

Proposed Syllabus

Philosophy of Religion

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Required Text:

There is **no required text**. Readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Description

This course is designed to engage students with the central issues in the philosophy of religion. While there will be a primary focus on the Western monotheistic tradition, views from Hindi, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions will also be considered. The course begins by discussing the nature of God, followed by a critique of classic proofs of His existence. We then turn to belief in God, both how we might arrive at belief as well as the reasonableness of it. From here, we consider challenges to the monotheistic tradition: the problem of evil, arguments for atheism, considerations of religious pluralism, and the treatment of women.

Classroom Expectations and Attendance Policy

Everyone is expected to come to class. For each unexcused absence exceeding two prior to fall break and/or two following fall break students will receive a 5% deduction on their final grade. Students are required to have done the readings, and they should be prepared to discuss them. There will on occasion be passionate disagreement—it is vital that we remain courteous to each other and to each other's point of view. It is possible to criticize arguments without showing disrespect for the people who endorse them—that is what we will strive to do. Electronic devices are permitted for note-taking purposes only.

Late and Make-Up Work

No make-ups or extensions will be granted for any assignment unless you provide either (1) written (and approved) notice of absence beforehand, or (2) written documentation of an emergency situation afterward.

Academic Misconduct

This course will be governed by Oberlin's Honor Code. All cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Student Honor Committee. For further information about the Honor Code, see <http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/honor-system-charter>.

Disabilities

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me as soon as possible. I rely on the Office of Disability Services to verify the need for accommodation based on documentation on file in that office.

Assignments and Evaluation

Citizenship (15%)

Philosophy is an activity. Like many activities, you'll only get as much out of doing philosophy as you put into it. To encourage engagement, 10% of your grade will depend in part on your being an active, appropriate, and interesting contributor to the class. I understand that speaking up in class is difficult for some students. To that end, this grade encompasses more than hand-raising. I primarily ask that all students are good citizens of the course. Thus, students who are present, clearly attentive, and who show engagement in other ways will also be rewarded.

60 seconders (15%)

For every class meeting, I will ask two of you to prepare and present a 60-second point on a specific reading.

Summary Points:

One student will be assigned a summary point. Here, I am looking for the student to remind the class of the main thesis of the article and perhaps a quick outline of the author's argument for her point. **DO NOT CRITICIZE.** It is important for philosophers to be able to present an argument from a neutral position. This is what I hope the summary points will accomplish in addition to reminding the class of the main points from the articles we have all read.

Critical Points:

The other student will be assigned a critical point. The idea is to tell us where you think the author's argument is vulnerable or underargued. **DO NOT SUMMARIZE** – we will have already heard the summary point. Instead I want you to launch directly into telling us where you think the author's argument is inadequate. Alternatively, you can do a 60-second supporting point: in this case, you should provide an argument for the author's conclusion that is different from what the author herself or himself offers. The idea here is to present additional support for some conclusion that the author didn't mention or develop. 60 seconds is a short time. In preparing for this, you will likely come up with more than one critical or supporting point. Pick one that you can articulate clearly and concisely. There will be time in the rest of class to bring up other points.

Take home essays (20%)

Students are to write a total of four short essays (1-2 pages typed, double-spaced) throughout the term. These essays will each take the form of summarizing and discussing an argument or point made in class or a reading. Students may only write one essay per topic. Essays written for a given topic are to be uploaded onto Blackboard by the beginning of the second class of the next topic.

Papers (50%)

Students will write two papers over the course of the semester, a midterm paper of 4-5 pages and a final paper of 5-6 pages. I will provide possible paper topics at least three weeks prior to the due dates of the papers. Students are permitted to write a paper based on another topic provided they meet with me to discuss their topic.

Schedule of Topics/Readings:

Weeks 1-5: On God

- Divine Attributes
 - o God, *Richard Swinburne*
 - o Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence, *George Mavrodes*
 - o Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action, *Nelson Pike*
 - o The Consolation of Philosophy, *Boethius*
 - o Atman Is Brahman, *The Upanishads*
- Proofs of God
 - o The Ontological Argument, *St. Anselm and Gaunilo*
 - o An Analysis of the Ontological Argument, *William L. Rowe*
 - o A Contemporary Modal Version of the Ontological Argument, *Alvin Plantinga*
 - o The Five Ways, *St. Thomas Aquinas*
 - o The Kalam Cosmological Argument, *William Lane Craig*
 - o Critique of the Cosmological Argument, *J. L. Mackie*
 - o The Analogical Teleological Argument, *William Paley*
 - o Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (II, V-VII), *David Hume*
 - o A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God, *Robin Collins*
 - o Why Anything, Why This, *Derek Parfit*

Weeks 6-8: On Belief

- Avenues to Belief
 - o Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God, *Robert Pargetter*
 - o Fallibilism and Faith, *Susan Haack*
 - o Of Miracles, *David Hume*
 - o Miracles as Evidence Against the Existence of God, *Christine Overall*
- Belief without Proof
 - o The Wager, *Blaise Pascal*
 - o The Ethics of Belief, *William Clifford*
 - o The Will to Believe, *William James*

Weeks 9-11: On Evil

- o Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (X-XI), *David Hume*
- o This is the best of all possible worlds, *Gottfried Leibniz*
- o The Evidential Argument from Evil, *William Rowe*
- o Knowledge, Freedom, and the Problem of Evil, *Eleonore Stump*
- o The Hiddenness of God, *Robert McKim*
- o Evil and Human Suffering in Islamic Thought, *Nasrin Rouzati*

Weeks 12-14: On Alternatives

- Atheism
 - Religion as Projection, *Ludwig Feuerbach*
 - The Naturalist Challenge to Religion, *Michael Ruse*
 - Principled Atheism in the Buddhist Scholastic Tradition, *Richard P. Hayes*
- Religious Pluralism
 - Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism, *Alvin Plantinga*
 - Religious Pluralism and Salvation, *John Hick*
 - Buddhism, Christianity, and the Prospects for World Religion, *Dalai Lama*

Week 15: On Women

- Feminism and Religion: Intersections between Western Activism, Theology and Theory, *Laurel Zwissler*
- Buddhist Feminist Reflections, *Karma Lekshe Tsomo*