

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
TH 4350fr/6304fr
AUSTIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
SUMMER 2018

June 25–29 9:00–6:00

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I want you to do well in this course, so please let me know if you are having difficulty with the class material.

Course Description: This course will explore philosophical issues raised by religious and specifically Christian theological claims. A discussion of careful, reasoned methodology, and an exploration of the relationship between faith and reason will serve as the groundwork for the course. The course will then focus on understanding and analyzing foundational religious issues in relation to philosophical principles. Topics will include questions that have to do with the existence and nature of God, and the relationship between God and the world.

Objectives: After taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe some of the current trends and figures in philosophy of religion.
2. Articulate their own views of religion and the relationship between faith and reason in light of the Christian metanarrative.
3. Summarize the main issues and arguments concerning the existence, nature, and attributes of God.
4. Discuss different views of God's relationship to the world and their implications.
5. Reflect critically about philosophical topics, articulating and illustrating their theological and practical implications.

Format: This is an inquiry-based course that will practice philosophical discussion of religious questions. It will also include some lectures, as well as focused analysis and discussion of the assigned texts in class.

Required Texts:

Evans, Stephen and R. Zachary Manis. *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009. [Evans]

Peterson, Michael, et al., eds. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. [PR]

Note about the PR textbook: It comes in many editions. It is permissible to purchase an older edition; most of the course readings marked “PR” will appear in previous editions. The few readings that do not appear in older editions will need to be obtained from the library reserve shelf.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend classes regularly. Especially in a short course such as this one, in which a whole semester’s worth of material is packed into five days, attendance is imperative.

In the event of illness, family emergency, or an extenuating circumstance, it is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor as soon as possible of the reason for the absence. A doctor’s note is required for excusing personal illness. Print a hard copy for my records.

Anyone with an unexcused absence will be dropped from the course with a “WF” (withdrawn, failing).

3 tardies = 1 unexcused absence. You will be considered tardy if you are not present when the roll is checked or if you leave during class. If you are tardy, it is your responsibility to make sure you were not counted absent. But if you come in more than 10 minutes late, or leave before the end of class without telling me why, you will be counted absent, and will not be allowed to take the test or quiz. Take care of all business before and after class and during the breaks.

Academic Honesty:

AGST places a high priority on honesty and a biblical commitment to truth. Incidents of **cheating, plagiarism**, or any other activities deemed dishonest will result in penalties. These penalties may range from receiving a zero (0%) on the assignment to failing the course or dismissal from the school. (According to Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, to “plagiarize” is to steal and use as one’s own the ideas, words, etc., of another. Collaborating on written assignments that should be done individually would fall under this category of dishonesty. See also the definitions and descriptions in the catalog or student handbook.)

Classroom Expectations and Decorum:

I expect all students to behave in a Christian manner in and out of the classroom. Please turn off cell phones. You may use laptops for taking notes only.

Course Requirements:

1. Reading, class preparation, quizzes, and participation. Every student should carefully read all required readings. Philosophy takes a long time to read and comprehend, so plan accordingly. It is hard work with a great reward. Readings for each day’s discussion should be complete before coming to class (see schedule below). For readings not in the textbooks (that is, not marked “Evans” or “PR”), a URL will be provided; bring hard copies to class for the purpose of discussion. (On bracketed [PR] readings, see below #6.) On the final exam, you will be asked to sign a statement indicating how much you actually read.

Note well: *For this short course, it is expected that students will come to class the first day with all the readings finished. During the week of class, there will be time only to review the readings in preparation for class the next day.*

Reading assignments will be accompanied by prepared discussion questions and vocabulary (available at the Faculty Resources webpage, under my name and then the course name at <http://austingrad.edu/resources/faculty>). Study these to prepare for class (as well as for quizzes and exams). Daily preparation will be evaluated by reading quizzes. In addition, be prepared to discuss and answer questions about the material in class. Your participation in class discussion (which includes relevant questions and thoughtful responses) may also contribute to the final grade. ca. **50** pts.

2. The student should keep a notebook containing all lecture notes and handouts to prepare for exams.

3. Two exams. There will be one mid-week exam and a comprehensive final. Study your discussion questions, vocabulary, and notes. **75** and **100** pts. The final exam will be a take-home, open-*note* exam that should be done individually in the presence of an approved proctor. Completed exams should be scanned and emailed to the professor no later than 5:00 pm, Friday, July 6. Late exams will be penalized 10% per day late.

4. Problem paper. In your opinion, what is the most difficult (philosophical) problem that faces Christianity? State the criticism/problem in its strongest form, and tell why you find it difficult to answer. This paper should be at least 300 words, type-written. **Due beginning of class on June 25. 25** pts.

5. Topical paper. Each student will select some philosophical issue and do independent reflection concerning it during the course. You will write a 6- to 8-page paper. Topics that arise from the readings will be appropriate, or you may suggest your own topic of interest. I will have the final right of approval. **Topics are due, in writing, on or before June 29.**

The content must be based on a philosophical claim over which there may be some reasoned disagreement, and you must defend a particular viewpoint. For example, “A discussion of natural law ethics” would be an unacceptable thesis, but “I defend natural law ethics for the following reasons...” would be acceptable. The thesis should be constructive (not negatively stated) and succinct.

The paper should be divided into two main sections. **In the first section, you will make your positive case in favor of your viewpoint. In the second, you will raise and refute the strongest objections to your claim.** N.B.: Do not short-change the second section. You must convince me that you have read deeply and thought seriously about your **opponents’ points of view**, and that you can credibly refute their best objections.

You should explore your topic fairly deeply—consulting a variety of reputable sources would be appropriate. The paper should be emailed to the professor by or before 5:00 pm, Friday, **August 10**, to be considered on time.

Additional guidelines:

- a. 6-8 pages (Times New Roman, double-spaced, not including cover page and bibliography).
- b. Use Turabian style footnotes and proper, academic English style.

c. Assessment criteria will include such things as: clearly stated purpose and position, logical organization, faultless style, evidence of research, and interaction with sources.

d. At least five scholarly sources should be consulted. These sources may include relevant surveys, special monographs, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Do not cite unsigned articles (whether online or in print). Do not cite sources in the bibliography unless they are used in the paper.

e. Papers are due on August 10. Papers will be penalized 5% per weekday late. Papers will not be accepted after August 24.

100 pts.

6. MATS Required Credit/BACS Extra Credit: Two “Study Questions” papers. Choose two readings from PR that appear in brackets [PR...], read each, and answer all the study questions that appear at the end of those particular readings. Although paper length will vary depending on the reading selected and number of questions, each paper should be at least three pages long (double-spaced). More important, the responses should be thorough and sufficiently answer the questions. The papers are to be done individually. Each is due on the day when that reading is scheduled to be covered. Be prepared to discuss the reading in class. Late papers will be unacceptable. MATS: **50 pts.** each = **100 pts.** (BACS: one paper, **up to 10 extra pts.** on final exam.)

7. MATS Student Extra Credit: Read either A. Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief*, D. Allen’s *Theology for a Troubled Believer*, or D. B. Hart’s *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. Give a detailed summary and then brief evaluation of the book. Double-spaced, 3 pages. Submit the paper to the professor via email attachment. Due no later than **July 13. Up to 25 pts.** on final exam.

Make-up Policy:

A test or quiz may be made up only if the absence is excused (see “Attendance Policy” above). Contact or see me immediately to arrange it. All make-up tests will be entirely essay format. There will be **no make-ups for unexcused absences**. Exams will not be given early.

Grading Scale: ca. 350 (BACS) 450 (MATS) points total.

90-100% = A 80-89 = B (“Good”) 70-79 = C (“Average”) 60-69 = D 0-59 = F

Assignments/Dates/Grades Summary:

Reading quizzes	50 pts.
Problem paper (June 25)	25 pts.
Mid-week Exam (June 27)	75 pts.
Topics due (June 29)	
Final exam (by July 6)	100 pts.
Topical paper (by August 10)	100 pts.
Study questions paper 1 (MATS)	50 pts.
Study questions paper 2 (MATS)	50 pts.
Optional Book review (by July 13)	Extra credit

Schedule and Readings:

Be sure to read the editors’ introductions to each “Part” in PR; they provide a useful survey of each topic.

Monday

Introduction

Evans, pp. 17-22, 57-61.

PR, Introduction

Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1/3 (1984): 235-71, available at http://www.faithandphilosophy.com/article_advice.php

Religious Experience

Evans, ch. 4

David B. Hart, *The Experience of God*, pp. 13-45 [on reserve]

[PR, W. James, "Religious Experiences as Feelings Forming the Root of Religion," from *Varieties of Religious Experience*, lectures 16 to beginning of 18, available at Google books]

[PR (5th ed.), Ludwig Feuerbach, "God Is a Projection of Human Nature"]

Tuesday

Faith and Reason

Evans, pp. 22-35, 195-98

PR, Thomas Aquinas, "The Harmony of Reason and Revelation," from *Summa contra Gentiles* Bk. I.3-7

PR, Blaise Pascal, "The Wager"

PR, William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

David B. Hart, "Believe It or Not," available at

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/05/believe-it-or-not>

[PR, Søren Kierkegaard, "Truth Is Subjectivity"]

[PR, William James, "The Will to Believe"]

God's Existence

Evans, ch. 3

PR, Anselm, "Classic Ontological Argument," from *Proslogion* chs. 2-4; and

PR, Gaunilo, "Critique of Anselm's Argument," from *On Behalf of the Fool* 2-6; both available at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/anselm/basic_works.html

PR, Aquinas, "Classic Cosmological Argument," from *Summa contra Gentiles* I.13

Thomas Aquinas, "Whether God Exists," in *Summa theologiae* Ia.ii.3, at

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm#article3>

PR, W. Paley, "Analogical Teleological Argument," from *Natural Theology*, ch. 1, available at Google books

PR (5th ed.), C.S. Lewis, "Moral Argument for God's Existence" (from chs. 1 and 4 of *Mere Christianity*)

[PR, J. L. Mackie, "Critique of the Cosmological Argument"]

Knowing God without Arguments

Evans, pp. 183-211

PR, A. Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology"

[PR, W. Hasker, "The Case of the Intellectually Sophisticated Theist"]

Wednesday

Religious Language

Evans, pp. 52-55

(Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, available at

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius.v.html>

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.xiii.5 resp. (that is, focus on the “I answer that...” section), available at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1013.htm#article5> (PR4, 391-3)

A. Flew, R. M. Hare, and B. Mitchell, “Theology and Falsification,” available at

<http://homepage.usask.ca/~ebd038/THEOLOGY%20AND%20FALSIFICATION.pdf> (PR4, 394-7)

Divine Attributes

Evans, ch. 2

PR, Aquinas, “God Is Omnipotent,” from *Summa theologiae* Ia.xxv.3

PR, George Mavrodes, “Some Puzzles concerning Omnipotence”

PR, Boethius, “God Is Timeless,” from *De consolazione philosophiae* Bk. 5, available at

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/boethius/consolation.vi.html>

PR, Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God Is Everlasting”

[PR, pp. 128-32, John Hick, “God’s Necessary Existence”]

Divine Action

Evans, pp. 42-52

PR, P. Helm, “Providence: Risky or Risk-free?” from *The Providence of God*

[PR, David Basinger, “Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought”]

[PR, Cobb and Griffin, “God Is Creative-Responsive Love”]

Thursday

Problem of Evil

Evans, ch. 7

PR, D. Hume, “Evil Makes a Strong Case against God’s Existence,” from *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, part X

PR, Gottfried Leibniz, “Best of All Possible Worlds Theodicy”

[PR, J. Hick, “Soul-Making Theodicy”]

Miracles

Evans, ch. 5

PR, Hume, “The Evidence for Miracles Is Weak,” from “Of Miracles”

PR, J. L. Mackie, “Miracles and Testimony,” from *The Miracle of Theism*

[PR, R. Swinburne, “Miracles and Historical Evidence”]

Life after Death

[PR, J. Hick, “Resurrection of the Person”]

[PR, R. Swinburne, “The Soul Needs a Brain to Continue to Function”]

Friday

Religion and Science

Evans, ch. 6

PR, R. Dawkins, “Science Discredits Religion”

PR, Daniel Dennett, “An Evolutionary Account of Religion,” from *Breaking the Spell*

David B. Hart, “Daniel Dennett Hunts the Snark,” available at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/daniel-dennett-hunts-the-snark>
[PR, Alvin Plantinga, “Naturalism and Science Are Incompatible”]

Religious Diversity

Evans, pp. 211-16

PR, Dalai Lama, “Buddhism and Other Religions”

PR, K. Rahner, “Religious Inclusivism”

[PR, J. Hick, “Religious Pluralism”]

Morality (time permitting)

Evans, pp. 87-96

[PR, Aquinas, “Ethics and Natural Law”]

[PR, A. MacIntyre, “Which God Ought We to Obey?”]

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