

Philosophy of Religion (Phil. 253/ Rel. 253): Spring 2011

Instructor: Dr. Arash Naraghi

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10 am-11am, Wednesday 4pm-5pm and by appointment.

Lectures: MW 11:45am- 12:55pm, Main St. Campus, Comenius Hall, 218

Course Description:

In this course, we will approach the large topics of religion from a philosophical perspective. More precisely, we will explore the rational dimension of religious belief system. So, we will be seeking clarification of important religious ideas and concepts. We will also be seeking justification for religious beliefs, and explore the relation between religion and some other aspects of human affairs. The class will consider different and conflicting positions in five major areas of philosophy of religion: (1) the relation between faith and reason; (2) reasons for the existence of God: (a) religious experience, (b) theistic arguments, (c) knowing God without arguments; (3) reasons against the existence of God: the problem of evil; (4) religious diversity; and finally, (5) the relation between religion and non-religion: (a) religion and morality, and (b) religion and science.

Course Objectives:

- To develop a substantial understanding of major topics in philosophy of religion.
- To develop skills of analyzing and evaluating arguments for and against different religious doctrines vigorously, fairly, and with sympathy.
- To exercise scholarly fairness, sympathy, and tolerance toward different conflicting views, and expand our intellectual horizon.
- To diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes our mind against speculation.
- To enrich our intellectual imagination.
- To learn how to think and write explicitly, clearly, and succinctly.
- To think creatively, and to be able to imagine alternatives to familiar view and situations.
- To have a better understanding of our own position on religion.

Required Texts:

- *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach, D. Basinger, Oxford: Oxford university Press, Fourth edition, 2009.
- *Philosophy of Religion (Selected Readings)*, M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach, D. Basinger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Third edition, 2007.

These books are available at Moravian College Book Store.

Note: You will find that you get the most out of the course if you read each assignment before lecture and then re-read the assignment after the lecture.

Lecture attendance:

It is not possible to perform well in the course without attending lectures regularly. We will cover substantial amounts of material in the lectures not necessarily included anywhere in the readings. It is highly unlikely that you will learn this material adequately by, e.g., borrowing your friend's lecture notes. You have two class sessions you can miss with no question asked. Beyond those two class sessions, any further missed classes without a really good excuse (involving a note from your doctor, psychiatrist, parole officer, etc.) will cost you 2% of your final grade.

Important Note: Please turn off your cell phones before walking into class! If you are having an emergency that requires you to have your cell phone on, please tell me at the beginning of class. No text messaging is allowed during the class, and the use of computers should be strictly confined to the things directly related to the class.

Academic honesty:

Students are required to honor academic integrity. The course imposes the application of Moravian College's Academic Honesty Policy. The policy is to be found at Moravian College's *Student Handbook*.

Course requirements:

- (1) A regular final exam, scheduled for **Monday, May 2, 2011, 8:30AM**, plus a midterm (tentatively scheduled for **Wednesday, March 2, 2011**). You will receive a Study Guide for the Midterm and Final Exams prior to the exams to know what kind of questions you should expect on the Midterm and Final Exams. Make up final exam will be administered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances, and only in light of appropriate supporting documents.
- (2) One paper (1500-2000 words). On Wednesday, April 6, 2011, you will receive the paper topic. The paper due is **Monday, April 18, 2011**. Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. You are responsible to submit a hard copy of your paper. In some exceptional cases, you may be allowed to submit your paper through email. If so, you must receive a confirmation email from me, otherwise, you must assume that I have not received your paper. If the paper is turned in late without prior permission, the grade will be adjusted downwards by a third of a grade for each day the paper is late (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.). It is always helpful to discuss the draft of your paper with your friends, roommates, or classmates so as to solicit feedback.
- (3) You will be required to write weekly short paragraphs (not more than two pages) consist of your critical evaluation of the material to be discussed in the class. In the paragraphs, you should concentrate on a specific concept, theme or question. You are required to complete 10 assignments of this sort by the end of the semester, that is, you have the option of choosing 10 out of roughly

13 assignments I am to assign throughout the semester. Every week, by the end of our Wednesday class, the assignments should be submitted.

Important note: *By the end of the semester, all four above-mentioned requirements (midterm exam, final exam, weekly assignments, and paper) must be completed in order to pass the course. In other words, if you miss at least one of the above requirements, we will fail the course automatically.*

Grading:

Final Exam: 30% - Midterm Exam: 30%- Paper: 20% - Weekly Paragraphs: 20%.

The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Grade	4-point conversion
95-100	A	4
90-95	A-	3.7
87-90	B+	3.3
84-87	B	3
80-84	B-	2.7
77-80	C+	2.3
74-77	C	2
70-74	C-	1.7
67-70	D+	1.3
64-67	D	1
60-64	D-	0.7
0-60	F	0

Tentative Lecture Schedule:

I. Faith and Reason: January 17, 19, 24, 26.

Readings:

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief:* Ch.2; Ch.4.
- (2) *Philosophy of Religion:* (i) “Religion as a Social Phenomenon” (Emile Durkheim); (ii) “A Defense of Religious Realism” (Roger Trigg), (iii) “The harmony of philosophy and the Qur’an” (Ibn Rushd); (iv) “The ethics of belief” (William Clifford); (v) “Truth is Subjectivity” (Soren Kierkegaard).

II. Religious Experience: January 31, Feb. 2, 7, 9.

Readings:

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief:* Ch.3.
- (2) *Philosophy of Religion:* (i) “Religious Experience as the Root of Religion” (William James); (ii) “Religious Experience as Perception of God” (William Alston); (iii) Religious Experiences as Interpretative Account” (Wayne Proudfoot).

III. Theistic Arguments: Feb. 14, 16, 21, 23.

Readings:

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief:* Ch. 6 (pp.90- 104).

- (2) *Philosophy of Religion*: (i) “The Classical Ontological Argument” (Saint Anselm); (ii) “Critique of Anselm’s Argument”; (iii) “The Classical Cosmological Argument” (Thomas Aquinas); (iv) “The Kalam Cosmological Argument” (William Lane Craig); (v) “Critique of the Cosmological Argument” (J. L. Mackie).

On Feb. 23, you will receive the Study Guide for the midterm exam.

On Feb. 28, we will have a review session for the midterm exam.

March 2, Midterm Exam.

IV. Knowing God without Arguments: March 14, 16.

Reading:

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief*: Ch. 7.
(2) *Philosophy of Religion*: (i) “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology” (Alvin Plantinga)

V. The Problem of Evil: March 21, 23, 28.

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief*: Ch. 8.
(2) *Philosophy of Religion*: (i) “Evil and Omnipotence” (J. L. Mackie); (ii) “The Free Will Defense” (Alvin Plantinga)

VI. Religious Diversity: March 30, April 4, 6.

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief*: Ch. 14.
(2) *Philosophy of Religion*: (i) “Religious Pluralism” (John Hick); (ii) “Religious Inclusivism” (Karl Rahner); (iii) “A Defense of Exclusivism” (Alvin Plantinga) (would be posted on Blackboard).

On April 6, the paper topic will be assigned.

VII. Religion and Morality: April 11, 13.

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief*: Ch. 15
(2) *Philosophy of Religion*: (i) “Which God ought we to Obey?” (Alasdair MacIntyre); (ii) “Ethics and Natural Law” (Thomas Aquinas).

VIII. Religion and Science: April 18, 20, 25.

- (1) *Reason and Religious Belief*: Ch. 13.
(2) *Philosophy of Religion*: (i) “Two Separate Domains” (Stephen Jay Gould); (ii) “Theology and Scientific Methodology” (Nancey Murphy).

The paper due is on April, 18.

On April 20, you will receive the Study Guide for the Final Exam.

On April 27, the review session for the Final will be held.

The Final Exam will be held on Monday, May 2, at 8:30AM, Main St. Campus, Comenius Hall, 218.

Important Notes:

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510).
- The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392. The Writing Center tutors will make arrangements with the student who needs tutoring services to meet in an accessible location, such as the library or a study/conference room in PPHAC.