PHIL 146 The Idea of God
Fall, 2015

Palle Yourgrau
yourgrau@brandeis.edu
Office Hrs., Wed., 2:15 – 3:30, and by appt. Rabb 332

This is a philosophy class, but it is not a class in the philosophy of religion, in the usual sense. It is a course devoted to the study of being, in this case, divine being. We will investigate, compare and contrast this idea as it emerges in ancient Greek myth (the polytheism of Homer) and in Greek philosophy (the monotheism of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), and then as it arises in the monotheistic Biblical tradition in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Gospels. Thus, the course could be subtitled: From Athens to Jerusalem. We will address such questions as: what kind of being is God? (material or immaterial? necessary or contingent? personal or impersonal?) How does God relate to the good? (does one define the other?) How should non-divine beings relate to divine being? (through prayer? imitation? obedience?)

For readings, we begin with E. Gilson, God and Philosophy, in relation to which we discuss Homer's gods. We build up to Plato's unhappiness with this theology, and read closely The Euthyphro. We look at R. Sharvy's essay, "Euthyphro 9d - 11b: Analysis and Definition in Plato and Others". We look also at The Phaedo, and time permitting, The Timaeus. We move on to Aristotle's theology (the unmoved mover) at the end of De Anima and in Bk. XII of The Metaphysics, and read some of A. Kosman's related essays ("What Does the Maker Mind Make?"; "Divine Being and Divine Thinking", etc.). We then move on to the Bible and compare and contrast the Bible with Plato and Aristotle, as well as Homer, and discuss the rise and fall, and rise again of anthropomorphism, of various sorts, from Homer's version, to Plato's and Aristotle's recoiling entirely, to a new kind in the Hebrew Bible, and a different but related new kind in the Gospels.

We thus come, in a sense, full circle in what could be called the "theological clock". We will read brief passages first from the Hebrew Bible, the opening of Genesis, and also Adam and Eve -- we look at L. Kass's essay on Genesis ("Evolution and the Bible"), and if time permits, also at L. Strauss's essay, which Kass builds on -- and Exodus (where Moses encounters God). We then read selections from the Gospels, from John and Matthew, and then at S. Weil, Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks. We read attempts to relate the two traditions, as in M. Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Perspective on Incarnation" and The Body of Faith.
Texts:

1) E. Gilson, *God and Philosophy*
2) Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Hackett; Transl. G.M.A. Grube)
3) S. Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*
4) M. Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel*

Writing Assignments:

Several short papers (3 - 5 ppg), and a final, slightly longer paper or take home essay exam. Papers must be submitted as hard copies. Late papers will be penalized half a grade for each day late.

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend every lecture, and to stay until the end of each lecture. Roll will be taken, and for every unexcused absence (or unexcused exit before the end of the lecture), after the first, the final grade will be lowered by half a grade. (Thus, a B turns into a B-.)

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Note:

No ipads, iphones, or any such computer related device to be used in class. The only "i" I want to see in class is you.*

*Please Note: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and need to have special accommodations for this class, please see me immediately. Also please note that any case of dishonesty (cheating on a test, using materials, including from the internet, and failing to cite its origin) is a serious academic infraction and is subject to disciplinary action.