

Philosophy of Religion 100-200

Instructor: Liz Jackson

Course Description:

Philosophy of Religion is the systematic study of questions about God, religion, and religious experience. This includes questions such as: does God exist? What are the best arguments for and against God's existence? If God exists, what is God like? Do you need an argument to rationally believe in God? Is faith compatible with reason? These are questions almost all of us encounter at some point in our lives. The aim of this course is to help students use the tools of logic to explore and make progress on answering these questions. This course will have three units:

- Unit 1: The Concept of God
- Unit 2: The Existence of God
- Unit 3: Rationality and Theistic Belief

Learning Goals:

During the course, students should learn to...

- 1) Clearly state an argument in premise-conclusion form.
- 2) Properly object to an argument in premise-conclusion form.
- 3) State and describe the main *views* on the topics discussed, i.e., the attributes of God, whether God exists, whether there is a practical reason to believe in God, whether an argument is needed to justify religious belief, and the relationship between faith and reason.
- 4) State, examine, and analyze *arguments* for and against the above views.

Policies:

Technology policy: No screens during class, including phones, laptops, tablets, etc. The reason for this policy is that there is quite a bit of research on this topic, and almost all findings support the idea that screens in class inhibit, rather than enhance, student learning. Further, the main purpose of this class is to *discuss* the philosophical issues at hand. I do not, primarily, want students to memorize facts, but for them to think, converse, and form opinions about the various topics. If you need to use a device during class to aid your learning, feel free to come talk to me.

Late work: Late work will be deducted one-third letter grade for each day late (A to A-, etc.).

Text: *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (7th edition) edited by Pojman and Rea.

We will supplement this textbook with other material, including professional philosophy articles, opinion pieces, podcasts, and video. Each topic will have material students are required to read or consume. Many topics will have further material that students are encouraged to consume.

Grading scale: I will use the following grading scale.

A	94+	B+	87-89	B-	80-82	C	73-76	D	60-69
A-	90-93	B	83-86	C+	77-79	C-	70-72	F	59-

Honor Code: Students are responsible for compliance with the University's honor code at all times. I take academic integrity very seriously. Cheating of any kind will be reported, will result in a failing grade on the assignment, and might lead to even stronger penalties. Any particular questions about the honor code should be directed to me.

Accessibility: I am committed to making this course accessible to all students. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability, or who have questions about disability, are invited to talk to me.

Assignments:

Attendance: It is impossible for a student to participate if he or she does not attend class. It is also difficult to learn the material without attending and participating. *Students who have more than two unexcused absences will have points deducted from their overall grade.* Students who are consistently tardy will lose participation points.

Participation: 20%

This class is discussion-based, so participation from the students is especially important. Participation is not just talking a certain number of times in class – it also includes quality of contributions, active contribution to group work, and listening and responding appropriately to your classmates. Getting a good participation grade also requires being on time to class and submitting reading responses.

Reading Responses: Students should submit a question about the assigned material 24 hours before the class meeting on the Google Doc. The question should demonstrate that you read (or watched/consumed/etc.) the material (partially because I am doing these instead of pop quizzes). Consistent failure to submit a question will affect one's participation grade.

Three Podcasts, 15% (5% each)

Students will be put in groups and must pick an argument to discuss. Groups will collaborate to record and produce a 5-10 minute philosophical conversation.

Paper 1, Objection and Response Paper: 25% (~3-4 pages)

In this paper, students pick an argument we talked about in class (or write a new argument with my help), defend the argument, then offer an original objection and response. A rough draft is required (and graded as pass/fail).

Paper 2, Paper & Creative Project: 40% (~6 pages)

Part 1- Paper (20%): In this paper, students take their own view on some issue in philosophy of religion. They offer an argument for their view, then give two objections to their argument, then respond to each objection. A rough draft is required (and graded as pass/fail). Students will provide peer feedback on each other's rough drafts. I will give ideas for paper topics, but students can write on any topic that is related to course material.

Part 2- Project and Presentation (20%): Students are required to do a creative project (poster, video, etc.) that explains or illustrates their argument from paper 3. During the final weeks of the semester, students will present their projects to the class.

I have a strict policy of blind grading for papers. Do not include your first or last name on your papers. Instead, merely include your student ID number.

Schedule:

PoR = *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (7th edition)

UNIT 1: THE CONCEPT OF GOD

Week 1: Introduction and Attributes of God

- Introductions and syllabus.
- Nicolas Everitt, “The Divine Attributes” *Philosophy Compass*.

Week 2: God and Time

- Hugh McCann, “The God Beyond Time” (PoR I.B.1).
- Stephen T. Davis, “Temporal Eternity” (PoR I.B.2).

Week 3: Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

- Pike, “God’s Foreknowledge and Human Free will are Incompatible” (PoR IV.B.7).
- Plantinga, “God’s Foreknowledge and Human Free Will are Compatible” (PoR IV.B.8).
 - Recommended: Augustine, “Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will” (PoR IV.B.6).

UNIT 2: THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Week 4: The Problem of Evil

- J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence” (PoR III.B.1).
 - Recommended: Hume “The Argument from Evil.”
- Rowe, “The Inductive Argument from Evil against the Existence of God” (PoR III.B.2).
 - Recommended: Draper, “Evolution and the Problem of Evil” (PoR III.B.3).

Week 5: The Problem of Evil, cont.

- Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense” (PoR III.C.1).
- Hick, “Evil and Soulmaking” (PoR III.C.2).
 - Recommend: Ekstrom, “Suffering as Religious Experience” (PoR III.C.6).

Week 6: The Problem of Divine Hiddenness

- Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism” (PoR III.B.5).
- Poston and Dougherty, “Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief” in *Religious Studies*.
 - Recommended: Rea, “Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence” (PoR III.C.8).

Week 7: The Cosmological Argument

- Aquinas “The Five Ways” (II.B.1).
 - Recommended: Craig and Moreland “The Kalam Cosmological Argument” (PoR I.B.4).
- Draper, “A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument” (PoR I.B.4).
 - Recommended: Rowe, “An Examination of the Cosmological Argument” (PoR II.B.3).

Week 8: The Fine-Tuning Argument

- Robin Collins “A Scientific Argument for God's Existence” (PoR II.C.4).
- Jonathan Weisberg, “A Note on Design: What's Fine-tuning Got to Do With It?” in *Analysis*.
 - Recommended: Roger White, “What fine-tuning's got to do with it: a reply to Weisberg” in *Analysis*.

UNIT 3: RATIONALITY AND THEISTIC BELIEF

Week 9: Pascal's Wager

- Video, “Pascal's Wager” (Susanna Rinard).
- Pascal, “The Wager” (PoR V.B.1).
 - Recommended: Hajek, “Waging War on Pascal's Wager.”

Week 10: Rational Theistic Belief without Arguments

- Flew “The Presupposition of Atheism” (PoR V.C.2).
- Bergmann, “Rational Religious Belief without Arguments” (PoR V.C.3).

Week 11: Religious Experience

- Alston, “Perceiving God” (PoR IV.A.4).
- Fales, “Do Mystics See God?” (PoR IV.A.5).

Week 12: Faith and Reason

- Howard-Synder, “Propositional Faith: What it is and what it is not” (PoR V.A.3).
- Video, “Reason and Faith” (Greg Ganssle).
 - Recommended: Buchak “When is faith rational?” in *Norton Introduction to Philosophy*.

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Student Presentations

Week 15: Student Presentations