



University of New Haven

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Program of Philosophy

PHIL 2250, Section 01
Philosophy of Religion
Spring 2018
M/W from 12:15 to 1:30
103 Kaplan Hall
3 Credit Hours

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Office Hours: M/W from 10:00 to 12:00

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, and the teleological argument. We will also watch debate about the existence of God and critically discuss the arguments of the two participants.

In the second part of this course, we will explore the philosophical and theological problem of evil, which has been a problem for theists 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 affirm divine justice in the face of evil and gratuitous suffering.

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 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,” and then we will then read *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, a unique 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 and “Why I Am Not a Christian” by Bertrand Russell, both of which are important texts in the history of atheism.

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

The other required texts for this course are available for download on my professional website: www.douglasficek.com. Download them ASAP, and always have the appropriate texts with you in class, either as hard copies or as electronic documents.

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

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 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%

Quizzes are worth five points each. Five points is full credit; one point is just signing your name; and zero points is missing the quiz entirely.

Undergraduate Scale			
Grades Scored Between			Letter Equivalent
97	to	100	A+
94	to	Less than 97	A
90	to	Less than 94	A-
87	to	Less than 90	B+
84	to	Less than 87	B
80	to	Less than 84	B-
77	to	Less than 80	C+
74	to	Less than 77	C
70	to	Less than 74	C-
67	to	Less than 70	D+
63	to	Less than 67	D
60	to	Less than 63	D-
		Less than 60	F

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, no sleeping, no ridiculously long bathroom breaks, and finally no computers, unless you absolutely need them for reading or note-taking. 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 (or something similar) to ensure the security of your written work.

Course Outline

January 17 – NO CLASS

January 22 – Course Introduction

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

January 24 – Selections from the *Proslogion* by Anselm of Canterbury

January 29 – Selections from the *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas

January 31 – Selections from *Natural Theology* by William Paley

February 5 – Video: TBA

February 7 – Video: TBA

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

February 12 – “Evil and Omnipotence” by J.L. Mackie

February 14 – “The Free Will Defense” by Alvin Plantinga

February 19 – “Divine Racism: A Philosophical and Theological Analysis” by William R. Jones

February 21 – “The Concept of God After Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice” by Hans Jonas

February 26 – “A Critique of Christian Masochism” by Dorothee Soelle

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

February 28 – Selections from *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal

March 5 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. TBA

March 7 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. TBA

March 12 – SPRING BREAK

March 14 – SPRING BREAK

March 19 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. TBA

March 21 – *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, pp. TBA

March 26 – Film: *Take Shelter*

March 28 – Film: *Take Shelter*

RELIGIOUS EXISTENTIALISM

April 2 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 41-82

April 4 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 83-108

April 9 – *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 109-147

April 11 – *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, pp. 53-85

April 16 – *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, pp. 87-122

April 18 – *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, pp. 123-182

REJECTING RELIGION

April 23 – *The Future of an Illusion* by Sigmund Freud, pp. 5-37

April 25 – *The Future of an Illusion* by Sigmund Freud, pp. 38-71

April 30 – “Why I Am Not a Christian” by Bertrand Russell

May 3 – FINAL EXAM (10:30-12:30)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES & ACADEMIC REGULATIONS

The following policy excerpts have been taken from the [Student Handbook](#). Follow the link to view the policy in its entirety.

Add/Drop Policy

January 24th is the final day to drop this course so that it does not appear on your transcript. After the first week of class, self-service registration will not be enabled for students to directly add or drop classes. Students should contact the registrar’s office directly or the Academic Success Center for assistance with adding and dropping courses during this time.

Attendance Policy

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’s course withdrawal 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.

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.

Withdrawal Policy

March 28th is the final date to request a withdrawal for this term. Students wishing to withdraw from a course MUST officially do so by completing the [online](#) form or by submitting a [course withdrawal form](#) to the registrar's office. This request must be submitted to the Office of the University Registrar (and signed by the International Services Office if you are an international student). The grade of **W** will be recorded, but the course will not affect the GPA.

Incomplete (INC) Grade Policy

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 and Procedures

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 is expected of them, students are responsible for reading and understanding the statement regarding academic honesty in the [Student Handbook](#). Please ask me about my expectations regarding permissible or encouraged forms of student collaboration if there is any confusion about this topic.

The [Dean of Students Office](#) offers a range of support to students. It answers questions, provides information about and referrals to campus resources; assists in students' adjustment to the University; promotes programs which address student needs, concerns and interests; and helps students in resolving problems of any type.

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. For more information, visit [Title IX at the University of New Haven](#).

Reporting Bias Incidents

At the University of New Haven, there is an expectation that all community members are committed to creating and supporting a climate which promotes civility, mutual respect, and open-mindedness. There also exists an understanding that with the freedom of expression

comes the responsibility to support community members' right to live and work in an environment free from harassment and fear. It is expected that all members of the University community will engage in anti-bias behavior and refrain from actions that intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem. ([Reporting Options](#))

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES

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

[Center for Student Success \(CSS\)](#)

The Center for Student Success provides students with the multitude of resources available on campus and assists students in fulfilling their educational, social and personal goals.

[University Writing Center](#)

The mission of the Writing Center (an expansion of the Writer to Writer peer-tutoring program) is to provide high-quality tutoring to undergraduate and graduate students as they write for a wide range of purposes and audiences. Tutors are undergraduate and graduate students studying Biology, Communications, Criminal Justice, National Security, Engineering, English, Environmental Science, Finance, Forensic Science, Legal Studies, Marine Biology, Music, Nutrition, and Psychology. We are here to work with you at any stage in the writing process; just bring in your assignment, your ideas, and any writing you've done so far. To make an appointment, you can register for an account with our scheduling site at <https://newhaven.mywconline.com> or visit us in person at our desk on the first floor of Peterson library (just to the left after you enter the library).

[Center for Learning Resources \(CLR\)](#)

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.

[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.

[Counseling & Psychological Services](#)

The Counseling Center offers a variety of services aimed at helping students resolve personal difficulties and acquire the balance, skills, and knowledge that will enable them to take full advantage of their experience at the University of New Haven.