

## **PL290 Philosophy Versus God**

Seminar Leader: Jeffrey Champlin  
Course Times: Fri 9:00-12:30  
Location: P24-0-Conference Room (20)  
Email: j.champlin@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: Fri 12:30-1:30 and by appointment

### **Course Description**

Since the 18th century, European philosophy has enacted a sustained critique of religion largely aimed at freeing humanity from irrational intellectual dogma and unquestioned moral and political authority. This course engages major challenges to religion with a view to both comprehending the alternative modes of thinking that emerge and also carefully tracking the religious concepts that are transformed or (supposedly) discarded in each philosophical revision. Attention to contemporary insights from evolutionary biology (regarding the emergence of the ability to create symbols and the growth of cities) and aesthetics (use of narrative, personification, metaphor) aim to question the assumptions of the secularization hypothesis that sees only a gradual rationalization of thinking in the critique of God. Authors include Hume, Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud, Arendt, and Derrida.

### **Requirements**

We will make the most of the liberal arts seminar format by developing ideas and analysis through a process of discussion and writing. Toward that end, each student will contribute a short presentation and write a midterm and final paper. Overall class participation is also essential, and will be evaluated based on consistently preparing the readings and class engagement.

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Beyond that, instructors are free to set policies about whether they wish to see documentation for further excused absences and about how further unexcused absences affect the participation grade.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2020:** Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

If students are feeling ill, they will have the opportunity to make up for their participation later by submitting a short response paper on the reading. Additional measures will be taken to keep everyone up to date as needed.

### **Assessment**

Class presentations: Students will present on one text as per a sign-up sheet. Each presentation of about 15 minutes will examine key passages of your choice as guided by a commentary handout that I will provide. You are encouraged to write your midterm or final papers on the text that you present on. In this manner, your essay can expand on the insights and questions that arose from your class contribution and the discussion that follows your readings.

### **Writing Assignments**

Students will write two papers. The first will be focused on one author and the second will develop a longer comparative analysis of two texts we have studied in the class. The midterm paper will be 2,000 words, the final will be 3,000 words.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Class participation (quality and quantity): 25%

Presentation: 20%

Midterm essay (2000 words): 25%

Final essay (3000 words): 30%

## Course Materials

The course will have a reader that all students should purchase. In addition, the books below should be purchased:

### **To Purchase:**

Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1998,2008) ISBN-10: 0521599644

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*. (New York; Norton, 1961). ISBN 0 393-01120-8

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols / The Antichrist* (New York: Penguin, 1968)

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) ISBN 978-0-521-60261-7

### **In Reader or shared on Google Classroom** (full reference information in the reader):

Arendt, "World Alienation," (From *The Human Condition*); "Religion and Politics" (From *Essays in Understanding*)

Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (Selections)

Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge." (From *Acts of Religion*)

Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Selections)

Harai, *Sapiens* (Selections)

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ch10: "Of Miracles"; ch11: "Of Particular Providence and of a future state"

Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "VII. Religion"; "VIII. Absolute Knowing"  
*The Philosophy of History* (Selections)

Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"

### **Schedule**

September 4 Introduction, readings provided in class.

September 11 Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (Selections)

Harai, *Sapiens* (Selections, uploaded on classroom site)

September 18 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, "Ch10: Of Miracles"; "Ch11: Of Particular Providence and of a future state"

September 25 Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

October 2 Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

October 9 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Selections)

October 16 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Selections); Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"

**Midterm papers due October 16**

October 23 No class, FALL BREAK

November 30 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "VII. Religion"; "VIII. Absolute Knowing"  
*The Philosophy of History* (Selections)

November 6 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "VII. Religion"; "VIII. Absolute Knowing"  
*The Philosophy of History* (Selections)

November 13 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols; The Antichrist*

November 20 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

November 27 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

December 4 Arendt, "World Alienation," in: *The Human Condition*; "Religion and Politics" in:  
*Essays in Understanding*.

December 11 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," in: *Acts of Religion*

December 18 (Completion week)

**Final papers due December 18**