

**Philosophy of Religion**  
Fall 2008  
Phil 317

Contact information

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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m., and by appointment.

Course webpage: you will find all of the course material on MyBGSU, including the syllabus, notes, reading questions, paper topics, and study questions.

I may have reason to email you during the semester. The email address I have for you is provided by MyBGSU. Unless you tell the system otherwise – e.g., by selecting another address as your default – it gives me your bgsu.edu address. So, you must either check that address, or go into MyBGSU and change your default address. You are responsible for receiving any information I send via email.

Meeting times and places

11:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday, 229 Olscamp Hall.

Required text

*Philosophy of Religion*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, eds. Pojman and Rea (Wadsworth, 2008).

This text is available at the BGSU bookstore. Most course readings are from this book; there is also one reading on e-reserve.

Course description

In this course, we will consider a range of issues in the philosophy of religion, focusing in particular on the question of whether God exists. First, we will consider what God is like, as well as a puzzle relating to the attribute of omniscience. Then we will consider four classic arguments for God's existence: (i) ontological, (ii) cosmological, (iii) teleological, and (iv) one based on religious experience. Next, we will consider what the presence of evil in the world implies about God's existence (some think it shows there is no God). After a discussion of possibility of miracles, we will ask whether belief in God should be determined by rational argument, or by faith instead. We will conclude with a discussion of death and immortality.

NB: There are many rich religious traditions in the world. We will be focusing on the monotheistic tradition as found in Western culture's three major religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This is *not* because other religions (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism) are less important. It is rather because many of the questions we'll be raising are specific to the conception of God found in Western culture. A consideration of philosophical issues arising within non-Western religions, while important, must be left for another time.

## Learning outcomes

### *A. Specific course learning outcomes:*

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Recognize a variety of philosophically important issues in religion.
2. Be able to deploy classic arguments for and against certain religious views, especially with respect to God's existence.
3. Identify, analyze, and think critically about the reasons – explicit or implicit – people (including you) have for their religious views.
4. Construct both oral and written arguments in defense of these views.

### *B. Department of Philosophy learning outcomes:*

At the completion of baccalaureate degree studies in Philosophy, students will be able to:

1. Read and comprehend sophisticated philosophical texts;
2. Critically evaluate philosophical arguments;
3. Construct and defend philosophical arguments in well-organized, clear, and concise prose;
4. Demonstrate mastery of basic philosophical concepts and methods in both oral and written contexts;
5. Apply critical thinking and argument-evaluation skills to those philosophical issues and arguments that present themselves in everyday life;
6. Engage in rational, civil discourse about complex and emotionally laden topics in a manner that is respectful of others.

## Assignments and grading

1. Attendance: 10%
2. Short assignments (10): 2% each, 20% total.
3. Paper (4 – 6 pages): 20%.
4. Midterm exam: 25%
5. Final exam: 25%.

Check the schedule of readings for assignment due dates.

Attendance: you get the whole 10% of the attendance grade simply by showing up and being respectful in class. Disrespectful behavior includes, but is not limited to, emailing, surfing the web, texting, taking phone calls, poking your neighbors, talking loudly to yourself, and snoring. This behavior annoys me, but more importantly, is a distraction to your fellow students. Starting with your *third* unexcused absence (you get 2 for free), your final grade will be docked 1% (e.g., from 100% to 99%), up to a maximum of 10%. “Unexcused absence” is defined below. Each day in class, I will pass around a sign-up sheet. It is your responsibility, not mine, to make sure your name is on it.

Question sets: these will be composed of 3 questions covering the reading assigned for the day the set is due. So, the question set due 9/2 will be composed of questions about the reading assigned for 9/2. Roughly, there is one set each week – *not* one set on every

reading we do. The questions will mainly test your comprehension of the reading, but are also designed to help you start *thinking critically* about it. (We'll continue the critical discussion in class.) I won't be asking about nit-picky details, but about major themes and arguments. Your answers must be typed and double-spaced. They should total no more than one page, but can often be much shorter. The questions will be posted on-line one week before they are due, and once you have done the reading, it should only take you about 15 – 20 minutes to do them. *These sets must be turned in at the start of class.* No late question sets will be accepted, as the answers to the questions will generally be discussed in class that day. Note that there will be 13 question sets available for you to do, but you are only required to turn in 10 of them. This means you can skip three with no penalty. Or, you can turn in all 13, and I will count your 10 highest grades. Question sets will be graded on a scale of 0 – 3, with 3 being the best score. Each question is worth 1 point. For questions that don't have straightforward, textually-based answers (viz., questions that ask for your *view* on an issue), points will be awarded based on the clarity and cogency of your answer. I need to be able to understand what you are saying and the reason(s) you have for your views. (It *doesn't* matter whether I agree with you.) Everyone should be able to get a very high grade (i.e., an A or a B) for this part of the course.

Paper: paper topics will be available to you on blackboard at least two weeks before papers are due. Around that time, we will discuss in class what is expected of you in terms of format, writing style, argumentation, etc.

Exams: the midterm covers material only from weeks 1 – 8 of the course; the final covers material only from weeks 9 – 16 of the course.

Overall the grading scheme for the course is: 90 and above = A; 80 – 89 = B; 70 – 79 = C; 60 – 69 = D; 59 and below = F. You can keep updated on your current grade in the course using the “my grades” function on MyBGSU.

#### Extra credit

Class is a lot more interesting when we have vigorous discussions of the readings. I strongly encourage everyone to participate – by asking questions, offering opinions, raising objections, sharing ideas, and so forth. I realize some of you find this hard to do. But you can also participate by asking questions (etc.) after class or in emails to me. To entice you still further, I offer this bonus: excellent participators (in any of these ways) will be given up to 2% extra credit toward their final grades. This matters more often than you might think. So, for example, if your other assignments average an 88%, but you participated regularly and intelligently, you will get an ‘A’ for the course. There is no penalty if you do not participate.

#### Academic integrity policy

If you cheat on a test or plagiarize all or even part of a paper, I will give you an ‘F’ for the course. I am very serious and completely inflexible about this. If you do not know what cheating or plagiarism is, it is your responsibility to inform yourself. BGSU's official policy can be found here:

[http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad\\_policies/Acad\\_policies2.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad_policies/Acad_policies2.html)

#### Late policy/missed exam policy

I recognize all and only the standard excuses for missing an exam and/or turning in a paper late, e.g., illness, jury duty, or a family emergency. Documentation for your excuse (e.g., a doctor's note) will be required. If you are unsure about whether your absence qualifies as excused, ask me.

If you know you will be absent on the day of an exam, arrange to take it before that day. If you do not, and your absence is excused, you will be allowed to take a make-up exam; if your absence is unexcused, you will not be given a make-up.

For each day your paper is late, it will be marked off 4%. Note, days that class doesn't meet and weekend days are still days. So, if a paper is due on a Thursday, and you turn it in the following Tuesday, it will be marked off 20%. (As noted above, this excludes question sets – no late question sets will be accepted.)

Papers are due at the beginning of class. If you turn it in after class is over, it will be marked off 4% (but not another 4% until the following day).

#### Withdrawal policy

Be aware of the university's withdrawal policy. The key portion is this: "During the fall and spring semesters, a student may enroll in a course within seven calendar days from the beginning of classes [8/25]; fourteen calendar days are allowed for a student to change the grading option or to drop a course with no record on the transcript [9/8]. After these dates exceptions may be granted only by the dean of the student's college." Further information can be found here: [http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad\\_policies/Acad\\_policies15.html#withdraw](http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad_policies/Acad_policies15.html#withdraw).

#### Readings

Below is a *tentative* list of readings. These are subject to change, depending on time and class interest. You are expected to have completed the relevant readings *before* class meets.

A '\*' marks a day that a reading question set is due.

#### The nature of God

Week 1:

8/26: Introduction. No reading.

8/28: Rowe, "The Idea of God" (e-reserve).

Week 2:

9/2: Pike, "God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will Are Incompatible."\*

9/4: Plantinga, "God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will Are Compatible."

## Arguments for God's existence

Week 3:

9/9: St. Anselm, "The Ontological Argument."\*

9/11: Kant, "A Critique of the Ontological Argument."

Week 4:

9/16: Aquinas, "The Five Ways"; Clarke, "The Argument from Contingency."\*

9/18: Edwards, "A Critique of the Cosmological Argument."

Week 5:

9/23: Paley, "The Watch and the Watchmaker."\*

9/25: Hume, "A Critique of the Design Argument."

Week 6:

9/30: Broad, "The Argument from Religious Experience"\*

10/2: Pojman, "A Critique of the Argument from Religious Experience."

## The problem of evil

Week 7:

10/7: Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence."\*

10/9: No class. Fall break.

Week 8:

10/14: Rowe, "The Inductive Argument from Evil Against the Existence of God."

10/16: **Midterm Exam.**

Week 9:

10/21: Hick, "Evil and Soul-Making."\*

10/23: Madden and Hare, "A Critique of Hick's Theodicy."

## Miracles

Week 10:

10/28: *Signs of God* (in-class video)

10/30: David Hume, "Against Miracles."\*

Week 11:

11/4: Van Inwagen, "Of 'Of Miracles.'"

11/6: Mackie, "Miracles and Testimony."\*

## Faith and reason

Week 12:

11/11: No class. Veterans Day.

11/13: Pascal, "The Wager."\*

Week 13:

11/18: Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief."

11/20: Plantinga, "Religious Belief Without Evidence." **Paper due.**

Week 14:

11/25: Martin, "A Critique of Plantinga's Religious Epistemology."\*

11/27: No class. Thanksgiving.

## Death and immortality

Week 15:

12/2: Plato, "Immortality of the Soul."\*

12/4: Russell, "The Finality of Death."

Week 16:

12/9: Hick, "Immortality and Resurrection."\*

12/11: Wrap-up and review.

**Final exam:** Tuesday, 12/16, 10:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.