

Reason and the Divine

A History of the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion from Ancient Greece to the Present Day



A four-week course led by

Dr Jim Driscoll
BA BPhil DPhil (Oxon)

Wednesday evenings 4th – 25th May
6.30 for 7.00 pm

Ashley Wood Farm, Hindon Lane, Tisbury

Four week course - £50
Individual session - £15

Each week will consist of a presentation by Jim Driscoll, followed by time for questions and discussion. Arrive at six thirty for a glass of wine before the class starts at seven. The evening will finish at around quarter past eight.

Both philosophy and religion make claims about the nature of reality that go beyond what we can ascertain on the basis of the evidence of our senses. The relationship between these various claims is often caricatured as a conflict between reason and faith, although the truth is more complex than this. In this introductory course, we will examine this contested relationship in four historical contexts, the Ancient Greek world, Medieval Europe, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the time from the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* to the present day.

Week One (4th May)

Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece saw the first flowering of philosophical thought in the Western world, setting the course of its development for the next two and a half thousand years. The philosophy of Plato also saw the development of theories about the nature of reality and the divine that have been influential ever since. We will look at those theories, and examine the claims of reason to be able to reach conclusions about reality beyond the world of appearances. We will also look at Aristotle's theory of the nature of the rational soul and its relationship to the body.

Week Two (11th May)

Medieval Europe

It is often argued that European philosophical thought stagnated for a thousand years under the baleful influence of religious orthodoxy. We will examine the relationship between religious doctrine and philosophical speculation, and the intimate links between the philosophy of the schools and the work of Aristotle, referred to during this period simply as 'The Philosopher'. What emerges is a picture of unexpected complexity, where superficial conformity masks a surprising diversity of views.

Week Three (18th May)

From Descartes to the Enlightenment

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were times of extraordinary intellectual ferment. The rise of 'natural philosophy', science, created a challenge for both religious and philosophical thought. We will look at the impact of scientific thought in this period, both on the conception of human beings' place in the universe, and the conception of human reason as able to reach truths about the nature of reality.

Week Four (25th May)

The Disenchantment of Metaphysics

The history of thought from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day has in many ways been a history of disenchantment. The scientific world view has presented itself as supremely rational, and philosophy has retreated from many of its metaphysical aspirations. We will trace this disenchantment from the writings of Nietzsche through the various philosophical schools of the twentieth century, examine the claims of science to answer questions until now thought the province of religion or philosophy, and consider the prospects for the future.



Jim Driscoll studied Philosophy, Politics, and Economics before embarking on graduate study in philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford.

He received his doctorate in 2006 with a thesis in the philosophy of psychology. In Oxford, he has taught for Balliol, Lincoln, and Magdalen Colleges, amongst others, and is currently teaching logic and the history of philosophy at Corpus Christi.

Jim also has a background in adult education, having taught Access to Higher Education courses for Oxfordshire County Council, and serving as an external moderator for the Open College Network.

He has also run courses for the mental health charity Restore, taught various summer schools, and for many years has run a popular course on science, religion, and philosophy for ASE, a study-abroad programme in Bath.

At present, as well as his teaching commitments, Jim works part-time as assistant to the composer Michael Stimpson. He is a poet, playwright, and musician, and is working on his first libretto, about the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Spinoza.