

Advanced Systematic Theology I Syllabus

STH TT 946; GRS PH 880

Robert Neville, Instructor, rneville@bu.edu

Office: STH 334; hours: Tue: 11-12, Wed.: 10-11

Fall 2014

Tues: 2-5

STH 317

This is the first of three courses in Advanced Systematic Theology studying ultimate realities, human predicaments and religious fulfillments, and religion, respectively. The division corresponds roughly to the Christian theological topics of God, sin/salvation/Christology, and sanctification/ecclesiology, or God, Christ, and Holy Spirit. The methodology of the course is provided by philosophical theology that aims to interpret most of the major religious traditions but in this course it is exemplified primarily with Christian material.

The purpose of the course is to develop students' own theological positions on ultimate reality or God. To this end it will study first-order issues about the nature of ultimate reality and also methodological or second-order issues about theology itself and the arguments that go into it. The philosophical problem at the heart of theologies of ultimacy is "the one and the many." The thesis of the course is that there is one ontological ultimate reality, an ontological act that creates everything determinate, including its own nature as creator. Indeterminate apart from creation, this ontological act can be symbolized only with broken symbols, of which there are three main families: as person, as consciousness, and as spontaneous emergence. There are also four cosmological ultimate realities giving rise to the religious projects of righteousness, wholeness, engagement of others, and achieving meaning or value-identity, each of which is addressed by every major religious tradition. Readings will illustrate these three families of ontological symbolism and touch on the cosmological ultimates. Standard positions within Christian philosophical theology will be explored more thoroughly than representatives of other traditions.

Learning Goals.

Goal 1. To help students become aware of the philosophical alternatives lurking behind symbols of ultimate reality, especially conceptions of God, alternatives that might be in contradiction with one another.

Goal 2. To help students become expert in the standard moves or arguments that lead thinkers to embrace one alternative or another.

Goal 3. To enable students to develop their own systematic positions concerning issues of God and other ultimate realities at a doctoral level of sophistication.

Goal 4. To improve students' ability to write research papers with imagination at the doctoral level.

Books. Please acquire the following books, which should be available at the BU Bookstore, Barnes and Noble. Neville's text, *Philosophical Theology One: Ultimates*, will be distributed electronically.

1. Chan, Wing-tsit, editor. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton UP.
2. Neville, Robert, editor. *Ultimate Realities*. SUNY
3. Neville, Robert, *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology Volume One*. SUNY, available in paper and in electronic form.
4. Nishitani, Keiji. *Religion and Nothingness*. Translated by Van Bragt. U. of California P.
5. Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*. Volume I. U. of Chicago P.
6. Wildman, Wesley J. *Religious Philosophy as Multidisciplinary Inquiry*. SUNY.

Structure and Grades. The class will be conducted as a seminar with a student making a 15 minute presentation on the assigned readings each week, with comments from each of the other students. Students will be required to write a term paper of about 20 pages, 5,000 words, on a relevant part of those topics with reference to at least some of the readings in the course. Term paper topics should be approved by the instructor before Thanksgiving; students are encouraged to speed-read all the books in the first two weeks so as to have some idea of the positions to be discussed toward the end of the course that might be of interest for the term paper. Students also will be expected to participate in the seminar discussions, and to make seminar presentations on the material; each student taking the course for credit should make at least one seminar presentation, and auditors who do the readings are invited to present as well. Grades are based on a combination of class participation, seminar presentations, and (mostly) the term paper. **Term papers are due at the last class. Incompletes will not be given except in cases of emergency as approved by the School of Theology registrar.**

Disabilities: Any students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with the instructor as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

Code of Conduct: The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found on the STH website at: www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct. All students are required to familiarize themselves with this code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions. Students should especially familiarize themselves with the section on plagiarism. **Do not plagiarize!**

Class assignments: Please prepare the assigned readings according to the following schedule.

9/2 Introduction

9/9 Wildman, *Religious Philosophy*, chapters 1-5.

9/16 Wildman, *Religious Philosophy*, chapters 6-8, Afterword; Neville, *Ultimates*, Preface and Introduction

- 9/23 Neville, *Ultimates*, Part I, entire.
- 9/30 Neville, *Ultimates*, Part II, entire.
- 10/7 Neville, *Philosophical Theology*, Part III, entire.
- 10/14 Monday class schedule, no class, no office hours.
- 10/21 Neville, *Philosophical Theology*, Part IV, entire.
- 10/28 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, Part I
- 11/4 Tillich, *Systematic Theology* volume 1, Part II.
- 11/11 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, chapters 1-3.
- 11/18 No Class; AAR
- 11/25 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, entire.
- 12/2 Chan, editor, *Source Book*, chapters 7, 19, 23, 28, 34.
- 12/9 Neville, editor, *Ultimate Realities*, chapters 1-8. **Term papers due at the beginning of class. One grade will be deducted for every 24 hours of lateness.**
- May you embrace the Ultimate before it embraces you!