

Phil 667. Fall 2016 (22260)

Seminar on 19th Century Philosophy – Philosophy of Religion

Time: Monday, 1:35–3:25 pm

Location: Lea 927

Prerequisite, Phil 366 (German Idealism) or Phil 460 (Hegel) or the equivalent

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Evaluation based on one major paper and seminar presentation(s). Late papers without excuse will be penalized by ½ mark per seminar-day delay.

Description:

This course would have been in the past at the now discontinued 500-level, that is, open to both advanced honour students and graduate students. Since I expect very few graduate students, I plan to run in conjunction with 460.2 (an advanced undergraduate course), but with special requirements for graduate students. The course will have for the most part the format of a seminar. This means that I shall contribute in lecture form, but that students will also be asked to make presentations on assigned texts for class discussion. The texts are all drawn from the German Late Enlightenment and Early Romanticism period. This is the time when traditional Theology, understood as a theory about God, became what we now call Philosophy of Religion. My lecturing is required for providing the historical/conceptual context of each text.

The main theme is the relation of religion, understood as based in some way or other on a historical event, and reason. At issue is how the understanding of this relation changed, radically indeed, between the 1780's (the height of the Enlightenment) and the 1830's (when Romanticism was already well established as a cultural force). Lessing/Mendelssohn, Kant, and Schelling, are the authors marking the crucial transition points in this change. Hegel will also figure prominently, as a return to the Enlightenment in Romantic garb. We shall have to consider also the influence on all these authors of Spinoza's thought, as interpreted by the Romantics and, before the Romantics, by Lessing and Jacobi.

This is the main theme. But others will come up for discussion in connection with it. For instance, religion is more than just an assent to certain doctrinal positions; it is also a way of life involving practices which outstrip theoretical considerations. We shall have to see how attitudes towards such practices also altered in the period just outlined. Why is it that Hegel, for instance, could consider art, at the time of its most pervasive cultural force, as itself religion?

We shall explore such themes in a historical context, on the basis of well known historical texts. The motivation, however, will be speculative. Religion obviously is an inextricable factor in human experience. Can we come up with an at least tentative concept of it? What is a philosophy of religion the philosophy of?

Texts (tentative list in the order we shall take the texts; only excerpts will be required in some cases):

1. Leibniz: *Theodicy* (1710); excerpts to be announced; text to be posted on MyCourses

2. Moses Mendelssohn: Open Letter to Deacon Lavater of Zurich from Moses Mendelssohn (1769). Text to be posted on MyCourses

3. Ephraim Lessing:

Anti-Goeze (1775): “On the Proof of the Spirit and of the Power:
“The Christianity of Reason”

The text of these very short pieces will be posted on MyCourse

Nathan the Wise (1779): text in English translation available at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3820/3820-h/3820-h.htm>

4. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: Passages from his 1785 Letters to Mendelssohn will be posted on MyCourses

5. Immanuel Kant:

Critique of Practical Reason (1788), Book Two: The Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason. The older translation by Abbott which is in the public domain is available on line in more than one venue.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5683/pg5683.html>

Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason I (1793), tr. with historical introduction by George di Giovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge, 1996); also found in single text at Cambridge 1998. An older and still perfectly good translation can be found on line:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/religion/religion-within-reason.htm> [copy the URL and paste]

6. J. G. Fichte, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792). § 3, which is the only one of interest for us, is available on line in pdf and will be posted on MyCourses.

7. G. W. F. Hegel:

“The Positivity of the Christian Religion” (1795/96). Revised §§ 1-3 (1800).

“Love” (1797/98?)

“Fragment of a System” (1800).

All these texts can be found in G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox (Chicago, 1948). This book has been reissued and is available in paperback. However, the original text is in the public domain and can be accessed on line.

For the whole book, go to:

<https://archive.org/stream/onchristianityea010999mbp#page/n11/mode/2up> [copy the URL and paste]

The first item can also be accessed in different format at:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pc/index.htm> [copy URL and paste]

8. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (1804). The text will be posted in MyCourses.

9. J. G. Fichte, *The Way towards the Blessed Life* (1806). The text will be posted on MyCourses, but we shall very likely skip this text.

10. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). I shall have to lecture on this classic. As will

be indicated in class, I shall ask you to read only the final section of Chapter 6, and the first of Chapter 7.

11. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. (1827), ed., P. C. Hodgson, tr. Hodgson *et al.* (Berkeley, 1988. The Introduction; Part I; Part III, Introduction. I shall try to make the text available. There is a 19th Century translation of the Lectures, available on line, but they are not very readable, and textually unreliable.

This is a challenging list of readings. I shall contribute to them in lecture form. We might drop some depending on how the make-up and rhythm of the class.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>) for more information).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.