

Philosophy 23: Fourth Study Questions

Main Question for the Course (draw on all readings):

Discuss the relation between religion and religious experience. What is genuinely religious experience and how do we know what is not? What are its manifestations? What can properly be said about it? How can we tell false from genuine religion, i.e., religious experience? Why is it that those who profess a religion may be falsely religious and those who do not profess any religion may be truthfully religious? What IS religion that makes this so? For example: Why is religious fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam idolatry and NOT a return to an archaic fundament, a return to a genuine religion? How might Buddhism be a genuine religion even without God or is that impossible given what a genuine religious experience must be?

Taliaferro

1. Give the strongest versions of each of the 4 arguments for the existence of God given in Taliaferro, then the strongest objections you can find or develop to each.
2. What is the problem of evil? What are the best arguments for solving this problem presented in Taliaferro and what are the strongest objections given or that you can develop? What does Guerriere (esp. pp. 99-100) say that undermines any arguments for or against the existence of God based on freedom and/or evil?

New Atheists:

What value does the thinking of the new atheists have? What are the limits and drawbacks? What are some of the central arguments of the "New Atheists" against religion? In what way are they useful? In what way, if any, do they miss the mark? Some of them aim at all religions, not just religions that are God centered. Do their arguments work equally well for theistic and non-theistic religions?

New Atheists, Taliaferro, Guerriere, and Miller

1. How does Guerriere show the primary problem with the New Atheist in saying "The lack of an experience is not the experience of a lack." "In the end, the only tenable positions are theism and nontheism: critical experience and the lack of it." What does this mean and why does it purportedly show that agnosticism and atheism (New Atheists) are uncritical and untenable?
2. How does Guerriere actually do better what the New Atheists improperly aim at by showing that much of religion is not genuine? How would the new atheists and Guerriere agree about much of religion in that Guerriere says religion is subject to fraud, superstition, mystification, ideology, illusion, etc. (falsity for/in/of Religion)? Yet Guerriere like Miller is a theist. Why should their arguments give pause to both theists and atheists that they are missing something?
3. Why do Miller (Ch 8) and Guerriere (esp. pp. 97-100) think speculative arguments for or against theism fail in principle? What does Miller say about our ordinary beliefs in God? Why is *that* God "dead" and in fact, never could have been? How is this and Guerriere's view connected to the implausibility or rather even complete irrelevance of the arguments you studied in Taliaferro? What presuppositions do the traditional conceptions and arguments about God and the traditional and popular widely held beliefs about God share in common that make them irrelevant such that even the most brilliant arguments are superfluous and ordinary beliefs in God are counter-productive

escapes that lead AWAY from the sacred and not toward it? (I realize this is a loaded question, but your task here is to show why A) speculative arguments cannot get off the ground without and are parasitic on an experience of the sacred that does not reduce to merely personal subjective states and B) what is fundamentally wrong with common popular beliefs in God?)

Siderits/Buddhism: Study Questions

1. What are the central features of Buddhism, Four Noble Truths, 8-fold path, three characters of reality, etc.?
2. What is the Buddhist view of faith and supernatural revelation? How would faith be an obstacle to nirvana or liberation? How are nirvana, critical thinking, and objective fact related? What was the Buddha's stance on metaphysics and theory?
3. What is the significance of Buddhism's "atheism" or "polytheism."?
4. In what way does Buddhism see truth as ambiguous (theory of two truths)? What are conventional truth and convenient designators versus objective truth?
5. The idea of karma is historically intrinsic to Buddhism. Is it philosophically or religiously intrinsic? Would it be possible to reject it without giving up Buddhism?
6. What is existential suffering as opposed to physical pain and emotional suffering? Why is that the core issue? What is the relation of this to the doctrines of no self (anatman) and impermanence (anicca)? Why is the claim of the fiction of the self central to Buddhism and to liberation?
7. What does "I" refer to? What are the five skandhas? What is it we mistake for a self?
8. What is the paradox of liberation?
9. What is the relation of philosophy and meditation in Buddhism?

Russon, Buddhism, Guerriere, Miller

1. With Russon we have a view that there is something inherent to human experience in general that provides a basis for ethics and possibly for understanding Miller's and Guerriere's claims about the sacred and salvational power. How might Russon show that his view can encompass religion and religious experience as one kind of emancipatory experience instead of Guerriere's position that religion and religious experience is the primary if not exclusive domain of confronting human freedom and "whether or not one will *be*. As a possibility for human decision, religion is the possibilization of man." (p. 101).
2. Russon would say that genuine education, therapy, and philosophy can provide a larger context for such possibilization of man. Would this make religion superfluous, or just the non genuine religion Miller, Guerriere, and the New Atheists reject?
3. What do Russon and Siderits (Buddhism) have in common?
4. How would you defend Siderits (Buddhism) as a fully viable approach to the sacred as opposed to Guerriere's claim that Buddhism is a salvational religion but incomplete?
5. How do Russon and Siderits (Buddhism) provide a viable alternative to Guerriere's and Miller's theism? How would Russon and/or Buddhism provide a genuine "axis mundi" as an alternative to the "verticality" of the Abrahamic religions? (Steinbock: verticality versus idolatry). Do we need the context of theism in order to make sense of idolatry? Could idolatry be construed as having no sense of the sacred regardless of one's experience of or belief about the sacred?