

Faith and Reason: An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Winter 20??

Instructor: Gerard Rothfus
Classroom: ???
Day/Time: ???
Office Hours: ??? or by appointment
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Description

Many of life's deepest and most important questions are religious in nature: Does God exist? Can faith be rational? Is there life after death? This course explores these and related questions from the standpoints of historical and contemporary philosophy of religion. Topics covered include the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments for the existence of God, the nature and attributes of God, the problem of evil, the nature and rationality of religious faith, and debates surrounding miracles and the afterlife.

Learning Objectives

This course will equip students to think critically and thoughtfully about matters concerning God and religion using the tools appropriate to philosophy. Students will finish the course with a broad appreciation of historical arguments for/against the rationality of religious faith, the existence of God, and the reality of life after death, as well as a good sense of the current dialectical state of academic debate on these topics. Finally, students who complete the course will have advanced in the skill of writing clear, lucid, and charitable argumentative papers.

Course Materials

The required text for the course as all readings is:

- *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (4th edition) by Brian Davies, 2020, Oxford University Press.

All other course readings will be made available online via

Course Structure

The course will be organized around a weekly lecture/discussion period, where various topics in philosophy of religion will be explored and discussed in person. You are strongly urged to do the suggested readings before each lecture in order to be better prepared to engage, ask questions, make suggestions in discussion, etc. Periodically, I may also release short, pre-recorded videos to the class site (as well as YouTube), summarizing different ideas covered in the course. You may view these videos to help with understanding particular readings or just to get a better grip on key ideas in the course.

I will also hold office hours on ... after class until Feel free to come to office hours and ask any questions you may have about the course! If you are unable to make this time any week and would like to discuss the course, you are very much encouraged to set up an appointment for another time. In these office hours, I am happy to go over past readings or discuss questions about upcoming assignments, new material, writing strategies, etc. Whether in or out of office hours, please feel free to reach out to me any time!

Course Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be determined by (i) a short midterm paper (25%), (ii) a rough draft of a longer paper (25%), (iii) a final version of the longer paper (35%), and (iv) class attendance/participation (15%).

Midterm Paper

Your short midterm paper will require you to write a philosophical response to one of the authors we read on arguments for/against the existence of God. You will select one of the readings and write a 1,000 to 2,000 word response to the reading that summarizes and explains a view held or an argument made by the author and then either (a) criticizes the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting an argument against it or raising and defending an objection to the argument) or (b) defends the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting a new argument for the view or supplying new support for the argument's premises). Every student will have the option of rewriting their midterm paper in light of my feedback to improve their grade.

I will make use of this general rubric in grading both the midterm and final papers: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/grades.html>

Final Paper

Your final paper will require you to write a philosophical essay arguing for or against a significant position in contemporary philosophy of religion of your choosing (though distinct from the topic of your first essay). You may write concerning one of the topics discussed in class (e.g. miracles or the afterlife) or may find an alternative topic if you clear it (and the sources you will use) with me first. Your paper should be 1,500 to 2,500 words in length and will be assessed according to the general rubric linked above. We will discuss good philosophical writing practices and tips for handling the final paper as the course goes on.

Attendance and Participation

Participation credit can be earned by (i) attending lectures, (ii) thoughtfully participating in class discussions, and (iii) attending office hours. Students are expected to attend lectures, though two classes may be missed without penalty to a student's participation score. Students are encouraged to participate actively in course discussions by asking questions, raising objections, or presenting their own ideas. It is very natural to feel apprehensive or intimidated about speaking during class. (I often felt this way in my philosophy classes!) If you have any concerns about classroom participation, please feel free to come talk with me about it during office hours, both because this is an additional way to earn participation credit outside the classroom and because maybe we can find ways to make classroom discussion seem less formidable.

Every voice is welcome in our classroom and students should feel free to raise any questions or thoughts they may have regarding course material during our class discussions. However, every student is expected to respect the bounds of kindness and respect for their peers during these discussions. (Avoid interrupting, rude language, etc.) Conducting oneself with honesty and compassion is essential to good participation in the discussion and debate of controversial philosophical and religious topics.

Grade Scale

A: 90-100	B: 80-89	C: 70-79	D: 60-69	F: < 60
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If you have any questions about your grade at any point in the course, please don't hesitate to ask!

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Though collaboration among students is encouraged, any work a student turns in must ultimately be their own.

Students who have any questions or uncertainty about this policy are responsible for meeting with the instructor to discuss the policy.

Disabilities

Please notify me in advance of the need for accommodation of a University verified disability. I will gladly provide the required accommodations. If you have any questions or concerns about disability accommodations, please don't hesitate to speak with me; I am happy to help out.

Course Outline

Week:	Topic:
Week 1	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophical method and writing, Logic <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments” by E.J. Coffman.
Part I	Philosophy and Religious Belief
Week 2	<p>Theism and its Variants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to believe in God? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 1: “Whose God? Which Tradition?”. • “On Worshipping the Right God” by Peter Geach.
Week 3	<p>The Rationality of Religious Faith I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is atheism the rational default? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 2: “Philosophy and Religious Belief”. • “The Presumption of Atheism” by Antony Flew.
Week 4	<p>The Rationality of Religious Faith II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can belief in God be properly basic? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Religious Belief as ‘properly basic’” by Alvin Plantinga.

Week:	Topic:
Part II	The Existence of God
Week 5	<p>Cosmological Arguments I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the universe have a beginning? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 3: “Cosmological Arguments”. • “The Kalam Cosmological Argument” by William Lane Craig and JP Moreland. • “A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument” by Paul Draper.
Week 6	<p>Cosmological Arguments II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an ultimate explanation of contingent reality? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Leibnizian Cosmological Arguments” by Alexander Pruss. • “Objections to Cosmological Arguments” by Paul Edwards.
Week 7	<p>Teleological Arguments I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the universe designed? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 4: “Design Arguments”. • “We cannot know that the world is designed by God” by David Hume. • “God, Regularity, and David Hume” by Richard Swinburne.
Week 8	<p>Teleological Arguments II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the universe fine-tuned? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Fine-Tuning Design Argument” by Robin Collins. <p>Midterm Paper Due</p>

Week:	Topic:
Week 9	<p>Ontological Arguments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must there be a Greatest Conceivable Being? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davies, Chapter 5: “Ontological Arguments”. <li>• <i>Proslogion</i> and <i>Exchange with Gaunilo</i> by St. Anselm. <li>• “A Contemporary Defense of Ontological Arguments” by Alvin Plantinga.
Week 10	<p>The Problem of Evil</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the existence of God compatible with evil and suffering? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davies, Chapter 11: “God and Evil”. <li>• <i>God, Freedom, and Evil</i> (selections) by Alvin Plantinga. <li>• “The Problem of Evil” by Michael Tooley.
Part III	The Nature of God
Week 11	<p>Talking About God</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we understand and talk about God? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davies, Chapter 7: “Talking About God”. <li>• “How Believers Find God-talk Puzzling” by St. Augustine. <li>• “One Way of Understanding God-talk” by St. Thomas Aquinas.
Week 12	<p>Divine Simplicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is God absolutely simple? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davies, Chapter 8: “Divine Simplicity”. <li>• “Problems with Divine Simplicity” by Thomas Morris. <li>• “A Modern Defense of Divine Simplicity” by Brian Davies.

Week:	Topic:
Week 13	<p>Omnipotence and Omniscience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is God all-powerful and all-knowing? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 9: “Omniscience and Omnipotence”. • “Understanding Omnipotence” by Kenneth Pearce and Alexander Pruss.
Part IV	Morality, Miracles, and Life After Death
Week 14	<p>Morality and God</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does morality require God? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 12: “Morality and Religion”. • <i>Euthyphro</i> by Plato. • “The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again” by William Lane Craig.
Week 15	<p>Miracles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it reasonable to believe in miracles? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 10: “Miracles”. • “The Case for Miracles” by Charity Anderson and Alexander Pruss. • “Testimony about Miracles Does Not Provide Evidence” by Arif Ahmed.
Week 16	<p>Life After Death</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there life after death? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davies, Chapter 13: “Life After Death”. • “Philosophy and Life After Death: The Questions and the Options” by Stephen T. Davis. <p>Final Paper Due</p>