

Major Themes in the Study of Modern Religious Thought

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In each case, you are to be concerned primarily with how the authors on your bibliography answer these and other, related questions:

Theological methods: What are the basic ways of conceiving the task of theology? From what sources do theologians draw? What are the fundamental historical moments in revising the conception of the task of theology? How do theologians construct arguments from their sources? How are theological arguments confirmed or denied? What is the relationship between theology and ethics?

Ethical methods: What are the basic ways of conceiving the task of ethics? What are the sources to which ethicists appeal, and what are the rules for using these sources? How are ethical arguments constructed and evaluated? What is the relationship between ethics and theology? What is the relationship between theological ethics and religious ethics? Who are the major figures in the history of ethics in the West, and what are the distinguishing features of their ethical methods?

The science and art of interpretation: What is hermeneutics, and what is its importance for theology? What are the central moments in the history of hermeneutics? What are the basic types of hermeneutical theology, and how are they constructed?

Theology of culture: What is the subdivision of theology of culture? What are the sources for this subdivision? What are the basic principles, concepts, and rules for theology of culture? What is the current state of the debate about theology of culture? What are its prospects for the future?

Prospects for a common morality: How are contemporary authors working within and between major traditions of ethical thought to develop ethical theories that are likely to promote a universal morality or at least a meaningful and productive moral discourse among persons who are embedded in different cultural contexts?

The comparative study of religion: How does one make the most valuable comparisons across religious traditions? What categories does one use as the basis for comparison? What should be compared (e.g., practical norms, concrete judgments, or abstract theories)? What are the goals of comparison: identifying commonalities, identifying differences, or some combination of the two?

Radical critiques of religion: What is critique and how does it arise in the history of culture? What are the major contributions to critical thought? In what sense does critique become radical in the 19th and 20th centuries? Is postmodernism a form of radical critique, or is it a recovery of traditional religious meaning?

Religion and politics: How do the authors on your bibliography understand these two terms? How do religion and politics influence each other? Should particular religious communities keep their views out of politics or do religious groups have a vital role to play in transforming society? Is it possible to justify a moral or political vision independently of religion? What is the relation between ethics and politics? Is politics a subfield of ethics, or are they different fields of inquiry?

Is politics the extension of ethics to the societal level? Is politics a proper object of concern for theology? How does politics influence theology? How should theology be influenced by politics?

Religion and health: What is the meaning of human well-being, and what are the respective contributions that religion and the medical/healing arts can make to human well-being? What contribution can theology and ethics make to interpreting the meaning of health and wholeness, evaluating the appropriateness of various forms of medical care, and assessing the development and use of new medical technologies?

Religion, literature, and the arts: How do authors on your bibliography understand these terms? What methods do they apply in interpreting religious content, form, and meaning in literature and other art forms?

Theology, ethics, and law: What are the types of law that function in human society, and what are the proper relations between them? What do the authors on your bibliography take to be the source, ground (i.e., what makes it binding), telos, and content of the moral law? How can humans know, in any given situation, what the law requires? What is the relation between traditions of interpreting revealed law (e.g., halakha) and the discipline of ethics?

Theology, ethics, and feminism: What is sexism? What forms has sexism taken, and how has it functioned, within the religious traditions that you have studied? How has sexism effected the theological and/or ethical reflection that partly constitutes these traditions? What are the major questions, principles, methods, goals, and accomplishments of feminist theology and/or ethics?

Ethics and psychology: What is the relation between these two disciplines? How do they compare in terms of their objects, principles, methods, and goals? What contributions can psychology make to ethics and vice versa?

Faith and reason: What is the classic problem of relating reason to revelation? What are the major historical moments in the ongoing critical reflection on this problem in the theological tradition?

Conceptions of God: What or who do the authors on your bibliography understand God to be? What images are used to conceive of God? What are the sources of the human understanding of God? What are the limits to this understanding? How does God act in the world? What are the classic arguments for the existence of God in the Christian tradition? What are the major developments and criticisms of these arguments in the history of western Christian thought? Is there a difference between arguing for the existence of God and arguing that God is?

Conceptions of Christ: What is the relation between Christ's human and divine natures? What is the significance of Jesus' life and actions? What is the significance of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, according to the authors on your bibliography? How could or should historical research on Jesus of Nazareth influence the understanding of Christ and Christian faith more generally?

Church or religious community: What is the role of religious community? Is communal membership integral to religious experience? If so, why? What role does the community play in preserving tradition? How is the community constituted and defined? Who has authority within it? What is the significance of the church's existence as an institution rather than simply a group

of people sharing beliefs and/or practices? How does the religious community or church relate to non-members?

Conceptions of the self: What is the nature of the human self? How do these authors delineate the parts, relations, powers, and activities that constitute the self?

The nature and meaning of love: What is love? Specifically, what is the nature of the love that constitutes the proper orientation toward God, self, and others? What is this love relative to eros, philia, caritas, nomos, and agape? What does it mean to love God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself?

Freedom, salvation, or liberation: How do the authors on your bibliography understand these terms? How are they related? Can conceptions of human freedom and of religious salvation be separated? Can freedom, salvation, and/or liberation be achieved independently of each another? What role do economic and political factors play in each?

Grace, free will, and predestination: How do the authors in your bibliography conceptualize grace, free will, and predestination; how are these related concepts shaped by the authors' larger theological frameworks; and what do the authors take to be the ethical implications of their views?

The body and sexuality: How is the body represented by the authors on your bibliography? How do these authors represent the relation between the body and the rest of the person? Do these authors associate women more closely than men with the body, and if so, what are the implications of this for the authors' larger theological and/or ethical program? What is the meaning and significance of human sexuality, in particular? What are the arguments that your authors give regarding the conditions for engaging in morally good and/or religiously sanctioned sexual contact, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?