

Philosophy of Religion – Second half

Topic and readings, week by week

7. Faith and devotion

One way to argue that religious faith can be rational is to compare it with non-religious faith (or trust): faith in my friends; faith in my doctor; faith in democracy. In many contexts we adopt legitimate beliefs by going beyond the available evidence. What are the differences between these kinds of faith. And how are we to distinguish 'legitimate' faith from 'blind' faith, superstition, wishful thinking, and indeed from fanaticism?

- a. Sliwa P (2018) 'Know-how and acts of faith'. Benton, Matthew, Hawthorne, John & Rabinowitz, Dani (eds.) *Knowledge, Belief, and God: New Insights in Religious Epistemology*. Oxford University Press.
- b. Spiegel J (2013) 'Open-mindedness and religious devotion'. *SOPHIA* vol. 52.

8. Universal love vs. love of significant others

The Christian God commands me to love my neighbour. What does such universal love (agape) mean in this context, exactly? I have only finite energy – which neighbours should I spend my love on? And how do I reconcile such universal love with my love for intimate partners, friends and family? Can agape be overridden by one's duty to meet the needs of family members who are dependent on me?

- a. Sullivan-Dunbar S (2009) 'Christian Love, Material Needs, and Dependent Care: A Feminist Critique of the Debate on Agape and "Special Relations"'. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 29, No. 2,
- b. Andolsen B (1981) 'Agape in feminist ethics'. *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 9(1)

9. Forgiveness

The Christian God instructs me to forgive those who trespass against me, presumably as an expression of love. Should such forgiveness be unconditional, i.e. regardless of whether I receive an apology or compensation? How much is forgiveness within one's control?

- a. Giannini H. (2017) 'Hope as grounds for forgiveness: a Christian argument for universal, unconditional forgiveness'. *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 45(1)
- b. Bash A (2011) 'Forgiveness: a re-appraisal'. *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 24(2).

10. Divine Command Theory and ethics

The central problem here comes from Plato's dialogue *The Euthyphro*, and it concerns the relationship between God and morality. Imagine that I am tempted to steal. Is stealing wrong because God prohibits it? Or does God (who is good) prohibit it because it is wrong? In the first case, God's commands seem arbitrary; in the second, God's commands seem redundant.

- a. Harrison G. (2015) 'The Euthyphro, divine command theory and moral realism'. *Philosophy* vol. 90 no. 351.
- b. Plaistead D (2017) 'On justifying one's acceptance of divine command theory'. *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* vol. 81.

11. The Problem of Evil

Job is famous (notorious) for suffering undeserved torment but preserving his faith in God. What does the story tell us about evil? About God? About Job? About Christianity?

- a. Neiman S (2021) 'The rationality of the world: A philosophical reading of the Book of Job' *ABC*.
<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/philosophical-reading-of-the-book-of-job/11054038>
- b. McBrayer J (2017) 'The problem of evil and sceptical theism'. *Philosophy* vol. 81.

12. Religious Upbringing

Religious believer parents generally want to bring their children up *in* the religion; that is, they want to teach the religious principles and stories *as the truth*, rather than teach it anthropologically, as what e.g. Christians happen to believe. This seems as legitimate as parents bringing up their children in their language and culture. Is this unfair on the child?

- a. Swift A (2020) 'Parents' Rights, Children's Religion: A Familial Relationship Goods Approach'. *Journal of Practical Ethics* 8(2).
- b. Mills C (2003) 'The child's right to an open future'. *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34(4).