

PHIL 331 (500): Philosophy of Religion
Spring 2024

Instructor: Byron Simmons

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Class: MWF 3:00 – 3:50 PM in YMCA 109

Office hours: 1:45 – 2:45 PM in YMCA 301J and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION: *Philosophy of religion* is, roughly, the philosophical study of religion. It is concerned with religious concepts, beliefs, practices, and experiences.

We will explore two basic kinds of questions. The first will be primarily *theological*: they will concern various accounts of the nature and existence of God. What would something need to be like in order to be God? Does such a God exist? The second will be primarily *soteriological*: they will concern the nature of salvation. What, ultimately, are we? Is there an eternal “self”, or is our existence impermanent and fleeting?

We will read a mix of historical and contemporary sources drawn from each of the world’s four major religious traditions: namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

COURSE PREREQUISITES: Junior or senior classification or approval of instructor.

SPECIAL COURSE DESIGNATION: None.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES: The primary goal of this course is to introduce you to some of the basic concepts and debates in the philosophy of religion. By the end of this course, you will have developed the ability to:

- Identify the structure of arguments—identifying their premises, conclusion, and logical form—and to present them in premise-conclusion form.
- Provide focused objections to arguments, which concentrate either on a particular premise or on a particular inference in the argument’s structure and suggest reasons to doubt that premise or inference.
- Analyze the strength of different objections to an argument, thinking about how an objection works, how central to the argument the point being challenged by the objection is, and how easy it would be to modify the argument so as to avoid the objection.
- Rationally defend a philosophical position, by explaining and then presenting valid arguments in favor of each of its central tenets, and identifying and responding to potential objections to it.

TEXTBOOKS AND COURSE RESOURCE MATERIALS: All required readings will be made available electronically.

Please note that this course will be somewhat **reading-intensive**. The required texts might not be very long, but you will still need to spend a lot of time doing the reading assignments. If you want to do as well as possible, you will need to read each reading assignment carefully and critically, and more than once.

The reading assignments will form the basis for the class discussions but these discussions will often cover material that goes beyond the readings. If you don’t work hard at the readings, you will

have a much harder time understanding the class lectures; and if you only do the readings and skip the lectures, you will miss out on much of what the course will cover.

GRADING POLICY: There will be a **midterm exam** (on March 8th) and a **final exam** (on May 6th) worth 150 points each: these exams will both be closed-book, closed-notes.

There will also be **several homework assignments** of varying lengths worth a total of 150 points.

Your **class participation** will be worth an additional 50 points.

There are thus a total of 500 points available in this course. Your grade will be determined on the basis of this numerical grade and will break down as follows:

- A: 500 – 450 points (100% - 90%)
- B: 449 – 400 points (89% - 80%)
- C: 399 – 350 points (79% - 70%)
- D: 349 – 300 points (69% - 60%)
- F: below 300 points (below 60%)

Please note that **attendance is required**. If you receive over 9 absences, you will get a zero for class participation. And if you have over 15 absences, you will automatically fail the course.

LATE WORK POLICY: Each homework assignment is due at the start of class on the day that it is due. I will accept late work with no penalty, provided that you turn it in within a week of its due date.

If, for whatever reason, you are unable to take either of the in-class exams on the days that they are held, you will need to schedule a makeup exam. I would strongly prefer you to take the exams on time, but I will allow you to make them up without penalty, provided that you do so no later than a week after they are held.

Work submitted by a student as makeup work for an excused absence is not considered late work and is exempted from the late work policy ([Student Rule 7](#)).

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE POLICY: Attendance is required. Once you have more than 9 absences, you will get a zero for class participation. And once you have over 15 absences, you will automatically fail the course.

While in class, you should be **actively engaged**. An actively engaged student will raise questions, contribute points of view about the readings and what I say about them—which can include challenging my interpretation of the readings or the plausibility of my assessment of their arguments.

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

MAKEUP WORK POLICY: Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in [Student Rule 7](#), or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#)).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT AND POLICY: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) POLICY: Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below). Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

TITLE IX AND STATEMENT ON LIMITS TO CONFIDENTIALITY: Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes,

or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation.

The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX webpage](#).

STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS: Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing.

Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus.

Students who need someone to talk to can contact Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) or call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or at 988lifeline.org.

TENATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE: The required readings should be done before the class under which they are listed. (* = optional, supplementary reading)

Preliminaries

Wed, 1/17	Introduction to Classical Theism and Perfect Being Theology Peter van Inwagen, <i>The Problem of Evil</i> , Lecture 2, "The Idea of God"
Fri, 1/19	Theism, Atheism, Agnosticism, and the Default Position * van Inwagen, <i>The Problem of Evil</i> , Lecture 3, "Philosophical Failure"
Mon, 1/22	Faith and Reason Augustine, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i> [= King 2010, pp. 33-34] Ibn Rushd [Averroes], <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> [=McGuinness and Reisman 2007: pp. 313-314] Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> , I.3-4 [= Pegis 1975, pp. 63-68]

I. Arguments for God's Existence

- Wed, 1/24 The Classical Cosmological Argument
Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3 [= Davies and Leftow 2006, pp. 24-27]
- Fri, 1/26 The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument
al-Ghazālī, *Moderation in Belief* [= Yaqub 2013, pp. 27-29]
Homework 1 due (30 points)
- Mon, 1/29 The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument (continued)
William Lane Craig, "The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument"
*Richard Courant and Herbert Robbins, *What is Mathematics?* pp. 77-83
- Wed, 1/31 The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument
G.W. Leibniz, *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* [= Ariew and Garber 1989, pp. 149-150]
Émilie du Châtelet, *Foundations of Physics*, ch. 2 [= Zinsser 2009, pp. 138-147]
- Fri, 2/2 The Teleological Argument
William Paley, *Natural Theology*, ch. 1
Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument", pp. 98-105
- Mon, 2/5 The Teleological Argument (continued)
Elliot Sober, "The Design Argument", pp. 133-140
- Wed, 2/7 The Teleological Argument (continued)
Collins, "The Teleological Argument", pp. 105-109
* Collins and Sober, "Is Fine-Tuning Evidence that God Exists?"
- Fri, 2/9 The Teleological Argument (continued)
- Mon, 2/12 The Ontological Argument
Anselm, *Proslogion* 2-5 [= Davies and Evans 1998, pp. 87-89]
Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, ch. 2, pp. 26-29
Homework 2 due (20 points)
- Wed, 2/14 The Ontological Argument (continued)
*Gary Matthews, "The Ontological Argument", pp. 89-95
- Fri, 2/16 The Modal Ontological Argument
Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 104-112
- Mon, 2/19 The Modal Ontological Argument (continued)
*George I. Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence"
*Wes Morriston, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection", pp. 143-144

Interlude: Alternative Conceptions of God

- Wed, 2/21 Stoic Pantheism
Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus* [= Inwood and Gerson 1988, p. 102]
Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.1-39 [= Inwood and Gerson 1988, pp. 103-109]
Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 9.74-91, 101-114, 133-136 [= Bett 2012, pp. 18-21, 23-26, 29-30]
Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.132-160 [= White 2021, pp. 305-312]
- Fri, 2/23 Stoic Pantheism (continued)
Homework 3 due (20 points)
- Mon, 2/26 Stoic Pantheism (continued)
- Wed, 2/28 Objections to Stoic Pantheism
Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 7.1 [= Long and Sedley 1987, pp. 329-330]
Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 13 [= Inwood and Gerson 1988, p. 64]
- Fri, 3/1 Objections to Stoic Pantheism (continued)
*J.L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', pp. 200-208

II. Arguments against God's Existence

- Mon, 3/4 The Problem of Evil
William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism", pp. 335-338
*van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, Lecture 1, "The Problem of Evil and the Argument from Evil"
- Wed, 3/6 The Problem of Evil (continued)/Review for Midterm
- Fri, 3/8 **Midterm Exam (150 points)**
- [Mon, 3/11 & Wed, 3/12 & Fri, 3/15 – No Class – Spring Break]
- Mon, 3/18 The Free Will Defense
David Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?", pp. 149-152
*van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, Lecture 4, "The Global Argument from Evil"
Homework 4 due (20 points)
- Wed, 3/20 [No Class – Instructor away]
- Fri, 3/22 The Free Will Defense (continued)
Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?", pp. 153-155
Laura W. Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, ch. 2, pp. 48-52
- Mon, 3/25 The Free Will Defense (continued)
van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy", p. 163
Daniel Howard-Snyder and Frances Howard-Snyder, "The Christian Theodicy's Appeal to Love", p. 187
Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, ch. 2, pp. 52-57

- Wed, 3/27 The Problem of Horrendous Evils
 Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", pp. 297-304
- Fri, 3/29 [No Class – Reading Day]
- Mon, 4/1 The Divine Intimacy Defense
 Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", pp. 304-310
 Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, ch. 3, pp. 73-81, 85-95
- Wed, 4/3 Skeptical Theism
 Stephen Maitzen, "The Moral Skepticism Objection to Skeptical Theism"
 *Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil", pp. 375-386
- Fri, 4/5 The Problem of Hell
 Augustine, *City of God*, Book 21, ch. 1, 9-13, 17, 23 [= Dyson 1998, pp. 1044-1045,
 1064-1072, 1076-1077, 1083-1084]
 Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians", pp. 301-306
 Lewis, "Divine Evil", pp. 231-235
- Mon, 4/8 The Problem of Hell (continued)
 Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians", pp. 320-327
 Lewis, "Divine Evil", pp. 235-238
- Wed, 4/10 The Problem of Hell (continued)
 Lewis, "Divine Evil", pp. 238-242
- Fri, 4/12 The Problem of Heaven
 Augustine, *City of God*, Book 22, ch. 30 [= Dyson 1998, pp. 1178-1182]
 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Doctrine*, § 163 [= Mackintosh & Stewart
 1928, pp. 721-722]
 Yujin Nagasawa, Graham Oppy & Nick Trakakis, "Salvation in Heaven?", pp. 97-104
- Mon, 4/15 The Problem of Divine Hiddenness
 J.L. Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy", pp. 13-25
 Homework 5 due (20 points)
- Wed, 4/17 The Problem of Divine Hiddenness (continued)
 Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy", pp. 25-32
- Fri, 4/19 The Problem of Divine Hiddenness (continued)
 Imran Aijaz, "Islam and the Problem of Divine Hiddenness", pp. 181-189
 *Gary Legenhausen, "Is God a Person?"

Coda: Alternative Conceptions of God

- Mon, 4/22 Nyāya Theism
 Nyāya-sūtra with commentary by Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara [= Dasti and Phillips
 2017, pp. 116-125]
 *Matthew Dasti, '[Theism in] Asian Philosophy', pp. 23-29, 32-35
 Homework 6 due (20 points)

- Wed, 4/24 Nyāya Theism (continued)
Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, *Śloka-vārttika*, and Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇa-vārttika* [= Guha, Dasti, and Phillips 2021, pp. 79-83]
*Śāntarakṣita, *Tattvasaṃgraha* with commentary by Kamalaśīla [= Goodman 2022, pp. 68-97]
- Fri, 4/26 Nyāya Theism (continued)
Nyāya-sūtra with commentary by Vācaspati Miśra [= Guha, Dasti, and Phillips 2021, pp. 41-62]
- Mon, 4/29 Nyāya Theism (continued)
Homework 7 due (20 points)
- Tues, 4/30 Last Day of Class/Review for Final Exam
- Mon, 5/6 **Final Exam from 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM (150 points)**