

Philosophy 366: Philosophy of Religion
TTH, 1:35-2:50, UNH 3316
Fall 2010

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Course Description

This course provides students with the background and tools for philosophical reflection on the existence and nature of God. Today the philosophy of religion as an academic discipline is alive, well, and most vibrant since the Renaissance. Taking cues from the central questions of religious believers and non-believers we will examine influential historical and contemporary discussions of the major theistic arguments, the relationship between reason and belief in God, the nature of God, and the meaning of life.

Course Objectives

1. Gain an understanding of key areas of the philosophical study of religion.
2. Develop and enhance critical and logical skills central to the study of philosophy.
3. Develop an appreciation of historical movements in the philosophy of religion.
4. Develop and enhance tools for reading and writing philosophy.
5. To engage and enjoy your community of colleagues in philosophical discussion, both inside and outside the classroom setting.
6. Develop a desire to understand that makes philosophy possible.

Required Texts (available at the bookstore)

Kelly James Clark, *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (2nd ed.) [RPR]
David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [Hume]
Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* [GFE]
Handouts [HO]

Course Requirements

Final Paper 30%
Midterm Exam 30%
“Seminar” Presentation 15%
Daily Discussion Questions 15%
Attendance, Preparation, Participation 10%

(a) Your final paper will be on a topic of your choosing, should be between 10 and 12 pages long, and deal with at least two peer-reviewed articles. I will hand out possible paper topics along with a grading rubric by November 9. The final paper will be due on the Tuesday (December 14) of finals week no later than 5:00 pm. I will request that you submit a paper abstract with a bibliography on November 18. The penalty for late submissions is 3% off of the final grade per day. Penalties for academic dishonesty and plagiarism are severe. Plagiarized papers will receive a zero and, depending on the severity, may lead to a failing grade for the course as well as disciplinary action from the Dean. Students are responsible for reading and understanding the University’s policy on academic dishonesty set forth in Loyola Marymount University’s “Honor Code and Process” on pages 24-27 of *Community Standards* (2008-2009) and at <http://www.lmu.edu/Page13245.aspx>. If you desire more information about plagiarism and how

to avoid it, I recommend looking at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab on the matter here:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

(b) The midterm exam will be on October 21, will consist solely of essay questions, and will cover theistic arguments and reason and religious belief.

(c) Each student will give one seminar presentation on some aspect of the reading (I suggest letting the discussion questions at the end of each reading help you decide what the important topics are). Seminar presentations should (1) summarize the central topic/argument in the reading and (2) raise some critical/analytical questions about that argument for discussion. The presentation should be no more than one page, single-spaced. Seminar presentations will begin in the second week and some days we'll have two presentations. I will hand out a seminar sign-up sheet with further instructions on September 2.

(d) Beginning September 7, students will write (with a word processor) answers to just two of the discussion questions that conclude the readings and turn them in at the beginning of each class, excluding days when the readings are not from RPR. Your answers for both questions should be no more than a page, and oftentimes will be much less than a page. On those days when we are discussing two readings, answer just one question for each reading. You are not required to answer discussion questions on the day that you are responsible for giving a seminar presentation.

(e) Attendance, preparation, and participation are welcome, expected, and mandatory to succeed in this course. Regular attendance and participation will aid in your learning the material and will be very important for writing a good final paper and succeeding on the midterm exam. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings for the week. Please don't text or surf the internet in class. Doing so will affect your participation points. I'm not really keen on punishing immature behavior of poor students. The main punishment for immature behavior is behaving immaturely, and the main punishment for being a poor student is being a poor student. It's your choice.

Course Calendar

The instructor reserves the right to alter the following course calendar to best suit the educational needs and aims of the course.

I. Theistic Arguments

Week One

8/31 Introductions

9/2 The Project of Natural Theology and Religious Skepticism (RPR, pp. 3-11; Hume pp. 1-12)

Week Two

9/7 The Cosmological Argument (RPR, pp. 29-33, Father Copleston/Bertrand Russell Debate --
<http://www.ditext.com/russell/debate.html>)

9/9 Contemporary Versions of The Cosmological Argument (RPR, pp. 39-57)

Week Three

9/14 The Argument from Design (RPR, pp. 59-66; Hume, pp. 13-27; RPR, pp. 71-73)

9/16 The Design Argument Revisited (RPR, pp.74-95)

Week Four

- 9/21 Moral Arguments (RPR, pp. 97-108)
9/23 The Ontological Argument (RPR, pp. 13-28)

Week Five

- 9/28 The Ontological Argument (GFE, pp. 85-112)
9/30 Wrap Up of Theistic Arguments (RPR, pp. 161-172)

II. Reason and Belief in God

Week Six

- 10/5 Belief in God as Properly Basic (RPR, pp. 191-207)
10/7 Belief in God as Properly Basic, cont. (HO, RPR, pp. 229-239)

Week Seven

- 10/12 Pascal, Kierkegaard, James (RPR, pp. 229-239; HO)
10/14 P, K, J (cont.), Reconciling Reason and Religious Belief (RPR, pp. 241-254)

Week Eight

- 10/19 Review for Exam
10/21 Examination

III. The Problem of Evil

Week Nine

- 10/26 The Logical Problem of Evil (Hume, pp. 58-66; GFE, pp. 7-29) – Movie?
10/28 The Free-Will Defense (RPR, pp. 299-308) –Movie?

Week Ten

- 11/2 The Evidential Problem of Evil (Hume, pp. 67-76; RPR, pp. 341-349)
11/4 The Evidential Problem of Evil (cont.) and Skeptical Theism (HO)

Week Eleven

- 11/9 Theodicies (RPR, pp. 309-314, 324-340)
11/11 Theodicies (Cont.)

IV. Philosophical Theology

Week Twelve

- 11/16 The Concept of God (RPR, pp. 387-389, 491-508)

11/18 The Suffering of God (RPR, pp. 405-416)

Week Thirteen

11/23 Why Pray? (RPR, pp. 417-428) Alec L.

11/25 Thanksgiving – No Class

Week Fourteen

11/30 Religious Pluralism (RPR, pp. 449-464)

12/2 The Problem of Hell (RPR, pp. 429-447)

Week Fifteen

12/7 Catch Up/Wrap Up

12/9 Catch Up/Wrap Up