

PH/RE 239: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (Fall 2010)

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Office: 1:30- 2:30 MWF
3:30-4:30 MTWT
Or by appointment

Course Description: Readings in this course deal with some important issues surrounding religious beliefs: proofs for the existence of a theistic god, the rationality of religious belief, the problem of evil for theists, and the relation (if any) between religious belief and ethics. While the focus is on issues in theistic religion, positions from a variety of perspectives will be discussed. *As a philosophy course, no specific religious perspectives, commitments, or texts are valued over alternatives.* The goal is to examine the issues from a philosophical point of view where reason and argument are given final authority. Even in those cases when the argument is that reason should not be given final authority, we look at the arguments for that position.

Course Objectives: At the completion of this course students will have demonstrated the ability

1. to understand many of the common debates in the philosophy of religion.
2. to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view with respect to issues in the philosophy of religion.
3. to express oneself skillfully in writing.

Format: The course format is a combination of lecture and class discussion. At times, discussion questions over the readings will be handed out prior to the day the readings are discussed. Students are responsible for reading each assignment prior to coming to class and for being prepared for discussion. If discussion is found wanting, quizzes will be given. Doing background research on the issues or authors is recommended.

Course Requirements:

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| 1. | Class participation* | 100 pts |
| 2. | Paper Outline | 100 pts. |
| 2. | One critical paper | 200 pts. |
| 3. | Two hour exams | 300 pts. |
| 4. | A comprehensive final** | 300 pts. |

*Satisfactory participation means being actively involved in the discussion of the readings. Anything less than this is "unsatisfactory" and will be graded as such.

**If the grade on the final is higher than the combined points on the one-hour exams, the final grade will be multiplied by 2 and replace the points for the three hour exams.

Exams: Exams will be a combination of objective and essay questions asking students to show their knowledge of the readings and to think critically about the issues. A study guide will be handed out prior to each exam. Questions will be taken from the guides.

Papers: The paper will be a critical analysis of any argument, issue, or position covered in the course. It should be 4 to 6 pages in length. Your text has essays that are critical responses to the essays we are covering. You might pick one of the critiques and evaluate it or use it as a starting place for your research, i.e. Rowe's critique of cosmological arguments.

The attached Paper Evaluation Sheet will be used as a grading rubric for your papers. It should guide your planning and writing the paper. A graded thesis and outline of the paper are required.

Grades: Grades will be determined on a 90\80\70\60 scale. Anyone below 60% of the total points shall not pass. Remember the final can be multiplied by 2 and replace the hour exams if its average is higher.

Attendance: Because of the course format, attendance is required. Grades will be lowered by 10% for each unexcused absence over **four**. The only excused absences are scheduled university events that the student must participate and family or personal health-related issues.

Academic Misconduct: Any instance of academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, or counterfeit work) as defined in the Baker University Student Handbook shall result in at least failure in the course.

Required Text: *Ten Essential Texts in the Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. Steven Cahn. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

ASSIGNMENTS

August

Thu., 26 B Introduction to the course. What is religion? What is the philosophy of religion? Film: **A**Marjoe,[@] an Oscar-winning documentary of the life of the child evangelist Marjoe Gortner

Ethics of Belief: Is it morally wrong to believe on insufficient evidence?

Tue., 31 B Pascal, **A**The Wager,[@] 361-365; Clifford W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," 367-372.

Arguments for the Existence of God

September

Thu., 2 -- Review Clifford and Pascal; The Ontological Argument: Anselm, *Proslogion*, 67-73.

Tues., 7 -- Anselm continued. Cosmological Arguments: Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I, 1,2), 134-139.

Thu., 9 -- Richard Taylor, "The Cosmological Argument: A Defense," 147 -155.

Tue., 14 B Paley, "The Teleological Argument," 265-275; **A**A New and Improved Argument from Design,[@] dlh,

Thu., 16 -- Discussion and Review

Tues., 21 **Exam #1**

Faith and Reason

Thu., 23 -- Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology, @ 278-290.

Tues., 28 -- William Alston, **A**Perceiving God[@] (handout);

Thu., 30 -- Alston continued

October

Tues., 5 B John Hick, **A**Religious Pluralism and Salvation,[@] 450-461.

Thu., 7 B Hick continued

Tues., 12 B Soren Kierkegaard, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript[@] selections, 312 B 320.

Thu. 14, -- **Fall Break**

Tues., 19 -- Review Kierkegaard; Antony Flew, et.al. "Theology, Belief, and Falsification," 221-233.

Thu., 21 -- Review Flew. John Hick, "The Question of Verifiability," 472 – 479; Review

Tues., 26 **B** **Exam #2**

The Problem of Evil and Some Skeptical Arguments

Thu., 27 -- Introductory lecture: "How Not to Solve the Problem of Evil," (DLH);

November

Tues. 2 John Hick, "The Problem of Evil," 289 -296

Thu., 4 **B** Steven Cahn, "The Problem of Goodness," 296-300; Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 301-311.

Tues. 9 **B** David Hume, "Of Miracles," 170 -185

Thu. 11 **B** Robert McKim, "The Hiddenness of God," 494 -499.

Religion and Ethics

due Tues. 16 **B** Nielsen, "Ethics without Religion." **Sign up for an outline conference. Outlines are as attachments by 7:00 p.m. <dhatcher@bakeru.edu>**

Thu. 18 **B** **Outline Conferences as scheduled (Case 102)**

Tues. 23 **Thanksgiving Break**

Thu. 25 **B** **Thanksgiving Break**

Tues., 30 **B** Nielsen, "Ethics without Religion"

December

Thu. 2 **B** **Papers Due.** Review sheet for comprehensive final handed out,

Tue. 7 Papers Returned. Review for final

TBA Comprehensive Final Exam 1:00 - 4:00

OUTLINE EVALUATION SHEET

- 1. Thesis (20)**
Clear, manageable, in standard form: Objections, position, and reasons
- 2. Support (30)**
Arguments are clear and adequately support thesis.
Evidence is sufficient to support all claims.
- 3. Objections and replies (30)**
No obvious objections are omitted.
Replies adequately answer the objections.
- 4. Bibliography (20)**
Sources are numerous enough to satisfy the requirements for the project.
Sources show an honest evaluation various sides of the issue.
Sources are reputable.

Proper documentation format is followed
Critical Paper Evaluation Sheet

Adequacy of introduction of the issue (summary of issue and establishes its importance):

Clarity of thesis (objection-position-reasons) and important concepts:

Quality of support and argumentation (evidence, quotes from relevant texts, etc.):

Quality of objections (to position and/or arguments) and **replies**:

Grammar, spelling, and punctuation: fragments, run-ons, comma splice, noun/pronoun agreement, subject-verb agreement, apostrophe use, sexist language

Quality of expression: paragraph development, transitions, word choice, syntax etc.

Originality of ideas: Not a commonplace thesis, objections were substantive and hard to answer well, or a clever critique of a position.

Quality of research: number of sources, quality of sources, integration of research into paper

All papers should contain the following parts: an introduction to the issue to be treated concluding with your thesis, arguments to support your thesis, objections and replies to the objections, and a summation and conclusion. Papers should be four to six pages. Proper documentation is required and may be MLA, APA, or Chicago Manual of Style. Review your notes from LA 101.