

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: HISTORICAL APPROACHES

Monsoon 2022

Meeting times: TTh 11:50-1:20 (AC 04 309)

Instructor: Tammo Lossau

Email: tammo.lossau@ashoka.edu.in

Office hours: Tuesday, 2-3pm (AC 01 614)

Teaching Assistant: Maahi Jain

Email: maahi.jain_ug22@ashoka.edu.in

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is religion? Historically, many Western philosophers have attempted to prove or disprove the existence of God, assuming a picture of religion that puts reason at its center. In this course, we will compare these philosophers with those who think that we can accept religious beliefs even if they cannot be proven (like James and Kierkegaard), those who view religion as essentially linked to morality (like Kant and Mencius), those who look at religion as a non-belief (like Nagarjuna and Chuang Tzu), and those who think that certain feelings or experiences are at the heart of religion (like Schleiermacher, Dogen and Vivekananda).

LEARNING 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.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Your overall grade will be composed of the following:

- Paper 1 (3-4 pg.): 15%
- Paper 2 (4-5 pg.): 20%
- Paper 3 (7-8 pg.): 30%
- Workshop Group Preparations: 15%
- Weekly Online Discussion Posts: 10%
- In-Class Participation: 10%

The main component of the grade are the papers. For these, I will post a menu of questions two weeks before their due date. I will also make a guide available that helps clarify expectations and gives tips on writing these papers. Feel free to contact me for help during the writing process. However, note that I do not give comments on draft papers. Papers 1 and 2 can be written based on the course readings. However, for paper 3 it is required to use at least one academic paper not listed on the syllabus.

To help you write the papers, you will be assigned to a workshop group consisting of 3-4 students. These groups will meet during class time and discuss their ideas for the paper. A week before the due date, there will be a slot for presentations. For papers 1 and 2, you will present a thesis and a structure of the paper. For paper 3, you will give a presentation on an outside reading you intend to use in the paper. In each case,

please prepare a short (1 page) handout to use in your presentation. Submit the handout to me via email ahead of the relevant meeting. The handouts will be graded, and each will make up 5% of your overall grade.

In addition, you will be required to submit weekly discussion posts. I will post a few discussion questions on Canvas before the weekend, but feel free to submit a comment on any other topic relevant to that week's readings. The posts are due on Monday, 7pm (beginning in week 2). A good discussion post shows engagement with the relevant reading, and expresses a productive thought or question with respect to it in a clear manner. If you post later, it is understood that your post may be less original, but you can make up for that by engaging with the posts of your classmates.

POLICIES

- Please aim to practice respectful and constructive discourse with your fellow students. Listen to what others have to say even if it does not relate to what you want to say. Do not interrupt others, and do not dismiss other perspectives (e.g. other religious views). When you criticize others, make an effort to improve upon their ideas instead of flat-out rejecting them. Practicing this kind of discourse will make the class a much better experience for everyone, and may improve our capacity to engage with differing world views.
- Please arrive to class on time, as late arrivals tend to be disruptive and make it particularly difficult to plan group activities. Regularly arriving late will impact your participation grade. Arriving more than 15 minutes late counts as an absence.
- Attendance is mandatory. You can miss up to four classes without an excuse, any further absence requires a valid excuse (e.g. illness, death of a close relative, incarceration). More than four unexcused absences will result in a penalty on your participation grade.
- Infection with Covid counts as an excuse for missing classes. However, if you have Covid (or another infectious disease), but are generally feeling well and would like to attend class, just send me a short email the evening before class, and I will try to make online participation possible.
- Paper submission policy: all papers are due at midnight at the end of the day on the posted due date. There is a grace period until 3am, during which papers are considered to be submitted on time. After that, every day the paper is late will reduce its grade by 5% (so a 90% on your paper will become an 85% for one day, an 80% for two days, etc.).
- All work you submit for this class must be your own, and you cannot re-submit your own work from other classes either. Any content you take from other sources must be clearly marked as such. This includes direct quotations, but also paraphrases of other people's ideas. Failure to do so is plagiarism, which is a serious violation of academic integrity and will result (depending on the level of it) in penalties on the paper or a failing grade on the class.
- If you have a disability or other condition that is making it more difficult for you to participate in this class, please contact me. I am happy to discuss accommodations that will make it easier to successfully complete this class.
- Electronic devices: Please do not use any laptops or phones during class time. E-Readers are permitted. Research shows that the use of electronic devices seriously impacts learning outcomes. Please also make sure to put your phones on silent/vibrate before class
- This course will use the following grading scale: <https://www.rapidtables.com/calc/grade/gpa-to-letter-grade-calculator.html>
- Extra credit assignments, if there are any, will be assigned late in the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Day	Topic	Reading	Notes
September 6	Introduction		
September 8	The Question: What is Religion?	Appiah	
<i><u>I. The Rational Conception of Religion</u></i>			
September 13	The Ontological Argument	Anselm, Gaunilo	
September 15	The Cosmological Argument	Thomas	
September 20	Natural Religion	Tindal	
September 22	Enlightenment and Skepticism	Hume	
September 27	Theodicy	Leibniz	
September 29	Review Session		Paper 1 assigned
<i><u>II. Belief Without Proof?</u></i>			
October 4	Pascal's Wager, The Will to Believe	Pascal, James	
October 6	Cont'd / workshop groups		Workshop presentations
October 11	Fideism	Kierkegaard	
October 13	Wittgensteinian Fideism	Wittgenstein	Paper 1 due
<i><u>III. Religion and Moral Belief</u></i>			
October 18	The Confucian Tradition	Mencius	
October 20	Mohism	Mozi	Paper 2 assigned
<i>midterm break/Diwali</i>			
November 1	Kant on religion as moral belief	Kant	
November 3	Review Session / workshop groups		Workshop presentations
<i><u>IV. Non-Belief</u></i>			
November 8	Emptiness and the Four Noble Truths	Nagarjuna, ch. 24	
November 10	Emptiness and Nirvana	Nagarjuna, ch. 25	Paper 2 due
November 15	Taoism	Chuang Tzu	
November 17	Review Session		
<i><u>V. Religious Experience as the Core of Religion</u></i>			
November 22	Religions without a book	Vivekananda	Paper 3 assigned
November 24	Zen	Dogen	
November 29	Religion as a feeling	Schleiermacher	
December 1	Review Session		
<i>midterm break/Diwali</i>			
December 6	Paper workshop		Workshop presentations
December 8	Wrap-Up Session		
December 16			Paper 3 due

READINGS

All readings will be made available as pdfs on Canvas. They are listed here in the order in which they appear on the syllabus.

Appiah, K. Anthony (2009). *Explaining Religion: Notes Towards a Research Agenda*. In: Simon Levi (ed.), *Games, Groups, and the Global Good* (pp. 195-203). Springer.

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.

Thomas Aquinas (1274). *Summa Theologiae I 1-13*. Translated by Brian Shanley. Hackett 2006. – Pars I, Quaestio 2.

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

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”).

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.

Kierkegaard, Søren (1846). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Transl. by Alastair Hannay. Cambridge University Press. Part 2, section 2, chapter 4, section 1 (he sure is complicated), pp. 303-323.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1967). *Lectures on Religious Belief*. In: id., *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Compiled from Notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor. University of California Press.

Mencius (ca. 300 BC). *Gaozi*. Translated by James Legge. In: *The Works of Mencius*. Clarendon Press 1985. Available online at: <https://ctext.org/mengzi>

Mozi (ca. 400 BC). *Mozi*. Transl. by W.P. Mei. In: *The ethical and political works of Motse*. Probsthain 1929. Book III: Identification with the Superior. Available online at <https://ctext.org/mozi>

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”).

Nagarjuna (ca. 200). *Nagarjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Transl. and commentary by Jay Garfield. Oxford University Press 1995. – Ch. 24 (“An Analysis of the Noble Truths”) and ch. 25 (“Examination of Nirvana”) + commentary on those chapters.

Chuang Tzu (ca. 300 BC). *The Inner Chapters*. Transl. by James Legge. In: *The Writings of Chuang Tzu*. Oxford University Press 1891. Chs. 1-3. Available online at <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>

Vivekananda, Swami (1896). *Raja Yoga*. Celephais Press 2003. – Book 1, chapters I and VIII.

Dogen (ca. 1250). *Shōbōgenzō*. Transl. through the Soto Text Project. Ch. 1 (“Bendowa”). Available online here: https://www.thezensite.com/ZenTeachings/Dogen_Teachings/Shobogenzo_Complete.html

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”).