

# AS.150.331: THEMES FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Fall 2020

Meeting times: TTh 10:30-11:45, online (see below)

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Office hours: Tuesdays 1-2, via Zoom

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion has always been a contested and extensively debated topic throughout the history of philosophy, and the topics from the philosophy of religion are still relevant today. In this course, we will look at several of those topics: what is religion? Do we have reason to believe or not believe in God? How does God relate to the world (or are there many Gods)? How can we understand religious practice? And what role (if any) should religion play in our society?

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this course is to gain an understanding of some of the most influential views and arguments from the philosophy of religion and the historical trajectory that shaped them. You should be able to explain and contextualize the views expressed in the readings in depth and to critically discuss them and clearly advocate your own opinion. More broadly, this will also help building several reasoning and expression skills in general: engaging with complex readings and closely analyzing them will improve your ability to read carefully and attend to detail as well as to weigh the different readings. Critical assessment of the arguments expressed in those readings will allow you to learn thinking and expressing yourself clearly and precisely both in conversation and in writing.

## CLASS FORMAT

Due to the ongoing pandemic, this class will run entirely online, although it will follow the original schedule. The modalities of the course will look like this:

- Readings for each week will usually be assigned to be read by Tuesday.
- I will pre-record a lecture of about 30 minutes and post it by Tuesday morning. The idea is for you to watch that lecture at 10:30 on Tuesdays. (I will link to these videos on the MS Teams site.)
- Following that until 11:45, we will have an online discussion on the Microsoft Teams site. I will provide discussion questions in the lecture and will be participating in the discussion on Teams. You are welcome to continue the discussion after class ends, or post earlier if you have a scheduling conflict.
- On Thursdays, we will be meeting on Zoom and discussing that weeks content further. Typically, this will involve group work using breakout rooms.

## STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Grading for this course consists of three components:

- A preliminary paper (20%)
- Preparatory stages of the final paper (20%)
- The final paper (40%)
- Weekly posts and participation (20%)

The preliminary paper is a 4-5 page paper to be written early in the class. I will assign a choice of topics (which will relate to the different conceptions of religion) and provide a guide on how to write such a paper within the first few weeks. The idea is for you to write that paper over a period of two weeks, mainly as a way of allowing you to get a sense of what you will need to do in the final paper.

The main project in this class is your final paper, which should be 12-15 pages long and cover a topic that you choose yourself. This paper should come close to an academic research paper and should go beyond what we are covering in class. In particular, it should cover content and literature that is not covered in our regular meetings, and it should contain some line of argumentation that goes deeper than or is different from what we talked about in class. I'm happy to help you in finding a topic and identifying relevant literature.

To help you write that paper, you will need to submit preparatory stages of your paper throughout the semester. After the preliminary paper, you will need to declare which section of the class you would like to write your final paper about. I will

assign you to a workshop group based on that interest, and I will set up a MS Teams chat for each group. You are encouraged to group chat about your papers in that group. As preparatory work, you will need to do the following things:

- Write a proposal for your paper that describes its thesis, structure, and the literature you want to read (5%)
- Provide feedback on the proposals of your workshop group (5%)
- Give a short literature report to your workshop group about a text or paper you read for your final paper (5%)
- Submit a draft of your final paper at least two weeks before the due date (5%)

Finally, this class has a participation component which covers two aspects:

- Your discussion posts on Teams (10%): you are expected to post at least one short comment or question every week. The comment has to be relevant and thought-out, but it is sufficient for it to be 2-3 sentences long. I will only count comments being posted on the relevant Tuesday (so you can't post a bunch of comments towards the end of the semester).
- Your participation in Zoom meetings and group workshops (10%): you are expected to actively participate in the class meetings, both in group work and in class discussions. (I recognize that the former is difficult for me to assess, but I will give you the benefit of the doubt.) Failing to regularly attend these meeting (including being late / leaving early) or ignoring group workshop discussions counts against this part of your grade.

See the section below for my policies on missed meetings or posts.

Because of the special circumstances, the university has decided to make S/U grading the default option for this class. Here are the specific Krieger School policies concerning that:

- You can switch to a regular letter grade for any number of courses you like. Please check with the registrar's office for the relevant deadlines.
- If you take this class as S/U, it will still count towards all degree requirements that require a graded class, including those that require at least a C.
- The course requirements described above (and the policies described below) *do not change* if you take this class as S/U. The university has set up the system in such a way that I do not know which of you are choosing to receive a letter grade, and I have been told to not ask you about your grading preferences. I will therefore act on the assumption that any of you may be needing a letter grade.

## COURSE POLICIES

- Attendance is required. You can miss up to a total of four Zoom classes or discussion posts without any penalty (e.g. you could miss two Teams discussion posts and two Zoom classes). Beyond that, you can only miss classes/posts with a valid excuse. If you miss more than four classes without a valid excuse, there will be a penalty on your overall grade. (If you have a letter from the disability office that exempts you from attendance requirements, you can ignore this paragraph.)
- Late assignments: assignments are always due at midnight at the end of the day specified on the course schedule. I will allow a "grace period" until 4am, but after that the assignment counts as late. For every day an assignment is late, there will be a deduction of 5% from the grade of that assignment. However, if the assignment is late more than 5 days, it will simply be graded 0%.
- Zoom etiquette: when attending Zoom classes, please open Zoom 2 minutes before the start time, so we are able to begin on time. While we are in the main meeting, please keep your video on, but your audio muted unless you would like to talk. In breakout rooms, please unmute yourself. Please use the "raise hand" button and other buttons in the "Participants" menu of Zoom, and feel free to post questions in the chat (but please don't have a side discussion in the chat).
- Covid-related accommodations: I realize that this is a difficult time for many of you, and that some of you may have additional obligations or restrictions in the way they can do academic work. Please alert me of any ways in which these circumstances inhibit your participation in this class – I will try to provide accommodations for that. (Some examples of such restrictions: being in a different time zone, having to take care of your siblings, having an unsteady internet connection, ...)
- Finally, some of you may feel strongly about the topic of this course – either because you are religious yourself, or perhaps because you have a relation to some form of harm that has been done in the name of religion. This makes it important for us to work together to create a friendly environment in which our different perspectives can coexist. It also presents an opportunity for us to learn to voice opinions and productive criticism to someone who disagrees with us, and to be receptive to such statements and respond to them well.

## **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you are a student with a disability or believe that you might have a disability that requires special accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services to obtain a letter from a specialist: Garland 385; (410) 516 4720; [studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu). The terms of these letters will be honored. (Please make sure I actually received the letter. If I did not write you a quick email acknowledging that I got it, I probably did not get it.)

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of students and/or the chairman of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” at <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/policies-guidelines/undergrad-ethics/> for more information.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Detailed references are at the end of this syllabus.

<b>Day</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Sep 1 (Zoom)	Introduction		
<b>I. Conceptions of Religion</b> <i>What is religion? Is it a system of beliefs (and what kinds of beliefs)? Or is it a feeling?</i>			
Sep 3 (Panopto/ Teams)	Natural religion	Tindal	
Sep 8 (Panopto/ Teams)	Religion as moral belief / Religion as a feeling of absolute dependence	Kant, Schleiermacher	
Sep 10 (Zoom)			
<b>II. Does God exist?</b> <i>Can we prove or disprove the existence of God? And if not, do we still have reason to believe one way or the other?</i>			
Sep 15 (Panopto/ Teams)	The Ontological Argument / The Cosmological Argument	Anselm, Gaunilo, Thomas	Preliminary Paper assigned
Sep 17 (Zoom)			
Sep 22 (Panopto/ Teams)	The Argument from Design / Belief based on miracles?	Hume (Dialogues + Enquiry)	
Sep 24 (Zoom)			
Sep 29 (Panopto / Teams)	The Problem of Evil	Leibniz, Plantinga, Mackie	
Oct 1 (Zoom)			
Oct 6 (Panopto / Teams)	Pascal’s Wager / The Will to Believe	Pascal, James	
Oct 8 (Zoom)			Preliminary Paper due
Oct 13	Religion without belief? / Review session	Mackie	

(Panopto / Teams)			
Oct 15 (Zoom)	Review / workshop meeting		
<b>III. God's relation to the world</b>			
<i>Are things good because God approves of them, or is it the other way around? Are we free in our actions if God can foresee our choices? Is God in space and time or outside of it?</i>			
Oct 20 (Panopto / Teams)	Foreknowledge and freedom / God and space/time	Zagzebski, Boethius, Descartes	
Oct 22	– Fall Break –		
Oct 27 (Panopto/ Teams)	God and morality / Pantheism	Plato, Spinoza	
Oct 29 (Zoom)			
<b>IV. Religious Practice and Experience</b>			
<i>What is prayer, and is it justified? What other kinds of religious experience and practice are there in Buddhism and Hinduism?</i>			
Nov 3 (Panopto/ Teams)	Buddhism and emptiness / Yoga	Nagarjuna, Vivekananda	Election Day – you have the option of posting on Nov 4.
Nov 5 (Zoom)			Presentation session 1
Nov 10 (Panopto/ Teams)	Prayer / Review session	Thomas, Of Prayer	Presentation session 2
Nov 12 (Zoom)	Review / workshop meeting		Presentation on Taoism + presentation session 3 PROPOSAL DUE
<b>V. Religion and Society</b>			
<i>Does religion have a place in our society? Can someone be religious and also be a good scientist? How is religion different from, say, political ideologies?</i>			
Nov 17 (Panopto/ Teams)	Marxism and Religion / Secularism	MacIntyre, Habermas	
Nov 19 (Zoom)			Presentation session 4 REVIEWS DUE
– Thanksgiving Break –			
Dec 1 (Panopto/ Teams)	Religion and Science / Is religion Special?	Gould, Brownlee	
Dec 3 (Zoom)			DRAFT DUE
Dec 8 (Zoom)	Review / workshop meeting		
Dec 15	DUE DATE FINAL PAPER		

### **READINGS**

Here are the full citations of the readings, listed in the order of the course schedule. Readings will be made available via Blackboard.

- Tindal, Matthew (1730). *Christianity as Old as the Creation*. Garland Publishing 1978. – Chapters 1+2.

- Kant, Immanuel (1788). *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge University Press 2015.– Book II, Ch. 2, sec. 5 (“The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason”).
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst (1799). *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Transl. by Richard Crouter. Cambridge University Press 1988. – Second speech, section B (“The Locus of Religion”).
- Anselm of Canterbury (1077/1078). *Proslogion*. In id., *Major Works*. Translated by M.J. Charlesworth. Oxford University Press. – Chapters 2-5.
- Gaunilo of Marmoutiers (no date). *Pro Insipientie* (On Behalf of the Fool). Ibid.
- Plantinga, Alvin (1969). *God Freedom and Evil*. Eerdmans. – Part II (c) (“The Ontological Argument”).
- Thomas Aquinas (1274). *Summa Theologiae I 1-13*. Translated by Brian Shanley. Hackett 2006. – Pars I, Quaestio 2.
- Hume, David (1770). *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Ed. by Dorothy Coleman. Cambridge University Press 2007. – Pt. 3, par. 1-10 (pp. 29-32) and pt. 7-8 (pp. 52-62).
- Hume, David (1748). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Hackett 1977. – Section 10.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1710). *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. Transl. by E.M. Huggard. Routledge 1951. – Appendix 1 (“Summary of the Controversy, Reduced to Formal Arguments”).
- Plantinga, op. cit. – Part I (a), sections 4-8 (pp. 29-55).
- Mackie, John (1983). *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford University Press. – Ch. 9, sections (d)-(f).
- Pascal, Blaise (1670). *Pensées*. Transl. by John Warrington. Dent 1932. – Sec. 3, par 233 (“Infinity – Nothingness”).
- James, William (1898). The Will to Believe. In id., *The Will to Believe and other essays in the popular philosophy* (pp. 1-31). Dover 1956.
- Mackie, John (op. cit.). – Ch. 12 (“Religion without belief?”)
- Plato (no date). Eutyphro. Transl. by G.M.A. Grube. In: John Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 1-16). Hackett 1997.
- Zagzebski, Linda (1997). Foreknowledge and human freedom. In: Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (pp. 291-298). Blackwell.
- Boethius (around 524). *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Transl. by David Slavitt. Harvard University Press 2008. – Book V, section VI.
- Descartes, René (1644). *The Principles of Philosophy*. Transl. by John Cottingham. In id., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Cambridge University Press 1985. – Part One, par. 24-27.
- Spinoza, Baruch de (1677). *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*. Transl. by T.S. Eliot. Princeton University Press 2020. – Book I, up until (including) proposition 16.
- Thomas Aquinas (1274). *Summa Theologiae II-II*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Available online at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html>. – Quaestio 83 (“Of Prayer”).
- Nagarjuna (ca. 150). *Nagarjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakārikā*. Transl. and commentary by Jay Garfield. Oxford University Press 1995. – Ch. 24 (“An Analysis of the Noble Truths”) + commentary on that chapter.
- Vivekananda, Swami (1896). *Raja Yoga*. Celephais Press 2003. – Book 1, chapters I and VIII.
- MacIntyre, A. (1968). Marxism and Religion. In id., *Marxism and Christianity*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy* 14: 1-25.
- Gould, Stephen Jay (1997). Nonoverlapping Magisteria. *Natural History* 106: 16-22.
- Brownlee, Kimberley (2017). Is religious conviction special? In: Cecile Laborde and Aurelia Bardon (eds.): *Religion in Liberal Political Philosophy* (pp. 309-320). Oxford University Press.