

Philosophy 383: Philosophical Approaches to Religion

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Spring 2010

Instructor: Lowell Friesen
Office: 385 Bartlett Hall
Office Hour: Wednesdays 1:15–2:15 (or by appointment)
Email: phil383-lfriesen-3@courses.umass.edu

Course Description

In this course, we will consider the following questions. Does the appearance of design in the natural order give us reason to believe that God exists? Does the mere existence of the universe give us reason to believe that God exists? Does the existence of evil give us reason to believe that God does not exist? To what extent do religious beliefs require evidence in order to be justified? Do religious experiences justify religious beliefs? What should our attitude toward religious belief and practice be? Should they be respected, tolerated, or neither? Can there be reasonable religious disagreement?

Course Objectives

I have several objectives for this course. The first is to add to your knowledge. Upon completion of this course, you should have a working knowledge of some of the most important debates in the philosophy of religion. As a result, you should be in a better position to decide the answers to some of the above questions yourself. The second is to improve your capacity to think clearly and carefully. In this course, you will encounter many different opposing views. We will look at these views and ask ourselves whether the reasons given in support of them are good ones. The third is to improve your writing. This course will require you to present and evaluate arguments. Your grade will be determined, in large part, by the extent to which you can do so in a clear and straightforward manner.

Course Website

All course materials and important course information will be posted on the course website.

<http://sites.google.com/site/philosophy383>

If you are ever prompted for a username and password while navigating the course website, enter your OIT-account username and password to gain access.

Readings

All of the assigned readings for this course will be made available in electronic format on the course website in the section marked “Course Materials.” It is your responsibility to get access to them. They will not be distributed in class. Readings will be assigned roughly a week in advance and must be read before the class period in which they are discussed.

Course Evaluation

Your course grade will be determined as follows.

- **Reading Quizzes** (together worth 15% of your course grade)

All assigned readings will be accompanied by reading questions. The purpose of these questions is to help focus your reading and get you thinking about the issues and questions that will be discussed in class. At several points during the semester, there will be an unannounced, in-class reading quiz. Reading quizzes will consist of some (or all) of the reading questions that accompanied the assigned reading for the day. The reading questions will be posted on the course website with the assigned readings.

Policy for Missed Reading Quizzes: If you miss a reading quiz, you will given no credit for it. However, if you notify me of your absence in advance—the best way to do this is via email—your course grade will not be negatively affected. The reading quiz portion of your course grade will be calculated as follows.

Reading quizzes will be graded on a scale of 0 to 3. If n is the number of reading quizzes given during the semester and m is the number of quizzes for which you notified me in advance of your absence, then

$$\frac{\text{Reading Quiz Portion of Your Course Grade}}{15} = \frac{\text{Sum of Your Reading Quiz Grades}}{(n - m) \times 3}$$

- **2 Written Assignments** (together worth 35% of your course grade)

Each written assignment will require you to write a short, 3-page essay in which you will present an argument and consider some objections to it.

- **2 Exams** (together worth 50% of your course grade)

The first exam will occur about halfway through the semester and will be scheduled *in the evening*. The second exam will be scheduled during exam week at the end of the semester. Both exams will include, and perhaps consist entirely of, essay-style questions.

Late Assignments and Missed Quizzes and Exams

Barring exceptional circumstances, late assignments will *not* be accepted and missed exams will *not* be rescheduled. If you know that you will be away on the day an assignment is due, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance of the due date to make alternate arrangements for the submission of your assignment. If you have a legitimate reason to be granted an extension on an assignment or to have an exam rescheduled, I will do my best to accommodate you. However, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance. Decisions regarding extensions and reschedulings will be made on a case by case basis, and I reserve the right to deny a request for an extension or rescheduling. See the previous section regarding the policy for missed reading quizzes.

Plagiarism & Cheating

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses and will be dealt with severely. I refer you to the university's policy on academic honesty. It can be found at

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty

Schedule

This schedule is tentative and I reserve the right to make changes to it. All of the important dates on the schedule can also be found on the course website in the “Calendar” section.

01/20 – 01/22	Preliminaries
01/25 – 02/10	Teleological Arguments for God’s Existence Readings: Paley (1802), Dawkins (1986), Behe (2001), Kitcher (2007), van Inwagen (2002)
02/12 – 02/24	Cosmological Arguments for God’s Existence Readings: Rowe (2001), Craig (2007), Smith (1999)
02/19	Assignment 1
02/26 – 03/12	Arguments From Evil Readings: Mackie (1955), Peterson (1998), Howard-Snyder et al. (2001)
03/03	Exam 1 (7–9PM, Location TBA) Spring Recess
03/22 – 04/16	Evidentialism, Religious Experience, and Religious Belief Readings: Clifford (1877), James (1896), Plantinga (1980), Plantinga (1983), Alston (2007), Quinn (1985), Pargetter (1990), van Inwagen (1996)
04/16	Assignment 2
04/21 – 05/03	Religion in the Public Realm Readings: Feldman (2007), Leiter (2008), Wolterstorff (2001)
TBA	Exam 2 (Time and Location TBA)

Reading List

- Alston, William P. 2007. “Religious Experience as Perception of God.” In Peterson et al. (2007), 45–54.
- Behe, Michael J. 2001. “Molecular Machines: Experimental Evidence for the Design Inference.” In Robert T. Pennock (ed.), *Intelligent Design Creationism and its Critics*, 241–256. The MIT Press.
- Clifford, William. 1877. “The Ethics of Belief.” *Contemporary Review*. This article can be found online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=Cn_fXInrMSkC&pg=PA46#v=onepage&q=&f=false>.
- Craig, William Lane. 2007. “The Kalam Cosmological Argument.” In Peterson et al. (2007), 210–222.
- Dawkins, Richard. 1986. *The Blind Watchmaker*, chapter 1 & 3. Longman Scientific & Technical.

- Feldman, Richard. 2007. "Reasonable Religious Disagreement." In Louise M. Antony (ed.), *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, 194–214. Oxford University Press.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel, Bergmann, Michael, and Rowe, William L. 2001. "An Exchange on the Problem of Evil." In William L. Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil*, volume 1 of *Blackwell Readings in Philosophy*, 124–158. Blackwell Publishing.
- James, William. 1896. "The Will to Believe." *New World*. This article can be found online at http://books.google.com/books?id=Cn_fXInrMSkC&pg=PA73#v=onepage&q=&f=false.
- Kitcher, Philip. 2007. *Living With Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*, 80–100. Oxford University Press.
- Leiter, Brian. 2008. "Why Tolerate Religion?" *Constitutional Commentary* 25:1–27.
- Mackie, J. L. 1955. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64:200–212.
- Paley, William. 1802. "*Natural Theology: or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature.*" This book can be found online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=PccZAAAAMAAJ&dq=paley%20natural%20theology&lr=&pg=PP9#v=onepage&q=paley%20natural%20theology&f=false>.
- Pargetter, Robert. 1990. "Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 27:141–163.
- Peterson, Michael, Hasker, William, Reichenbach, Bruce, and Basinger, David (eds.). 2007. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. Oxford University Press, 3rd edition.
- Peterson, Michael L. 1998. *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*, chapter 3. Westview Press.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 1980. "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology." *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 54:49–62.
- . 1983. "Reason and Belief in God." In Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, 16–93. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1985. "In Search of the Foundations of Theism." *Faith and Philosophy* 2:469–486.
- Rowe, William L. 2001. *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, chapter 2. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 3rd edition.
- Smith, Quentin. 1999. "The Reason the Universe Exists is that it Caused Itself to Exist." *Philosophy* 74:579–586.
- van Inwagen, Peter. 1996. "It is Wrong, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence." In Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, 137–153. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- . 2002. *Metaphysics*, chapter 8 & 9. Westview Press, 2nd edition.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 2001. "Do Christians Have Good Reasons for Supporting Liberal Democracy?" *The Modern Schoolman* 78:229–248.