
Philosophy 262: Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

University of Michigan, Spring Semester, 2010

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Office hours T/Th, 4:10–5:00pm (1156 Angell), or by appointment

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1 Required Texts

- Peterson *et al.* (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (Fourth Edition, 2009, Oxford UP). [[AMAZON LINK](#)]

The book will run you \$46 from Amazon, if purchased new.

2 About the course

This is a course about the **PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**, which is just to say that we will be studying religion—certain items of religious belief, specifically—as a phenomenon of philosophical interest, using tried-and-tested (if not always conclusive) philosophical techniques. We will do this by subjecting religious belief to two major kinds of scrutiny: **direct scrutiny** and **indirect scrutiny**.

Direct scrutiny is about trying to assess whether or not some item of religious belief is true or false. We will, for example, be considering several arguments that purport to establish, to a reasonable degree of certainty, that there is a God (as well as arguments that purport to establish, to a reasonable degree of certainty, that

there is no God). Most of the direct scrutiny we'll be looking at is concerned with the **ontological** question of whether or not God exists. Indirect scrutiny, to contrast, is about trying to assess whether or not some item of religious belief is justified, rational, responsible, supported by the evidence, etc. The character of indirect scrutiny tends toward the **epistemological**, rather than ontological. Although related in interesting and sometimes subtle ways, it's important to keep in mind that direct scrutiny and indirect scrutiny are ultimately two different kinds of philosophical activity, with different objectives and different norms: we could, for example, succeed in showing that some item of religious belief is not supported by any evidence (irresponsible, irrational, etc.), without thereby having shown that it was false.

My big goal in this course is to introduce you to a general method for thinking and writing carefully about a wide range of philosophical questions. Ideally, the skill set you learn in this course will include:

- The ability to *read philosophical literature* carefully and identify (i) an author's point of view and (ii) her arguments in favor of that point of view.
- The ability to *evaluate philosophical arguments* critically, to ascertain whether an author's argument (i) supports her point of view and (ii) is itself plausible.
- The ability to *construct plausible arguments* for philosophical points of view.

3 Preparing for lecture

For each scheduled meeting of the course, I'll assign a chunk of reading. Your job, prior to the lecture, is to do the reading, to do it *carefully*, and to come to lecture ready to discuss the reading with the rest of the class. If things work as I'm expecting, the bulk of class time will be devoted to student-led discussion.

For each meeting, I ask that you **write down (at least) one substantive question** about each article that was assigned. I will collect these questions at the beginning of the lecture (so, for the sake of class discussion, try to remember your question or keep a copy of it). I can't give a definition of what I mean by 'substantive question,' but I can tell you that substantive questions tend (i) not to be about terminology, (ii) not to have the form *What does author X mean by term Y?*, (iii) to be distinct from the "Study Questions" that appear at the end of each assigned reading. The quality of your questions, and the level of engagement with the reading that they show, will in large part determine your participation grade.

4 Grading

There are 450 possible points. The breakdown is as follows.

- Participation (50 points)
- Daily quizzes (100 points)
- Midterm paper (100 points)
- Final paper (100 points)
- Comprehensive final exam (100 points)

You must complete both papers and take the final exam to pass.

5 Quizzes

Each day, prior to the beginning of the lecture, there will be a quiz over the reading for that day. The quizzes will be short, consisting of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Their main purpose is to determine whether or not you've done the reading conscientiously. So, the best way to prepare for them is to do the reading conscientiously. **The lowest quiz grade will be dropped when calculating your average. There are no make-up quizzes; if you miss a quiz, that will count as your drop.**

6 Papers

You are expected to write two medium-length ($\approx 1,800$ words) papers for this class. These papers will be in-depth, critical explorations of a *topic of my choosing*. Good papers will begin by stating a philosophical thesis, carefully lay out the various arguments in favor of it, and critically evaluate those arguments, via the construction of counter-arguments. Excellent papers will develop and present plausible arguments for an original philosophical position, or, alternatively, develop plausible, original arguments for one of the philosophical positions we discuss in class. I'll say more about my expectations for these papers when appropriate.

7 Final Exam

The final exam will be comprehensive. The format of the final will be a mixture of short answer and essay. You will need to bring a blue book. The final is scheduled for **Friday, June 25, from 8:00–10:00am (1401 Mason Hall)**. The final exam must be taken on this day, at this time. *Absolutely no exceptions.*

8 Plagiarism

Is, of course, prohibited! See <http://www.lib.umich.edu/handouts/plagiar.pdf> for an explanation of what plagiarism is (note: failure to realize that you are committing plagiarism is not an excuse for committing plagiarism). All suspected cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean. Confirmed cases of plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the course (minimally, in a failing grade for the assignment) and in further academic sanctions, such as expulsion.

9 Late work

“Late” refers to *any time* subsequent to the time that the assignments are first collected. I don't accept late daily assignments (in this class, the only daily “assignments” are your reading questions), unless you have a very good reason for having failed to turn it in on time.

Midterm papers submitted between 0 and 24 hours after initial collection will be docked one full grade (10 points); papers submitted between 24 and 48 hours after initial collection will be docked two full grades (20 points); and so on...

10 Schedule

This schedule is pretty ambitious (and therefore subject to revision). We may get behind and decide to spend two days on a single topic, having only budgeted one. We'll handle complications and revisions of the schedule as they arise.

Tu 5/4. Introduction. Evaluating arguments, reading/writing philosophy.

- Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"
(<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>)
- Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
(<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>)

Th 5/6. The origins, subject matter, and function of religious belief.

- Daniel C. Dennett, "An Evolutionary Account of Religion," pp. 10–18.
- Roger Trigg, "A Defense of Religious Realism," pp. 22–7.

Tu 5/11. God's attributes.

- Peterson *et al.*, Introduction to Part Four, pp. 123–7.
- Thomas Aquinas, "God Is Omnipotent," pp. 138–40.
- George I. Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," pp. 141–3.

Th 5/13. God's attributes (ctd.).

- Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," pp. 144–9.
- Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Is Everlasting," pp. 153–9.

Tu 5/18. The cosmological argument.

- William Lane Craig, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument," pp. 197–204.
- J. L. Mackie, "Critique of the Cosmological Argument," pp. 205–11.

Th 5/20. The teleological argument.

- William Paley, "The Analogical Teleological Argument," pp. 212–4.
- David Hume, "Critique of the Analogical Teleological Argument," pp. 215–21.

Tu 5/25. Intelligent design.

- L. Betty & B. Cordell, "The Anthropic Teleological Argument," pp. 222–9.
- William Dembski, "Reinstating Design Within Science," pp. 527–41.
(The Dembski article is somewhat difficult. Do your best with it.)

Th 5/27. No class. **First paper due.**

Tu 6/1. Intelligent design (ctd.).

- Philip Kitcher, “At the Mercy of Chance?” pp. 542–50.
- Elliott Sober, “What Is Wrong with Intelligent Design?”
[http://philosophy.wisc.edu/sober/what's wrong with id qrb 2007.pdf](http://philosophy.wisc.edu/sober/what's%20wrong%20with%20id%20qrb%202007.pdf)

Th 6/3. The relationship between religion and science.

- Stephen Jay Gould, “Two Separate Domains,” pp. 515–22.
- Richard Dawkins, “Science Discredits Religion,” pp. 523–6.

Tu 6/8. Evidence and religious belief.

- William Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” pp. 99–103.
- William James, “The Will To Believe,” pp. 104–10.
- Søren Kierkegaard, “Truth Is Subjectivity,” pp. 111–14.

Th 6/10. Evidence and religious belief (ctd.).

- Alvin Plantinga, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,” pp. 246–55.
- W. Hasker, “The Case of the Intellectually Sophisticated Theist,” pp. 262–8.

Tu 6/15. The Problem of Evil.

- David Hume, “Evil Makes a Strong Case Against God’s Existence,” pp. 276–81.
- J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” pp. 288–96.

Th 6/17. The Problem of Evil (ctd.).

- Alvin Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense,” pp. 297–315.
- Marilyn McCord Adams, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God,” pp. 333–40.

Tu 6/22. Religion, Morality, and the Absurd.

- George I. Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality” (CTools).
- Jean-Paul Sartre, “Ethics Without Religion,” pp. 622–9.
- Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, excerpts (CTools).

Th 6/24. Review for Final Exam (no reading). **Second paper due.**