Course Description

This course will introduce you to some ways of philosophically reflecting on ideas and themes drawn from religious texts and practices. It will be a mix of the traditional and the untraditional, the historical and the contemporary. It will be highly inclusive. (Many of our readings will be drawn from a brand new anthology entitled The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals.)

The course breaks down into three big units. In the first unit, we will ask what it is that philosophy of religion does. What is its subject matter? How does it differ from apologetics or theology more broadly? Is it even legitimate for us to apply the philosopher’s methods to religious texts and ideas? Finally, are there ways that we philosophers could be doing better? Are their religious subjects that we have overlooked or improperly ruled out? In the second unit, we turn to experiences of the divine. Here, we will ask whether experience of the divine must involve “higher order” cognitive powers, such as the intellect (or even “going beyond” the intellect), or can we sense the divine? Often, we refer to direct experience of the divine as a “mystical vision”, but could one possibly experience the divine through one of the other four sense modalities? Finally, we will ask whether only humans and other higher order creatures (such as angels) can experience or have a spiritual relation with the divine. In the third and final unit, we will turn to questions about the After Life. We will ask whether a good and just divinity would actually condemn any creature to eternal suffering. We will also wonder about non-human animals: Can my cat enjoy eternal life too? Finally, we will ask some questions that spring from the theistic proposition that in the After Life our bodies will be resurrected. For instance, will these bodies have gender or disabilities?

For questions about the course and for a tentative schedule and reading list, you may contact me at: aarlig@brooklyn.cuny.edu.