

Philosophy of Religion: The Nature, Ethics, and Rationality of Faith

Professor Lara Buchak

This seminar will examine different approaches, both historical and contemporary, to the question of what faith is. Several guiding questions will be important as we examine each approach. Is religious faith the same attitude as mundane faith? What is the relationship between faith and belief, between faith and knowledge, and between faith and doubt? What is the role of desire in faith, and in rational belief? Does having faith require going against the evidence? When is faith rationally required or rationally impermissible? When is faith morally required or morally impermissible? To what extent is faith an attitude that is essential to ordinary human lives, and why?

This course is intended for graduate students in philosophy, but advanced undergraduates may enroll with permission. No background in philosophy of religion or in epistemology is required

Assignments

Presentation: Each student must prepare a short presentation on the readings for one week. You should consider yourself an expert on that week's reading, and be prepared to respond to other students' questions and help clarify the discussion.

Paper: Each student will write a paper of length and quality appropriate for a graduate student in philosophy. Please consult with me about your topic before you begin writing. Papers are due on Friday, Dec 12th.

Graduate students please note: this course may fill any of the "area requirements," depending on the content of your paper.

Schedule of Readings

1. Introduction: Faith and Epistemology (Sept 8)

No reading – introduction.

2. Faith as Trust in Testimony I (Sept 15)

Eleanor Stump (2003), "Faith," Chapter. 12 of *Aquinas*.

Eleanor Stump (2014), "Faith, Wisdom, and the Transmission of Knowledge Through Testimony."

Optional: Thomas Aquinas (1265-74), *Summa Theologica*, excerpts.

3. Faith as Trust in Testimony II (Sept 22)

Richard Foley (2001), "Self-Trust and the Authority of Others," in *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*.

Trent Dougherty (2014), "Faith, Trust, and Testimony," in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, Callahan and O'Connor (eds.), OUP.

Optional: John Locke (1689), "Of Faith and Reason, and their Distinct Provinces," in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Optional: Augustine of Hippo (391), "On the Profit of Believing," excerpts.

4. Faith and Foundationalism (Sept 29)

Alvin Plantinga (1983), "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, Plantinga and Wolterstorff (eds.), University of Notre Dame Press. Pp 47-91. (Optional: pp 16-47)

Optional: John Calvin (1536), "Institutes of the Christian Religion," III, ii.

Optional: Sanford C. Goldberg (2014), "Does Externalist Epistemology Rationalize Religious Commitment?"

5. Faith and Disagreement (Oct 6)

David Christensen (2007), "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"

Thomas Kelly (2013), "Disagreement and the Burdens of Judgment"

Optional: Catherine Elgin (2010), "Persistent Disagreement"

6. Faith as Doxastic Venture (Oct 13)

John Bishop, Believing by Faith, Chapters 5&6.

Optional: John Bishop, Believing by Faith, Chapter 4.

Optional: William James, "The Will to Believe."

7. Faith and Theory Choice (Oct 20)

Nancey Murphy (1990), *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, excerpts.

8. Faith as Sub-Doxastic Venture (Oct 27)

Andrei Buckareff, "Can Faith be a Doxastic Venture?"

William Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith."

9. Faith and Duty (Nov 3)

Soren Kierkegaard (1843), *Fear and Trembling*, pp 1-67. (Preface through Problema I)

Andrew Cross (2003), "Faith and the Suspension of the Ethical in Fear and Trembling."

Optional: *The Bhagavad Gita* (~3rd century BCE), excerpts.

10. Faith and Subjectivity (Nov 10)

Soren Kierkegaard (1843), *Fear and Trembling*, pp 82-123. (Problema III)

Michelle Kosch (2008), "What Abraham Couldn't Say."

Optional: *Fear and Trembling*, pp 68-82. (Problema II)

11. Faith and Risk (Nov 17)

Adams (1982), "Kierkegaard's Arguments Against Objective Reasoning in Religion."

Buchak (2012), "Can it be Rational to have Faith?"

12. Faith, Doubt, and Losing Faith (Nov 24)

Daniel Howard-Snyder (2013), "Propositional Faith: What it is and what it is not."

Evan Fales (2014), "Making and Breaking Faith."

Optional: Saadia Gaon (933), *Emunoth ve-Deoth*, Introduction.

Optional: Norman Lamm (1972), "Faith and Doubt"

13. Functional Faith (Dec 1)

Kvanvig (2014), "Epistemic Fetishism and Deweyan Faith."

Optional: Kvanvig (2013), "Affective Theism and People of Faith."

Optional: Dewey (1934), *A Common Faith*, excerpts.

14. Presentations of Student Papers (Dec 8)

FINAL PAPER DUE – Friday Dec 12