



# University of New Haven

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Program of Philosophy

PHIL 2250, Section 01  
Philosophy of Religion  
Spring 2017  
M/W from 12:15 to 1:30  
9 Echlin Hall  
3 Credit Hours

Dr. Douglas Ficek  
Visiting Assistant Professor  
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Office Hours: T/R from 11:00 to 2:45

## Undergraduate Course Syllabus

### Course Description:

An examination of some philosophical notions used in religious discourse, such as meaning, truth, faith, being, God, and the holy.

### Extended Course Description:

Does God exist, and is God responsible for the evil in the world? What is the nature of religious experience, and can religious beliefs be justified without metaphysical evidence? How should we understand religion in terms of human existence in the world? And finally, what if religion is simply a sham? Questions like these – and there are many more – are about the *philosophy of religion*, and in this course we will explore them across numerous readings and one film.

In the first part of this course, we will consider some of the arguments for the existence of God: namely, the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, and the moral argument. We will also watch a remarkable debate between William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens, both of whom know these arguments inside and out.

In the second part of this course, we will explore the philosophical and theological problem of evil, which has been a problem for religious people for millennia. We will read several essays, all of which deal with this problem differently, and we will discuss the pros and cons of the project of theodicy, which aims to save God from metaphysical criticism.

In the third part of this course, we will look at religious experience, starting with a selection from Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*. We will then read an abridged version of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James – a classic work – and then watch *Take Shelter*, a challenging film about a man who comes to believe that the world is coming to an end.

In the fourth part of this course, we will discuss religious existentialism. We will read *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, in which the story of Abraham and Isaac is analyzed in terms of “teleological suspension.” We will then read *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, an admittedly difficult text that tries to break down human experience – from the mundane to the divine.

Finally, in the fifth and final part of this course, we will consider the possibility that religion is merely an illusion created by human beings in order to cope with a difficult and all-too-often

dangerous world. Here we will read *The Future of an Illusion* by Sigmund Freud, which remains one of the most insightful and critical accounts of religion ever written.

**Required Texts:**

- *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James; ISBN: 0312488300
- *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard; ISBN: 0140444491
- *I and Thou* by Martin Buber; ISBN: 0684717255
- *The Future of an Illusion* by Sigmund Freud; ISBN: 0393008312

**Course Objectives:**

- Students will learn (and hopefully appreciate) what it means to do philosophy.
- Students will discover new (and possibly profound) concepts, ideas, and theories.
- Students will become better arguers (in the sense making and evaluating arguments).

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will be able to explain course readings in pop quizzes and written papers.
- Students will be able to evaluate course readings in class discussion and written papers.
- Students will be able to develop their own arguments in class discussion and written papers.

**Course Requirements and Assessment:**

We will cover numerous texts in this course, and it is your responsibility to read the assigned pages before class begins. To this end, I will be giving you several pop quizzes throughout the semester, on which you may use your notes but not the texts themselves. These quizzes will cover new material as well as material that we have already covered. Also, they cannot be made up, so do not make lateness a habit.

In addition to these pop quizzes, I will be assigning three substantial papers. These assignments will be posted on my website, and you will be able to choose from among several questions. As always, my strong recommendation is that you choose the questions that you find interesting, not the ones that seem “easiest.”

There will not be a midterm exam or a final exam.

**Grading:**

- Attendance – 10%
- Pop Quizzes – 20%
- First Paper – 20%
- Second Paper – 20%
- Third Paper – 30%

**Undergraduate Grading System:**

<http://www.newhaven.edu/UGGradingSystem>

**Caveats:**

As an instructor, I am pretty easy-going. I do, however, insist upon a respectful atmosphere in the classroom. What does this mean? It means: no phone calls, no texting or Facebooking, no sleeping, and no ridiculously long bathroom breaks. If your phone does go off during class, you

have a choice: You can either sing a song for the class, or I can assign an additional paper that everybody must do. This is not a joke.

Also, "My flash drive broke" has become the new "My dog ate my homework," and I will no longer accept it as an excuse for late or incomplete work. Please use [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com) (or something similar) to ensure the security of your written work.

**2016-2017 Academic Calendar:**

<http://www.newhaven.edu/AcademicCalendar>

**Course Outline:**

- January 18 – Course Introduction

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- January 23 – Selections from the *Proslogion* by Anselm of Canterbury
- January 25 – Selections from the *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas
- January 30 – Selections from *Natural Theology* by William Paley
- February 1 – Selections from *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- February 6 – Video: "William Lane Craig vs. Christopher Hitchens"
- February 8 – Video: "William Lane Craig vs. Christopher Hitchens"

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

- February 13 – "Evil and Omnipotence" by J.L. Mackie
- February 15 – "The Free Will Defense" by Alvin Plantinga
- February 20 – "An Irenaean Theodicy" by John Hick
- February 22 – "Divine Racism: A Philosophical and Theological Analysis" by William R. Jones
- February 27 – "The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice" by Hans Jonas
- March 1 – "A Critique of Christian Masochism" by Dorothee Soelle

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

- March 6 – Selections from *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal
- March 8 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. 19-52
- March 13 – NO CLASS
- March 15 – NO CLASS
- March 20 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. 53-116
- March 22 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. 117-160
- March 27 – Film: *Take Shelter*
- March 29 – Film: *Take Shelter*

RELIGIOUS EXISTENTIALISM

- April 3 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 41-82
- April 5 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 83-108
- April 10 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 109-147
- April 12 – *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, pp. 53-85
- April 17 – *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, pp. 87-122
- April 19 – *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, pp. 123-182

## REJECTING RELIGION

- April 24 – *The Future of an Illusion* by Sigmund Freud, pp. 5-37
- April 26 – *The Future of an Illusion* by Sigmund Freud, pp. 38-71
- May 1 – Discussion and Course Conclusion
- May 4 – FINAL EXAM (10:30-12:30)\*

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

### Academic Regulations:

<http://www.newhaven.edu/UGAcademicRegulations>

### Adding and Dropping Classes:

The final day to drop a course without it appearing on your transcript is Wednesday, January 25th, 2017. During the second week of classes, further adjustment requires the approval of the chair of the department offering the course.

### Attendance Regulations:

Students are expected to attend regularly and promptly all their classes, appointments, and exercises. The instructor has the right to dismiss from class any student who has been absent more than two weeks (pro-rated for terms different from that of the semester). A dismissed student will receive a withdrawal (W) from the course if they are still eligible for a withdrawal per the university "Withdrawal from a Course" policy, or a failure (F) if not.

A student who is not officially registered in the course is not permitted to attend classes or take part in any other course activities.

Students absent from any class meeting are responsible for making up missed assignments and examinations at the discretion of the instructor.

### Course Withdrawal Policy:

Students wishing to withdraw must submit a request for an official course withdrawal in writing using the Course Withdrawal Form. The final date to request a withdrawal for this semester is Friday March 24, 2017. This request must be submitted to the Registrar's Office and signed by the International Office if you are an international student. The grade of W will be recorded, but the course will not affect the GPA. Here is a link to the Course Withdrawal Form:

<http://www.newhaven.edu/907680.pdf>.

### Incomplete:

A grade of Incomplete (INC) is given only in special circumstances and indicates that the student has been given permission by the instructor to complete required course work (with the same instructor) after the end of the term. In the absence of the instructor a student should contact the Department Chair.

### Academic Integrity Policy:

The University of New Haven expects its students to maintain the highest standards of academic conduct. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at the University. To know what it is expected of them, students are responsible for reading and understanding the statement regarding academic honesty in the Student Handbook or on the University website. Please ask about my expectations regarding permissible or encouraged forms of student collaboration if they are unclear.

**Commitment to Positive Learning Environment:**

The University adheres to the philosophy that all community members should enjoy an environment free of any form of harassment, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or intimate partner violence. If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct we encourage you to report this. If you report this to a faculty/staff member, they must notify our college's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose to request confidentiality from the University). If you encounter sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Caroline Koziatek, at 203-932-7479 or [ckoziatek@newhaven.edu](mailto:ckoziatek@newhaven.edu). For more information about Title IX at the University of New Haven, see: <http://www.newhaven.edu/about/title-IX/>.

**Coursework Expectations:**

All undergraduate full-time and part-time students are expected to spend at least two hours on academic studies outside and in addition to each hour of class time. This expectation should be used by the student as a guide in determining how much time to spend on academic studies outside class. It should also be used by the student, in consultation with the academic adviser, to help determine the student's course load each semester so that the course load matches the amount of time available for academic studies.

**University Support Services:**

The University recognizes that students can often use some help outside of class and offers academic assistance through several offices.

**Academic Success Center:**

The Academic Success Center provides a wide range of academic support to day and evening undergraduate students beyond their first year of college.

**Center for Learning Resources:**

The Center for Learning Resources (CLR), located in the Peterson Library, provides academic content support to the students of the University of New Haven using metacognitive strategies that help students become aware of and learn to apply optimal learning processes in the pursuit of creating independent learners CLR tutors focus sessions on discussions of concepts and processes and typically use external examples to help students grasp and apply the material.

**Writer to Writer:**

Writer to Writer is a peer-tutoring program inspired by the belief that all writers struggle and can benefit from talking through their ideas. Tutors are undergraduate students trained to work with you at any stage in the writing process.

**Accessibility Resources Center:**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to share, in confidence, information about needed specific course accommodations. The Accessibility Resources Center, located in Sheffield Hall, is responsible for and committed to providing services and support that serve to promote educational equity and ensure that students are able to participate in the opportunities available at the University of New Haven. Accommodations cannot be made without written documentation from the Accessibility Resources Center.

**Religious Observance Policy:**

The University of New Haven respects the right of its students to observe religious holidays that may necessitate their absence from class or from other required university-sponsored activities. Students who wish to observe such holidays should not be penalized for their absence, although in academic courses they are responsible for making up missed work.