2013

404-01 21st Century Christian Philosophy

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Course Syllabus: PHIL 404-01

21st century Christian Philosophy

This course will give students a cutting-edge view of how top scholars are articulating diverse ways in which reason and faith can intersect at the turn of the 21st century. We will be reading recent books by Alvin Plantinga and Robert Sokolowski, two preeminent contemporary Christian philosophers. We will also be considering other Christian voices on the contemporary scene, through the reading of various PDF documents. The course will open up a space for believers and non-believers alike to consider the importance of both a critical space within religion itself and a grounding in the historical roots of a major faith tradition. The course presents an intellectual challenge consistent with Xavier’s Catholic tradition of informed inquiry into matters of faith and reason.

A quote from John Paul II’s *On Faith and Reason* animates the spirit of the course:

> I wish to . . . concentrate on the theme of *truth* itself and on its *foundation* in relation to *faith*. For it is undeniable that this time of rapid and complex change can leave especially the *younger generation*, to whom the future belongs and on whom it depends, with a sense that they have no valid points of reference. The need for a foundation for personal and communal life becomes all the more pressing at a time when we are faced with the patent inadequacy of perspectives in which the ephemeral is affirmed as a value and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast into doubt. This is why many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where they are going. At times, this happens because those whose vocation it is to give cultural expression to their thinking no longer look to truth, preferring quick success to the toil of patient enquiry into what makes life worth living. With its enduring appeal to the search for truth, philosophy has the great responsibility of forming thought and culture, and now it must strive resolutely to recover its original vocation.

N.B. Please note that this course is primarily a course in Christian philosophy, but the majority of our authors are Catholic Christians. As such, they will be touching on the relation between the three sources of teaching considered by Catholics as authoritative, scripture, tradition, and the magisterium, whereby the latter refers to particular Roman Catholic teachings such as John Paul II’s encyclical letter *On Faith and Reason* and Francis’ *Lumen Fidei*. All students of any other or no religious background are more than welcome, as long as they keep an open mind to the material presented in this particular faith tradition. All questions will be entertained from any perspective whatsoever, as diversity of philosophical points of view will be respected at every turn in the course.

One thing is for sure: there will be no preaching or proselytizing in this class; it is not a course in apologetics.
Required Books:


Course Requirements:

20% Participation

15% Quizzes/writing assignments (in-class or take-home, about 5)—lowest quiz grade dropped

10% Protocol assignment

10% Paper #1

15% Paper #2

30% Final Exam (Paper #3)

Writing Center: Everyone needs help with his or her writing. Even great authors need an editor or second pair of eyes. I strongly suggest that you visit the writing center before you turn in each paper. Your grammar will improve, your prose will become crisper, and your argument stronger. Overall, your writing skills and course grade will very likely increase. There is really nothing to lose, and everything to gain. For more information: [http://www.xavier.edu/writing_center](http://www.xavier.edu/writing_center). Where: CLC 5th Floor / Phone: 745-2875 / When: Monday-Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. Friday: 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Sunday 1:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

I will be happy to work with you on drafts, but only if we go over them in office hours, with hard copies (one for you, one for me), with you taking notes on my suggestions. No drafts will be looked at if sent as attachments or within 48 hours before the due date. This policy is meant to encourage you to organize your ideas as early as possible.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in the failing of the assignment, and it may result in the failing of the course. The following statement on plagiarism is from Xavier University’s website on plagiarism, where you can take a tutorial about how to avoid plagiarism: [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.cfm)

- Plagiarism is using the work of another as if it were your own, without enclosing the words of others in quotations—this is also the case for paraphrasing lecture notes!
- Plagiarism is copying from the Internet, from a web page, or from another person without giving credit.
- Plagiarism is using ideas which are not your own without citing those ideas.
- Plagiarism can be applied to ideas, research, art, music, graphs, diagrams, websites, data, books, newspapers, magazines, plays, movies, photos, and speeches.

Participation: Participation is required. Participation can take place in a number of ways: asking questions, responding to questions, raising objections, and making points. I do recognize that for some students talking in class and discussing philosophy can be intimidating. Discussing the philosophical content of the readings or class discussion by email or during office hours will count toward your participation grade. Socratic method will be practiced during class time (calling on students at random in a brainstorming fashion), but I don’t want to put anyone on the spot, so you always have the option of saying “pass” without any shame.
Quizzes: If you miss a quiz because of an unexcused absence, you may not make it up. If the absence is excused, then I will assign you a writing assignment that will be graded and carry the same weight as the missed quiz. Unannounced reading quizzes are always a possibility.

Protocol: Please see forthcoming sheet for information about 2-person team protocols, which are 2-page summaries of a particular week’s content.

Papers: You will write three papers. For each paper I will provide a handout detailing the assignment and my expectations. A late paper will be lowered a full grade for each class it is late.

Attendance: You are allowed three unexcused absences. More than three unexcused absences will have a serious effect on your grade. Each unexcused absences after three will result in a lowering of your final grade by a full grade. If your final grade is an A- and you have 4 absences, then your grade for the course will be a B-. This policy will be strictly followed. Excused absences require an official note from a doctor or student affairs. If you have more than 7 absences then you will fail the course. If you do miss a class you must (a) get notes from another student, (b) ask me for handouts I might have distributed and (c) ask for instructions for the next class. If you are absent, do not assume that you know where we are in the readings.

Students must keep their cell phones off during class, not on vibrate or silence. Please: no eating during class. Anyone using a computer or tablet reader MUST sit in the first or second row.
Syllabus of Readings (subject to revision)

August

Overtures: Disenchantments

Week 1: The Disenchantment of Modern Youth

T 27 Schiller, “The Gods of Greece”


September

Week 2: The Disenchantment (Entzauberung) of the World: Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (pdf)

T 3

Th 5

Week 3: The Disenchantment with Objective Truth: Protagoras handout (pdf) & Stefanick, Absolute Relativism

T 10

Th 12

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Week 4: Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies, Preface and chs. 1-2

T 17

Th 18

Week 5: Plantinga, chs. 3-4

T 24

Th 26

October

Week 6: Plantinga, chs. 9-10

T 1

Th 3

Fall Holiday; no classes T/Th

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Week 7: John Polkinghorne, “Belief in God in an Age of Science” (pdf)
T  15
Th  17

Week 8: Benedict, “The Regensburg Lecture” (pdf)
T  22
Th  24

Week 9: Sokolowski, chs. 1-2
T  29
Th  31

November

Week 10: Sokolowski, chs. 3-4
T  5
Th  7

Week 11: Sokolowski, chs. 10, 14
T  12
Th  14

Week 12: Sokolowski, ch. 18
T  19
Th  21

Week 13: John Haldane, “The Restless Heart: Philosophy and the Meaning of Theism” (pdf)
T  26
Th  28  Thanksgiving; no class

Week 14: Francis, Lumen Fidei (pdf)
T  3
Th  5

Week 15: The Re-enchantment of the World? (Reading TBA)
T  10
Th  12