of their religious practices. How do these feelings differ from other feelings? For instance, how is the same piece of music (say, Verdi’s *requiem*) experienced differently as prayer or as the object of aesthetic appreciation?
- (4) Religion has traditionally been the foundation of strong communal bonds? How do these bonds differ from purely political ones?

These questions motivate the course. A detailed Syllabus will be made available on MyCourses in due time.