

Spring 2024  
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History Elective  
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### Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy has sometimes stood as the vehement enemy of religion, at other times it has humbly served as the servant of religion; at all times the relationship between the two has been a tense one. This course will not relieve that tension. In this course, we will be exploring the philosophical underpinnings of religious belief. With a focus on monotheistic tradition, we will study issues such as religious epistemology, religion and science, proofs of the existence of God, religious experience, mysticism, the origin of religion, atheism and death. The reading for this course will cover some of the heavy-hitters in this tradition such as William James, Karl Marx, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich Nietzsche, Augustine, Aquinas as well as literature and film.

#### Course Policies:

A discussion based class works only if everyone is prepared, open-minded and above all respectful. This is especially true of a Religion class, since many of you may have strong and deeply held religious and/or personal beliefs. I would ask that everyone remember that the point of this class is to **UNDERSTAND** and **ANALYZE** these viewpoints. In short, this is an academic class like any other -- you will be responsible for **understanding** these ideas. Whether or not you choose to believe anything we study is a personal choice of yours.

At each session, each student should bring to class homework, the text, and at least **one** question about the reading for that day. This can be either a point that you're confused about that you'd like cleared up ("What does James mean when he says...?"), an objection you see to the argument in the readings ("How can Nietzsche's claim that p, since elsewhere he said q, which seems to conflict with p?" "If Augustine really thinks p, doesn't q follow, which is clearly absurd?"), a query about how something said in the reading relates to something else ("When Plantinga claims that p, is what he is saying here different in any important way from Alston's claim that q?"), or anything else. Make sure also to mark passages you think are either **KEY** or **MYSTERIOUS**.

Another major concern involves **plagiarism**. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Regardless of the source (newspaper, magazine, textbook, internet, etc...), if you want to use someone else's description of an idea, it is imperative that you give it full credit. I have been reading these texts and the secondary sources since I was 17 or so. I will notice if you plagiarize.

#### Course Requirements:

**1. Attendance & participation:** It is in the nature of a Philosophy class that the material needs to be worked through together; if you're not in class you'll miss the discussion and your participation grade will suffer. This class **SHOULD NOT** be lecture-based. I need everyone to come to class prepared for discussion and willing to be courageous enough to share.

**2. Response papers:** You will be responsible for 2 papers responding to the readings or class discussions. You may choose the topic. These papers will be about 3 pages each (typed), but I will expect them to be polished of grammar and spelling mistakes, to be thoughtful and to stick to the topic. A short response paper is designed to go deeply into a **VERY** narrow idea that you find interesting. It should not attempt to comment on a number of issues. If you choose to do more than 2 response papers, the 2 highest grades will count.

#### 3. Midterm and Final Exams

**Grade Breakdown:**

2 Response Papers	40%
Midterm	20%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	20%

**Course Texts:**

The primary text for the class will be Brian Davies. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion. Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1982.

This will be supplemented by readings from the Christian and Jewish Bibles, Koran, Sum: 40 Tales from the Afterlives by David Eagleman and The Gospel of Jesus Christ by Jose Saramago.

Topics we will hopefully cover:

Content / Essential Questions	Assignments / Assessment/ HW Questions	Resources
<p><b>What do we mean by God?</b></p> <p>Traits of God from different perspectives</p> <p>The philosopher’s God: theism</p> <p><b>Philosophy and Religion...</b>How do they interact? What is the nature of a religious claim? Of a philosophical claim?</p> <p><b>Can the existence of God be proven?</b></p> <p>Cosmological Arguments</p> <p>Design Arguments</p> <p>Ontological Arguments</p>	<p>Why does it matter how we conceive of God since we can’t prove this conception?</p> <p>How many angels can fit on the head of a needle?</p> <p>How do philosophy, religion and science differ in approach? Do they describe different things? Can they disprove each other?</p> <p>Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the cosmological argument.</p> <p>If the argument from design is true, what is the design of the universe? Is there evidence for such a view?</p>	<p>Brian Davies, <u>Philosophy of Religion</u>, Chapter One</p> <p>Davies, Chapter Two</p> <p>Davies, Chapter 3,4,5</p>

<p><b>Religious Experience</b></p> <p>Is religion a different sort of language, unable to be conveyed through traditional means?</p> <p>Does religious experience prove God?</p> <p><b>Language and God</b> Nominalism Metaphor <i>Via Negativa</i> Analogy</p> <p><b>Traits of God</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplicity/ Immutably</li> <li>• Omnipotence and Omniscience</li> </ul> <p><b>Theodicy</b></p> <p>Is God just or cruel?</p>	<p>What is religious experience? How is it described?</p> <p>Are humans physically and culturally different in understanding religion?</p> <p>How does mystical writing explain religious experience?</p> <p>Can phenomenological approaches help here?</p> <p>What are the philosophical connotations of nominalism?</p> <p>Choose metaphor, via negativa or analogy.</p> <p>Assignment to find a description of God from popular culture. Assess it.</p> <p>Compare/ contrast images of God to those of humans.</p> <p>Describe the most unfair event you can think of. How would a religious believer make sense of this?</p> <p>Is Saramago's critique fair? Why not?</p>	<p><u>Gospel According to Al Green</u></p> <p>William James <u>Variety of Religious Experience</u></p> <p>Davies, Chapter 6</p> <p>Plotinus, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Julian of Norwich, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin</p> <p>Davies Chapter 7</p> <p>Meister Eckhart</p> <p>Parmenides and Zeno</p> <p>Davies, Chapter 8, 9</p> <p>Nietzsche on spider God</p> <p>Saramago from <u>Gospel of Jesus Christ</u></p> <p>Davies, Chapter 10</p> <p>Watch "God on Trial"</p>
<p><b>Atheism</b></p> <p><b>Agnosticism</b></p> <p>Are there arguments for disbelieving in God? For saying humans can't know this "type" of question? What does it mean to believe?</p>	<p>How does belief work? Is it Volitional?</p> <p>Are there things that it's immoral to believe?</p>	<p>Russell "Why I'm Not Christian"</p> <p>Friedrich Nietzsche</p> <p>Clifford "The Ethics of Belief"</p> <p>James "The Will to Believe"</p> <p>John Newman "Essay in</p>

<p><b>Miracles</b></p> <p>What is a miracle? What philosophical challenges arise when believing in miracles?  Can we disprove miracles?  Can religion exist without miracles?</p> <p>Others:  <b>Science and Religion</b>  <b>Death</b>  <b>Revelation/ Apocalypse</b>  Heaven/ Hell/ Purgatory</p>	<p>Describe the most miraculous event you can conceive of.  What would naturalistic explanations look like?</p> <p>How can we square science and religion?</p>	<p>Aid of Grammar of Assent”</p> <p>Davies, Chapter 11</p> <p>On religion of the gaps</p> <p>Davies, Chapter 13</p> <p>Film “Apocalypse”</p>
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