

# Philosophy of Religion (PHIL 361)

Jeff Russell ([jeff.russell@usc.edu](mailto:jeff.russell@usc.edu))

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How should we respond to religious disagreement? Can opposing religious beliefs and practices be justified? How should people with radically different outlooks treat each another?

This course will have four main parts.

1. **Can religious beliefs be justified?** We'll focus on one of the most influential reasons for belief in God—the argument from the universe's apparent *design*—and one of the most influential reasons for believing there is no God—the argument from *evil*.
2. **Evidence, faith, and disagreement.** Is it ever reasonable to believe something when the evidence is inconclusive? What about when other people disagree with you? What about when your disagreements seem connected to culture and upbringing?
3. **Can religious practices be justified?** We'll especially focus on *prayer*. Is it reasonable to pray? How are religious practices related to religious beliefs?
4. **Religion, morality, and politics.** How is religious belief related to living a moral life? What role should religious beliefs play in the political decisions of a diverse democratic society?

## Goals

You will **investigate philosophical questions**.

- You will understand major positions, arguments, and texts in the philosophy of religion.
- You will contribute your own ideas about these questions, and you will work to clarify and refine them.

You will **develop philosophical skills**.

- You will **read actively**.
- You will **analyze the structure of debates**. What are the important questions? What could their answers be? What are the strongest arguments for different answers? What are the most challenging replies to these arguments?
- You will **analyze the structure of arguments**. What are its premises and conclusion? Is it valid? What makes it strong or weak?
- You will **apply tools of logic and probability** to philosophical arguments.
- You will **communicate complicated ideas clearly in writing**.

## Meetings

Lecture	Tuesday and Thursday	12:30-1:50pm	VKC 205
Office Hours	Tuesday	11am–12pm	STO 227
Office Hours	Thursday	8:30–9:15am	STO 227
Final exam	Wednesday, May 8	2-4pm	

I encourage you to **make an appointment** during my office hours using this website:

- <https://calendly.com/jeff-russell>

You're also welcome to drop by impromptu without an appointment, but I'll give priority to people who have signed up ahead of time.

If you have a class conflict with my scheduled office hours, you can email me to make an appointment for another time.

## Resources

There is one required textbook for this class:

- Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion: an Historical Introduction*

I will distribute additional readings on the course website (link coming very soon).

## Evaluation

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<b>Participation</b>	5%	Every day
<b>Meditations</b>	18%	8 times: see schedule
<b>Quizzes</b>	20%	5 times: see schedule
<b>Dialectical map</b>	7%	February 19
<b>Essay plan</b>	10%	Thursday, March 21
<b>Analytical essay</b>	20%	Tuesday, April 9
<b>Final exam</b>	20%	Wednesday, May 8, 2-4pm

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### Participation

Be present, be prepared, and be on time. Ask questions and contribute to discussions. Be helpful and respectful to others.

Discussion is a major part of this class. If you are well prepared and participate actively, this class will be interesting and fun. If not, it will be kind of a drag. Let's do the first thing!

If you have serious illness or emergency that requires you to miss class, let me know by email *before class* so we can discuss accommodations.

### Meditations

Meditations are short structured writing assignments. The point of this is to help you practice active reading and analytical writing, and prepare your mind for class. Meditations are always due in hard copy at the beginning of class. **You cannot turn in meditations late.** Instead, you get two freebies: I will drop your lowest two meditation scores. Save these for when you really need them—for example, because of sickness or emergency.

### Quizzes

There will be five short in-class quizzes. The point of this is to help keep you honest: are you keeping up with the reading, are you understanding the major ideas as we go, and are you adequately preparing for class? Because of this, **you cannot make up missed quizzes.** Instead, you get one freebie: I will drop your lowest quiz score. Don't use up your freebie early! Save it for when you really need it, for example, because of sickness or emergency.

## Dialectical Map

You will make a map of major positions, arguments, and replies in the debate about whether God exists. The point of this is to develop your skill at analyzing the structure of a philosophical debate. I will distribute a more detailed guide in a separate handout.

## Essay Plan and Analytical Essay

You will write a carefully argued essay defending a position in a debate about the rationality of religious belief. The point of this is to develop your skills at analyzing the structure of arguments, and communicating your ideas in writing, and to deepen your understanding of one of our central philosophical questions. I will distribute a more detailed guide in a separate handout.

Writing a good philosophy paper requires careful planning. For the first stage of this assignment, you will write a detailed plan for what position you plan to defend, what argument you will make, and how you will defend this argument.

After I give you feedback on this plan, you will go on to write your complete essay.

## Final Exam

There will be a comprehensive final exam. The point of this is to evaluate your knowledge and understanding of the major positions, arguments, and texts we discuss in this class.

## Schedule

I may make changes to this schedule, including assignment deadlines, based on how things go during the semester. I will announce changes by email and on the course website.

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<i>Date</i>	<i>Read This</i>	<i>Do This</i>
	<b>Can Religious Beliefs Be Justified?</b>	
8-Jan	Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"	
10-Jan	Zagzebski, ch. 2, "The Classical Arguments for the Existence of God"	
15-Jan	Paley, selection from <i>Natural Theology</i>	
17-Jan	<i>Class Canceled</i>	
22-Jan	Hume, selection from <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i>	Meditation 1

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24-Jan	<a href="#">Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”</a>	Quiz 1
29-Jan	Zagzebski, ch. 7, “The Problem of Evil”	Meditation 2
31-Jan	<i>No Class</i>	
5-Feb	Shankara, “Brahman, Creation, and Evil”, and Kaufman, “Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil”	
7-Feb	<a href="#">M.M. Adams, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God”</a>	Meditation 3
12-Feb	Cone, “Divine Liberation and Black Suffering”	Quiz 2
	<b>Evidence, Faith, and Disagreement</b>	
14-Feb	Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”	
19-Feb	James, “The Will to Believe”	Dialectical Map
21-Feb	Zagzebski, ch. 10, “Faith, Reason, and the Ethics of Belief”	
26-Feb	Cohen, “Paradoxes of Conviction”	Meditation 4
28-Feb	Van Inwagen, “It is Wrong, Always, Everywhere, and for Anyone to Believe Anything on Insufficient Evidence”	
5-Mar	Schoenfield, “Meditations on Beliefs Formed Arbitrarily”	Meditation 5
7-Mar	Pascal, <i>Pensées</i> , selections	Quiz 3
12-Mar	<i>Spring break</i>	
14-Mar	<i>Spring break</i>	
19-Mar	Buchak, “Can It Be Rational to Have Faith?”	Meditation 6
21-Mar	Pryor, “Writing Philosophy”	Essay plan
	<b>Can Religious Practices be Justified?</b>	
26-Mar	Stump, “Petitionary Prayer”	
28-Mar	Kleinschmidt, “Atheistic Prayer”	Meditation 7
2-Apr	TBD	
4-Apr	Benatar, “What’s God Got To Do With It? Atheism and Religious Practice”	Quiz 4
9-Apr	TBD	
	<b>Religion, Morality, and Politics</b>	
11-Apr	R.M. Adams, “Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief”, selections	Analytical essay
16-Apr	Cone, “Liberation and the Christian Ethic”	
18-Apr	TBD	Quiz 5 (in class)
23-Apr	TBD	Meditation 8

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25-Apr TBD

8-May **Final Exam**

Final Exam

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## Equality

This classroom is a safe space. Discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, religion, age, or other identities is unacceptable. If at any time while at USC you feel you have experienced harassment or discrimination, you can file a complaint: see <http://equity.usc.edu> for more information. You are also welcome to bring the complaint to any faculty or staff member at USC.

## Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or re-cast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <[policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b)>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

## Support Systems

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <http://equity.usc.edu>

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support>

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

*USC Support and Advocacy (USCSA) – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa>

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <http://diversity.usc.edu>

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. <http://emergency.usc.edu>

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>