

Scheme of work: The metaphysics of God

This scheme of work for A-level Philosophy (7172) is designed to help you plan your teaching.

Introduction

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 1 | Deploy the key philosophical concepts and techniques students have learnt in Epistemology in a new context.Students should be able to reference their ‘philosophical toolkit’ of key concepts and techniques, built up during the Epistemology course.As there is a substantial body of accessible literature on the philosophy of religion, this part of the course gives students opportunities to develop and refine their independent learning and research skills. |  | EmpiricismRationalismInductionDeductionA prioriA posterioriArgument premise, conclusion, inference, entailment, assumptionPremiseAssumptionInferenceEntailmentConclusion | Application of key philosophical concepts and techniques to new arguments. | Test on definitions of key terms and concepts. |

The concept and nature of ‘God’

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 2–3 | It is important to clarify that this is about what philosophers mean when they talk about God – the key attributes of God. These are, in themselves, controversial, so students should know that we have selected some key ones for consideration:* omniscience
* omnipotence: no limitation (eg Descartes) vs some limitations (eg Aquinas)
* supreme goodness
* eternal/everlasting.

As articulating the meaning of the attributes and considering what happens when they are combined tend to run together, the distinction between weeks 2 and 3 will be fluid.Key arguments can be introduced here – so the paradox of the stone and the Euthyphro dilemma. Teachers may wish students to engage directly with the texts, or provide edited versions.The focus for the teaching should be on analysis of the arguments and students can be encouraged to present the arguments in their logical form, rather than in extended writing. | Aquinas, T, *Summa Theologica*,part 1, question 25, article 3Plato, *Euthyphro*Stump, E, Kretzmann, N, *Eternity: journal of philosophy*, 78 (8):429–458 | ConceptDefinitionAttributeGodOmniscientOmnipotentSupremely goodEternal/ everlastingArgumentPremise,ConclusionInferenceEntailmentAssumptionParadoxDilemmaFallacyReductio ad absurdumNecessary truthContingent statementFactual impossibilityLogical impossibilitySelf-contradiction | Activities focusing on:* understanding the definitions of key terms
* moving from a broad understanding of a concept to the detailed clarification of concepts.
* understanding the nature and structure of arguments
* the drawing of and supporting of appropriate conclusions.
 | Definition questions.Outline questions.Outline questions.Essay questions.Possibly giving different groups an attribute or combination of attributes and asking them to generate an essay for the whole class to use. |

Arguments relating to the existence of God

Introduction

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 4 | Begin by asking students to draw on their work in Epistemology and consider how to prove that something exists. What strategies for doing this would be open to an empiricist and a rationalist?What kinds of arguments could be used and what are the strengths and limitations of each?What additional issues might proving the existence of God bring in?Teachers should reinforce the notion that, in philosophy, if asked about the existence of God, students can legitimately argue that God does not exist, that God does exist or that we cannot know whether or not God exists. What is important is the quality of the argument.For this reason, a student might choose to argue in a way which is directly contrary to his or her own beliefs, because that way is philosophically more interesting. |  | RationalistEmpiricistInductionDeductionA prioriA posteriori |  |  |

Teleological/design arguments

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 5–6 | Students should understand Paley’s argument – focusing on a particular understanding of purpose – parts working together for an end. They should understand that Paley himself recognised and responded to some issues with it. It is important that students understand the logical form of the argument(s).They should understand Swinburne’s argument – from regularity – and how it is similar to and different from Paley’s argument.As the arguments are relatively straightforward, students could be encouraged to read independently here, focusing on commentary on Paley/Swinburne and/or on the ways in which other philosophers have engaged with the design argument. There might be opportunities for cross-curricular work with colleagues from science departments.Students could consider the extent to which particular objections had been anticipated by Paley and how convincing his response to them might be.For Hume, the emphasis should be on the empiricist basis of his objections.Hume:1. proportional effect to cause
2. uniqueness of the universe
3. infinite regression
4. multiple deities
5. comparison to machine
6. chance
7. signs of disorder.

Kant – is the designer God? (no specific text for Kant here) | Paley, W, *Natural theology*, chapters 1, 2 and 5Swinburne, R G, *The argument from design*, 43 (165), 199–212Hume, D, *Dialogues concerning natural religion*, parts II, V, VIII and IX | TeleologyPurposeRegularityTemporal orderInductionInferenceExplanationHypothesisOckham’s razorScientific lawCause/effectInfinite regression | Detailed textual analysis.* Independent research and reading skills.
* Activities focusing on:
* the drawing of and supporting of appropriate conclusions
* the generation of examples to demonstrate understanding
* understanding the nature and structure of the argument.
 | Outline questions.Peer assessment of short essays applying a single objection to the design argument in detail. Revising and improving the work in the light of feedback. |

Cosmological arguments

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 7–8 | It might be helpful to begin with Kalam, as the general form of the argument – from the fact of the universe to God as cause/explanation.Hume’s objections – could use Copleston and Anscombe (Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* chapter 5 - see *Additional resources list* page 3) to evaluate Hume.Russell’s objections.Then move to the detailed analysis of [Aquinas’ versions](http://aquinasonline.com/Topics/5ways.html):* first – movement/change
* second – cause/effect
* third – necessary being.

Descartes’ trademark argument provides an opportunity to consider in detail how a rationalist version of a cosmological argument might be formulated. | Aquinas, T, *Summa Theologica*,part 1, question 25, article 3Descartes, R, *Meditations on first philosophy*, 3Hume, D, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, section 11The Kalam version is set out clearly in the [Stanford encyclopedia](http://plato.stanford.edu/%20entries/cosmological-%20argument/#5) | CauseInduction and deductionFallacy of composition | Activities focusing on:* understanding the nature and structure of arguments
* the drawing of and supporting of appropriate conclusions
 | Outline questions.Essay questions. |

Ontological arguments

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 9–11  | The ontological argument is complex and challenging and so three weeks have been given, to encourage students to develop an understanding of how the argument has been formulated, objections raised and then reformulated to respond to those objections.Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* chapter 4 (see the *Additional resources list*, page 3) is useful here, as it offers detail on each of the arguments, alongside an overview of the debate.The texts themselves are challenging, which provides a useful opportunity for students to develop their skills in the use of secondary literature.Anselm is a sensible place to start and then Gaunilo’s objections, making Gaunilo’s strategy clear. Students should consider how far each of Gaunilo’s objections really does impact on Anselm’s argument – so distinguishing between crucial and less crucial arguments – so evaluating the extent to which Anselm’s version can (or cannot) survive Gaunilo’s attack.A similar approach can be taken to Descartes and Malcolm’s versions – with appeal to Hume and Kant. | Anselm, *Proslogium*, chapters II–IVDescartes, R, *Meditations on first philosophy*, 5Hume, D, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, part IXMalcolm, N, *Anselm’s ontological arguments: the philosophical review*,69, 41–62 | DefinitionAnalysisPropertyA prioriAccidentalNecessaryContingentPerfection | Considering precisely how arguments have been refined in the light of objections and criticisms.Activities focusing on discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position. | * Definition questions.
* Outline questions.
* Essay questions.
 |

The problem of evil

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 12–13  | This topic provides an opportunity to revisit and build on some of the issues raised in the consideration of the concept of God.As always, students should develop a detailed understanding of the issue, so understand, for example, that distinctions have been made between different kinds of evil –physical and moral – so different approaches might be needed for each.Students should also understand that the problem of evil can be considered in both incompatibility formulations (showing that God logically cannot exist), or evidential formulations (showing that it is very unlikely that God exists).Students should be able to explain precisely how the strategies for addressing the problem work.Again, as the Problem of Evil is a reasonably accessible issue, students should be encouraged to read independently beyond the specification. | Hick, J, *Evil and the God of love*, chapters 13–17, with the core argument in chapter 13Plantinga, A, *God, freedom and evil: essays in philosophy*, 29–34 and 59–64 | OmnipotenceOmniscienceSupreme goodnessPhysical evilMoral evilConsistent/ inconsistentFree willDeterminismLibertarianism(Free) agent | Independent research and learning.Application of philosophical reasoning to ‘real world’ problems.Activities focusing on:* understanding the definitions of key terms and distinctions
* the generation of examples to demonstrate understanding
* discussing the relative merits of different objections to a position.
 | Debate on God and evil. |

Religious language

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Teaching notes** | **Anthology references** | **Key concepts** | **Skills development** | **Assessment** |
| 14–15 | Empiricist principle of meaning for a propositional claim (statement).Two versions: verifiable empirically in practice or in principle.Students can be encouraged to think strategically about how to engage with the verification principle either attack it specifically or propose an alternative that circumvents the issue, eg is the principle self-refuting? Does it go too far and make too many statements meaningless?Religious statements as fact-asserting and issues arising.Mitchell – the Partisan – the theist will allow counter evidence, but not decisively.Hick – religious statements can be verified eschatologically.Hare – religious utterances do not make assertions – they express bliks (the lunatic example). | Ayer, A J, *The central questions of philosophy*, 22–29Ayer, A J, *Language, truth and logic*, especially chapters 1 and 6Flew, A, Hare, R M, Mitchell, B, *Theology and falsification*, in Flew, A, Macintyre, A, *New essays in philosophical theology*Hick, J, *Evil and the God of love*, chapters 13–17, especially chapter 13 | Logical positivismVerificationFalsificationPropositional claimCognitivistNon-cognitivistAssertionEschatological | Activities focusing on:* discussing the implications of particular philosophical positions
* understanding the definitions of key terms and distinctions
* the generation of examples to demonstrate understanding
* discussing the relative merits of different solutions to an issue.
 | Outline questions.Essay questions. |
| 16 | Mock exam |  |  |  |  |