

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 1, Introduction Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jim Spiegel's Philosophy of Religion course introduces the field as the philosophical analysis of religious concepts and arguments. The course will explore various topics, beginning with theistic arguments for God's existence and common objections like atheism and the problem of evil. It will also examine alternative perspectives on religious belief, such as reformed epistemology, and address issues like divine hiddenness and the doctrine of hell. Furthermore, the sessions will cover religious pluralism, miracles, the relationship between science and theology, the doctrine of providence, and core Christian doctrines like the incarnation and the trinity.

**2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 1 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Apologetics → Philosophy of Religion).**



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3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 1, Introduction

Briefing Document: Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (Dr. Jim Spiegel)

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and important ideas introduced by Dr. Jim Spiegel in the first session of his course on the Philosophy of Religion. Dr. Spiegel, a philosophy Ph.D. specializing in the philosophy of religion and ethics, outlines the scope of the course, the central questions it will address, and provides a roadmap of the topics to be covered. The course aims to critically examine concepts, ideas, and arguments relevant to various religious traditions and beliefs, potentially including philosophical theology.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Definition and Scope of Philosophy of Religion:

- Dr. Spiegel defines philosophy of religion as "the philosophical examination of concepts, ideas, and arguments that are relevant to various religious traditions and beliefs."
- This involves "the critical analysis of concepts and issues that are relevant both to religious belief and practice."
- The course may also include philosophical theology, which is "the philosophical or critical examination of concepts and doctrines within a particular religious tradition." He provides the example of scrutinizing "the logic of the atonement" or "the doctrine of hell" within Christianity.

1. Key Areas of Inquiry: Dr. Spiegel provides a comprehensive overview of the topics that will be explored in the course. These can be broadly categorized as follows:

• Arguments for the Existence of God (Theistic Arguments):

- The cosmological argument (first cause).
- The teleological argument (argument from design).
- The moral argument.
- The argument from mind or consciousness.

- The ontological argument (based on the concept of a perfect being).
- Practical or pragmatic arguments (prudential reasons for belief).
- The course will also consider "objections to those arguments along the way."
- **Atheism and the New Atheism:**
- The course will address atheism and the "cultural movement" of the new atheism of the last 10-15 years.
- It will explore the reasons behind the confidence of figures like Richard Dawkins, who believes it's "about 99% likely that there is no God."
- **Epistemology of Religious Belief:**
- The concept of "reformed epistemology" will be discussed, which posits that "you don't need arguments to justify your belief in God. You don't need evidence to make your belief in God rational."
- This view suggests that "belief in God as a basic assumption" can be a rational starting point.
- **The Problem of Evil and Divine Hiddenness:**
- The course will examine "the most important and influential objection to religious belief, which is the problem of evil": "How is it that an almighty, all-good, all-knowing God could permit such rampant suffering and immorality that we see in this world?"
- It will explore potential responses to this objection, known as "theodicies," which aim to show "that there's good reason to believe that God would want to permit evil in this world."
- Relatedly, the "problem of divine hiddenness" will be considered: "Why is God's existence, if he does exist, so unclear? Why is it not more certain and evident that God is real?" This is seen by many as an objection to theistic belief.
- **The Doctrine of Hell:**
- The course will delve into the doctrine of hell from multiple perspectives.
- It will consider whether the reality of hell constitutes evidence against religious belief (as an aspect of the problem of evil).

- It will also explore the nature and duration of suffering in hell, contrasting views such as:
 - Universalism (eventual salvation for all).
 - Traditional view (everlasting torture).
 - Conditional immortalism or annihilationism (finite suffering leading to non-existence).
- **Religious Pluralism:**
 - The question of whether "one religion or religious tradition is exclusively true" as the sole path to God and salvation will be addressed.
 - The course will also consider if "many different religions [are] potentially adequate to bring believers to God and to ultimate salvation?"
- **The Doctrine of Miracles:**
 - The rationality of believing in miracles will be examined: "How rational is it to believe that a miracle has taken place in a particular situation?"
 - The course will explore the relationship between miracles and science, and when belief in a particular miracle might be justified.
 - It will also consider if miracles are always violations of the laws of nature.
- **Science and Theology:**
 - The relationship between "empirical inquiry, the scientific method, and theological belief" will be discussed.
 - The course will consider the compatibility of these two domains and the argument that "a theological perspective offers the best kind of perspective or worldview context for the doing of science."
- **The Doctrine of Providence:**
 - This topic concerns "God's care for creation and his control over the world."
 - The extent of God's guidance in history and individual lives will be explored, considering perspectives ranging from active intervention to a more deistic "letting things run on their own."

- **Key Christian Doctrines:**

- The course will conclude with an examination of two central Christian doctrines:
- **Divine Incarnation:** The philosophical problems arising from the belief that "Jesus Christ [is] both human and divine." The question of how these two natures can be reconciled will be addressed.
- **The Divine Trinity:** The challenge of understanding how God can be "one being and yet three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, simultaneously." The course will consider objections, such as the Muslim perspective that this implies polytheism, and explore ways to rationally maintain this doctrine.

Quotes:

- "Philosophy of religion is the philosophical examination of concepts, ideas, and arguments that are relevant to various religious traditions and beliefs."
- "Philosophical theology involves the philosophical or critical examination of concepts and doctrines within a particular religious tradition."
- Regarding the new atheism, Dr. Spiegel mentions, "...why, according to Richard Dawkins, it's about 99% likely that there is no God."
- On reformed epistemology: "You don't need arguments to justify your belief in God. You don't need evidence to make your belief in God rational. It's a proper starting point or a basic belief for the believer."
- The problem of evil is framed as: "How is it that an almighty, all-good, all-knowing God could permit such rampant suffering and immorality that we see in this world?"
- Regarding divine hiddenness: "Why is God's existence, if he does exist, so unclear? Why is it not more certain and evident that God is real?"
- On miracles: "How rational is it to believe that a miracle has taken place in a particular situation? Is it fundamentally at odds with science or a scientific outlook to believe that God performs miracles?"
- Concerning the relationship between science and theology: "Many have argued that, in fact, science is best done; it's most reasonably conducted in the context of religious belief."
- Defining providence: "...God's care for creation and his control over the world."

- On the incarnation: "...philosophical problems that arise in the context of the doctrine of Jesus Christ being both human and divine, right? God became human, and he was incarnate. How is that not a contradiction?"
- Regarding the trinity: "...how can we maintain, in a consistent way, that God is one being and yet three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, simultaneously? Is that a contradiction? As our Muslim friends and others would maintain, that's ultimately really believing in polytheism."

Conclusion:

Session 1 of Dr. Spiegel's Philosophy of Religion course provides a broad and engaging introduction to the field. It sets the stage for a critical examination of fundamental questions surrounding religious belief, arguments for and against the existence of God, and the philosophical challenges posed by various religious doctrines and experiences. The course promises a rigorous and multifaceted exploration of the intellectual landscape of the philosophy of religion.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 1, Introduction

Philosophy of Religion: Introduction

Quiz

1. What is the philosophy of religion, and what does its study typically involve?
2. Explain the difference between the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. Provide an example of a topic that might be studied within philosophical theology.
3. Briefly describe the cosmological argument for the existence of God. What is the core premise of this argument?
4. What is the ontological argument for God's existence, and on what concept does it primarily rely?
5. Explain the perspective of reformed epistemology regarding the rationality of belief in God.
6. What is the problem of evil, and why is it considered a significant objection to theistic belief?
7. How does the problem of divine hiddenness function as a potential objection to the existence of God?
8. Briefly outline the traditional view and annihilationism regarding the doctrine of hell.
9. What is the doctrine of miracles, and what are some of the questions raised within the philosophy of religion concerning miracles?
10. What is the doctrine of providence, and what are some different perspectives on its extent?

Answer Key

1. The philosophy of religion is the philosophical examination of concepts, ideas, and arguments relevant to various religious traditions and beliefs. It involves the critical analysis of concepts and issues pertinent to both religious belief and practice.

2. The philosophy of religion is a broader field examining religious concepts generally, while philosophical theology is the philosophical examination of doctrines within a specific religious tradition. An example of philosophical theology is the logical analysis of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.
3. The cosmological argument posits that the universe requires a first cause, and this first cause is God. The core premise is that everything that begins to exist has a cause, and this chain of causes cannot be infinite, necessitating an uncaused first cause.
4. The ontological argument reasons for God's existence based on the very concept of God as a perfect being possessing all perfections. It argues that a perfect being must necessarily include existence as one of its perfections.
5. Reformed epistemology suggests that belief in God can be rational without requiring arguments or evidence. It posits that belief in God can be a properly basic belief, a rational starting point for an individual.
6. The problem of evil questions how an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God could permit the existence of widespread suffering and immorality in the world. It challenges the coherence of these divine attributes with the reality of evil.
7. The problem of divine hiddenness argues that if God exists and desires a relationship with humanity, it is puzzling why his existence is not more obvious and certain. The lack of clear and undeniable evidence is seen as a potential mark against theistic belief.
8. The traditional view of hell posits it as a state of eternal suffering for the damned. Annihilationism, or conditional immortalism, suggests that hell is finite in duration, and those in hell may eventually cease to exist or be annihilated.
9. The doctrine of miracles concerns the belief that God occasionally intervenes in the natural order to perform extraordinary events. Questions arise about the rationality of believing in miracles and their relationship to natural laws and scientific understanding.
10. The doctrine of providence deals with God's care for and control over creation. Perspectives vary on the extent of this control, ranging from God actively guiding history and individual lives to a more deistic view where God does not intervene.

Essay Format Questions

1. Critically analyze one of the theistic arguments (cosmological, teleological, moral, or ontological) discussed in the source material. What are its strengths and weaknesses? How might an atheist respond to this argument?
2. Compare and contrast the perspectives of the "new atheism" and reformed epistemology regarding the justification for belief in God. Which perspective do you find more compelling, and why?
3. Discuss the problem of evil as a challenge to theistic belief. Evaluate one of the theodicies (though not explicitly detailed in this excerpt, consider general approaches like the free will defense or soul-making theodicies) as a potential response to this problem.
4. Explore the philosophical challenges arising from either the doctrine of the divine incarnation or the doctrine of the Trinity as presented in the source material. Can these doctrines be considered logically coherent? Why or why not?
5. Analyze the potential relationship between science and theology as discussed in the source material. Can these two domains of inquiry be compatible? Under what conditions, and what are the potential benefits or tensions in their interaction?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Philosophy of Religion:** The branch of philosophy that critically examines religious beliefs, concepts, arguments, and practices.
- **Philosophical Theology:** The philosophical or critical examination of concepts and doctrines within a specific religious tradition.
- **Theistic Arguments:** Philosophical arguments that aim to demonstrate the existence of God (also sometimes called theistic proofs).
- **Cosmological Argument:** An argument for God's existence based on the idea that the universe must have a first cause.
- **Teleological Argument (Argument from Design):** An argument for God's existence based on the apparent order, purpose, and design observed in the natural world.
- **Moral Argument:** An argument for God's existence based on the existence of objective morality.

- **Argument from Mind/Consciousness:** An argument for God's existence based on the nature of human consciousness and intellect.
- **Ontological Argument:** An argument for God's existence that proceeds from the very definition or concept of God as a perfect being.
- **Pragmatic Arguments (Prudential Reasons):** Arguments for religious belief based on the practical or beneficial consequences of having such beliefs.
- **Atheism:** The disbelief in the existence of God or gods.
- **New Atheism:** A contemporary movement characterized by a strong, often critical stance against religious belief.
- **Reformed Epistemology:** A philosophical view that holds that belief in God can be rational even without evidence or argument; it can be a properly basic belief.
- **Problem of Evil:** The challenge to the existence of an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God posed by the existence of evil and suffering in the world.
- **Theodicy:** An attempt to explain why an all-good and all-powerful God would allow evil to exist.
- **Problem of Divine Hiddenness:** The argument that if God exists and desires a relationship with humanity, it is puzzling why God's existence is not more obvious and evident.
- **Religious Pluralism:** The view that multiple religions may be valid or adequate paths to God or ultimate salvation.
- **Doctrine of Miracles:** The theological belief that God occasionally intervenes in the natural order to perform extraordinary events.
- **Science and Theology:** The relationship between empirical inquiry and the scientific method with religious beliefs and doctrines.
- **Doctrine of Providence:** The theological doctrine concerning God's care for and governance of creation.
- **Divine Incarnation:** The theological doctrine, particularly within Christianity, that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ.
- **Divine Trinity:** The Christian theological doctrine that God is one being existing in three co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- **Conditional Immortalism (Annihilationism):** The view that hell is not a state of eternal conscious torment, but rather that the unsaved will eventually cease to exist.
- **Universalism:** The theological belief that all people will eventually be saved.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 1, Introduction, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

1. What is the field of philosophy of religion? Philosophy of religion involves the philosophical examination and critical analysis of concepts, ideas, and arguments that are relevant to various religious traditions and beliefs. It extends to the scrutiny of issues pertinent to both religious belief and practice. Additionally, it often includes philosophical theology, which focuses on the philosophical examination of doctrines within a specific religious tradition, such as the logic of the atonement or divine attributes within Christianity.

2. What are some of the main arguments for the existence of God that are explored in philosophy of religion? Philosophy of religion examines various arguments for the existence of God, often referred to as theistic arguments or proofs. These include the cosmological argument, which posits a first cause for the universe; the teleological argument, also known as the argument from design; the moral argument, which reasons from the existence of morality to a divine source; the argument from mind or consciousness; and the ontological argument, which argues for God's existence based on the concept of a perfect being. Furthermore, practical or pragmatic arguments for religious belief are considered, which explore prudential reasons for believing in God.

3. How does philosophy of religion address atheism, particularly the "new atheism"? Philosophy of religion engages with atheism, including the more recent cultural movement known as the "new atheism." This involves understanding the arguments and reasons put forth by prominent new atheists for their conviction that God does not exist or is highly improbable. The field critically analyzes these arguments and contrasts them with theistic perspectives.

4. What is "reformed epistemology" and how does it relate to belief in God? Reformed epistemology is a viewpoint within the philosophy of religion that suggests belief in God does not necessarily require arguments or evidence to be rational. Instead, it proposes that belief in God can be a "basic belief," a proper starting point or assumption that is inherently rational for the believer without needing external justification.

5. What is the problem of evil, and how does philosophy of religion attempt to address it? The problem of evil is a significant challenge to religious belief, questioning how an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God could permit the extensive suffering and immorality observed in the world. Philosophy of religion explores various responses to this problem, known as theodicies. These are attempts to provide reasoned explanations for why God might allow evil to exist. Relatedly, the problem of divine hiddenness is considered, questioning why God's existence is not more obvious if he truly exists.

6. How does philosophy of religion approach the concept of hell and related doctrines? Philosophy of religion examines the doctrine of hell from multiple perspectives. One is its implications for the problem of evil – whether the existence of hell itself constitutes an argument against a benevolent God. It also explores the nature of hell, including the duration of suffering (eternal vs. finite, as in annihilationism) and the possibility of universal salvation.

7. What are some of the key questions explored regarding the relationship between different religions and the concept of miracles? Philosophy of religion grapples with religious pluralism, considering whether one religious tradition holds exclusive truth as the sole path to salvation or if multiple religions can be valid paths to God. It also analyzes the concept of miracles, questioning their rationality, their compatibility with scientific understanding, and the justification for believing in specific instances of divine intervention. The relationship between science and theology is also examined, including whether they are compatible and if a theological worldview provides a beneficial context for scientific inquiry.

8. What aspects of divine action and specific Christian doctrines does philosophy of religion analyze? Philosophy of religion delves into the doctrine of divine providence, exploring the extent of God's care and control over creation and history. It considers whether God actively intervenes in the world or allows it to operate independently. Additionally, it addresses philosophical challenges arising from core Christian doctrines such as the divine incarnation (how Jesus can be both fully human and fully divine without contradiction) and the Trinity (how God can be one being and yet three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – simultaneously without this being polytheistic or contradictory).