

Philosophy of Religion (PHIL 361)

Tues and Thurs 12:30–1:45pm, Von KleinSmid Center 205

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Office hours: Thurs 11:30–12:20 or by appointment

This class will have five main parts.

1. Creation and Explanation

Does the universe have a beginning? Could it be infinite in time or space? Does it have a cause or explanation? What kind of explanation could it have? Do the order and complexity of the universe point to a cosmic designer?

2. Evil

Our world includes horrendous evils. Does this show there is no good and powerful God?

3. Time and Freedom

Suppose there is a God. Is God in time, or outside of it? Does God know what we will do before we do it? Would this be compatible with our actions being genuinely free?

4. Evidence and Faith

Is it ever ok to believe something without evidence? Could we learn religious truths by direct revelation, or through mystical experiences? Do disagreements between different people's religious opinions show that it's unreasonable to be committed one way or another?

5. Religion, Morality, and Politics

Does what is good or right somehow depend on God? Is it consistent with democratic ideals to vote or pass laws for religious reasons?

This class will be difficult. Many of the readings will take significant work to understand. Some of them are technical. You'll be expected to wrestle with hard questions, to carefully evaluate arguments, and to come up with your own ideas. Your writing will be expected to be precise and logically organized.

Assessment

- **Participation** (10%). Be prepared, be present, ask questions, engage in constructive discussion, be respectful.
- **8 reading responses** (8%). Each of these should be a paragraph or two, directly responding to one (or more) of the week's readings. Here are some things you might do in a reading response: ask a question about an aspect of the reading that confused you; give an analysis of the structure of an argument; identify a problem with an argument; offer a counterexample; try to give a better version of an idea; point out an interesting connection between two different readings.
- **Three quizzes** (27%). These will test whether you know what is going on the readings and lectures, and whether you understand the key ideas and arguments and how they connect to each other.
- **Midterm paper** (20%). 4-5 pages. In this paper you'll give an analysis of one of the classic arguments for the existence of God, and consider whether certain objections succeed against it.
- **Final paper proposal** (10%). 2 pages, explaining the argument you plan to make in your final paper.
- **Final paper** (25%). 8-10 pages. In this paper you'll have more freedom to write about a topic from the course of your choice. I'll make some suggestions, but look ahead and think about what you might do. Come discuss ideas with me in office hours at any point in the semester.

Reading

Readings will be made available online.

- <http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~russ813/religion.readings.html>

Here's one book worth getting a copy of, since we'll be reading most of it. (The paperback is cheap—I recommend the Hackett edition—or there's a free version on Project Gutenberg.)

- David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4583>

These are also on reserve in the Philosophy Library. (Some selections from them will be assigned reading, but they're also useful places to start if you're looking for more background reading.)

- Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*
- *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*
- M.M. Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (on order)
- Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (on order)

Schedule

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Topic</i> | <i>Readings</i> | <i>Due</i> |
|--------------|-------------------------|--|--------------------|
| | Part 1 | Creation and Explanation | |
| 1/13 1/15 | Introduction Theism | Pryor, "Reading Philosophy" and "Writing Philosophy" | |
| 1/20 | First Cause | Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> , selection ("Five Ways") | Reading response 1 |
| 1/22 | First Cause | Hume, <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> , ch. 9 | |
| 1/27 | Infinity | Craig, "The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe" | Reading response 2 |
| 1/29 2/3 | NO CLASS Contingency | Van Inwagen, <i>Metaphysics</i> , ch. 7 ("Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument") | |
| 2/5 2/10 | Contingency Design | <i>no new reading</i> Paley, <i>Natural Theology</i> , selection | |
| 2/12 | Design | Hume, <i>Dialogues on Natural Religion</i> , chs. 2–5 | Reading response 3 |
| | Part 2 | Evil | |
| 2/17 | Evil | Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" | Quiz 1 (in class) |

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| 2/19 | Free Will | Plantinga, <i>The Nature of Necessity</i> , Ch. 9 (“God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom”) | |
| 2/24 2/26 | Evil and Free Will Horrors | <i>no new reading</i> M.M. Adams, <i>Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God</i> , ch. 3 (“The Dignity of Human Nature?”) | First Paper |
| 3/3 | Evil and Evidence | Rowe, “Evil is Evidence Against Theistic Belief” | |
| 3/5 | Evil and Evidence | Howard-Snyder and Bergman, “Evil does not make Atheism more reasonable than Theism” | Reading response 4 |
| 3/10 | Evil and Evidence | <i>no new reading</i> | |
| 3/12 | Part 3 Freedom & Foreknowledge | Time and Freedom Zagzebski, <i>Philosophy of Religion</i> , ch. 5 (“Fate, Freedom, and Foreknowledge”) | Reading response 5 |
| 3/24 3/26 | SPRING BREAK Freedom & Foreknowledge Freedom & Foreknowledge | <i>no new reading</i> <i>no new reading</i> | Quiz 2 |
| 3/31 | Part 4 Evidence | Evidence and Faith Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” | |
| 4/2 | Evidence | James, “The Will to Believe” | Reading response 6 |
| 4/7 4/9 | Evidence Disagreement | <i>no new reading</i> Cohen, “Paradoxes of Conviction” | |
| 4/14 | Disagreement | <i>no new reading</i> | Final Paper Proposal |
| 4/16 4/21 | Part 5 God and Morality God and Morality | Religion, Politics, and Morality Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> R.M. Adams, “Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief” | Reading response 8 |
| 4/23 4/28 4/30 | God and Morality Religion and Politics Religion and Politics | <i>no new reading</i> <i>no new reading</i> King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” | Quiz 3 |
| 5/8 | NO CLASS | (Final paper deadline) | Final Paper |

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.

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible.

Disability Services and Programs

Located in STU 301

Open 8:30am–5pm, Monday–Friday

213-740-0776 (Phone)

213-740-6948 (TTD)

ability@usc.edu

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html

Academic Integrity

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Emergencies

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Changes

I may change anything at any time.