

Philosophy of Religion (Phil. 253/ Rel. 253): Fall 2015

Instructor: Dr. Arash Naraghi

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Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30-11:30am, Thursday 2:30-3:30pm, and by appointment.

Lectures: TR 10:20 AM-11:30 AM, Main Street Campus, Comenius Hall, 201.

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; (3) reasons against the existence of God: the problem of evil; (4) religious diversity; and finally, (5) the relation between 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 **Thursday, Dec. 17, 1:30PM**, plus a midterm (tentatively scheduled for **Thursday, October 8th**). 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 (700-1500 words). On Nov. 3rd the paper topic will be posted on Blackboard. The paper due is **Nov. 17th**. The Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. 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. I am to assign 12 assignments throughout the semester, however, you are required to complete only 10 assignments of this sort by the end of the semester, that is, you have the option of choosing 10 out of 12 assignments. The topic for the reflecting paper will be posted on Thursdays and the due date will

be the next Thursdays (There would be no assignment for the first week).

- (4) You will be divided into two groups, and groups are required to participate in 4 class discussions. As a group you receive a grade between 0 and 10 for each discussion. If you miss a discussion, you individually receive 0 for that discussion, unless you have an extremely good excuse for your absence. If your absence is excused, then I will decide how you may make up for the missing discussion. However, if you miss more than one discussion, the make-up policy applies only to one of them, and you will receive 0 for the rest.

Grading:

Final Exam: 30% - Midterm Exam: 30%- Paper: 20% - Class discussions: 10% - Weekly Paragraphs: 10%.

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: Sept. 1, 8, 10, 15

Note: There would be no class on Sept. 3rd.

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).

First Class Debate: Sept.22.

II. Religious Experience: Sept. 17, 24, 29.

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: Oct. 1, 6, 15, 20.

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).

Midterm Exam: Thursday, Oct 8th.

Second Class Debate: Tue. Oct. 27.

IV. The Problem of Evil: Oct. 27, Nov. 3, 5, 10, 12.

- (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). (iii) “The Evidential Argument from Evil” (William Rowe).

On Nov. 3rd, the paper topic will be assigned.

The paper due is on Nov. 17.

The third class debate is on Nov. 19.

V. Religious Diversity: Dec. 1, 3.

- (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).

VI. Religion and Science: Dec. 8.

- (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).

Fourth Class Debate: Dec. 10.

The Final Exam will be held on Thursday, Dec. 17, 1:30PM, Main St. Campus, Comenius Hall, 201.

Important Notes:

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Ms. Laurie Roth, Assistant Director of Academic & Disability Support, located on the first floor of Monocacy Hall (extension 1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic & Disability Support office.
- 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.