

Philosophy of Religion

Sample Syllabus for Prospective Course

Section #: Meeting time/place

Instructor: Robert K. Whitaker

Office Hours:

Email: robert.whitaker@marquette.edu

Course Description

This course will introduce the student to philosophy of religion, including topics of historical and contemporary importance such as the existence of God, the relationship between faith and reason, the problems of evil and divine hiddenness, and religious and mystical experience. The course will have a contemporary focus, with most of the readings written by recent authors. There will also be an emphasis on diversity of perspectives, including non-Western and feminist perspectives, and on the lived experience of one's religious or irreligious commitments.

Required Texts

- § Louis P. Pojman & Michael Rea, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, Seventh Edition. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2014. ISBN-13: 978-1285197326
- § William Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, Fourth Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0495007258

All other course materials will be made available as PDF documents online.

Course Objectives and Assessment

By the end of the course,

- (1) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the concept of God, including the traditional Western conception and competing Western and non-Western conceptions.
- (2) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for and against the various arguments for God's existence, including the cosmological, teleological, ontological, and moral arguments.
- (3) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for and against the various arguments against God's existence, including the problems of evil and divine hiddenness.
- (4) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for and against the various theodicies offered in response to the problem of evil, including the free will, soul-making, and skeptical theist responses.

- (5) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning religious and mystical experience, including the possibility of belief justification on the basis of such experience and the various forms of such experience.
- (6) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the relationship between faith and reason, including the nature of faith, the justification of religious belief, and the ethics of religious belief.
- (7) The student will be able to state, explain, compare, and contrast the views of various representative thinkers in contemporary philosophy of religion.
- (8) The student will have had practice considering the personal impact that the content of the course might have on their own lives, and will have had the opportunity to consider the testimony of various philosophers of religion about their own experiences.
- (9) The student will have received practice and instruction on crafting well-written arguments, as well as recognizing and assessing the arguments of others.

Attainment of all objectives will be assessed primarily through reading responses, the critical paper, the personal reflection, and the exams. All objectives will also be assessed via class participation.

Course Requirements

Course Composition:

Reading Responses	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Critical Paper	20%
Personal Reflection	10%
Video Responses	5%
Participation	5%

The grading scale is as follows:

A	94 – 100	C	73 – 76.9
A-	90 – 93.9	C-	70 – 72.9
B+	87 – 89.9	D+	67 – 69.9
B	83 – 86.9	D	60 – 66.9
B-	80 – 82.9	F	... – 59.9
C+	77 – 79.9		

Reading Responses: There will be 8 short reading responses assigned throughout the course of the semester (see readings in the schedule marked with an ‘R’), of which you are responsible for **5**. You may write up to **6** of these. If you write 6, I will drop your lowest grade. If you wish, you may write only 5, but

you will be stuck with the grades you get. I highly recommend writing all 6. These are to be **no more than a half page** double spaced (this should be roughly 2-3 paragraphs—do not exceed this!), and are to be purely exegetical. You will **summarize the main arguments of the author; do not provide your own opinion.** The goal here is to develop the skills needed to read philosophy. Please cite the page number of the relevant reading for any quotations and major points; no outside sources will be necessary. Hand in a hard copy at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned. Reading responses will not be accepted after the class for which they are assigned, and you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse). Each response is worth **4%** of your final grade.

Midterm Exam: There will be a midterm exam on _____. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Final Exam: There will be a (non-comprehensive) final exam on _____. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, short essay, and a longer essay.

Critical Paper: The critical paper consists of an articulation and assessment of at least one of the philosophical views considered during the course of the semester. This does not have to be a direct response to one of the readings, though it should be conversant with at least one of the authors we've covered. As with the reading responses, you will need to identify and explain the argument or position you are responding to, but the bulk of the paper should be your own argumentation. This may take the form of critiquing the argument of an author, critiquing a philosophical position taken by one or more authors, critiquing an entire style of approach to a type of philosophical problem, and/or making a positive case for your own view over and against the view of one or more of our authors. I will provide a list of potential topics for this paper, and I encourage you to choose something that interests you. You may also suggest something that is not on the list (pending my approval). You will submit the paper (PDF or Word files only please) **online by _____, at 11:59 pm.** There is no need to turn in a hard copy.

Specifications: 3-4 pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins, correct grammar, and proper citation.* See "Critical Paper Rubric" on D2L for further detail.

* I do not care what citation style you use, so long as whatever style you choose is consistent throughout, and so long as all sources, quotations, and borrowed ideas are properly cited (see below regarding academic honesty). No cover page or separate bibliography page is necessary, nor will such count towards page total. Footnotes are preferred over endnotes.

Personal Reflection: I have reserved the following texts at the library for use by our class:

God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason, ed. Thomas V. Morris
Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers, ed. Kelly James Clark
Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life, ed. Louise M. Antony

These books are collections of essays by recent philosophers about the reasons they have for being either religious (in the first two books) or non-religious (in the third). The essays are often personal in nature and are simultaneously philosophical and experiential. I'd like you to peruse these volumes and **choose two essays to read**, and write a reflection that simultaneously engages with the ideas expressed in your chosen

essays, and also discusses the meaning that these ideas have for you personally. This reflection should be 3 pages in length (double-spaced), and is worth **10%** of the final grade.

Video Responses: Five times throughout the course of the semester, I will assign short videos for you to watch before class (see places in the schedule marked with a “V”). The videos will typically feature some thought-provoking content relevant to the unit we are in at that time. You will prepare a question about the video(s), and bring it to class, typed and printed. **Handwritten questions will not be accepted.** We will watch the video(s) again together in class, and then split into groups to discuss your questions. You will turn in your questions at the end of class. To receive credit, you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse). These will not be graded for content, but you will receive **one participation point** for each question you turn in, which together will constitute **5%** of the final grade.

Participation: Participation involves two things: 1. class involvement, and 2. at least one 1-on-1 meeting with me outside of class. **Class involvement:** your involvement is essential to the success of this class and to your success in this class. This means that a) active listening and note-taking, b) open questioning, and c) creative discussion are expected of you. Note that all of these things require attendance; thus, if your attendance drops below the required minimum, your participation grade will suffer. Class involvement constitutes **4%** of your final grade (though excessive absences will result in a greater than 4% grade reduction—see below under “Attendance”). **Individual meeting:** you are responsible for meeting with me at least once during office hours or by appointment **on or before** _____. This meeting may be in relation to your paper or another class assignment, but this is not necessary. A 10-15 minute chat about questions you might have had in class or anything philosophical fulfills this requirement. Please do not delay in scheduling this meeting, as I cannot guarantee extra appointments towards the end of the semester. The individual meeting constitutes **1%** of your final grade.

Reading Incentive: To encourage reading, you will have the following opportunity: for each day of class, you may bring in a **single 4x6 note card** with notes you have taken from the required reading for that day, **completed prior to the class for which the reading is assigned.** These may be turned in at the beginning of class. **Please print your name clearly at the top of each note card.** On exam day (midterm and final), I will return to you any note cards you have turned in, and you may use them on the exam. If you don't turn them in, you don't get any help on the exams.

Attendance: Attendance is required. Your success in the course will largely depend on your grasp of the material discussed in class, and it is not possible to get the full benefit of that discussion if you are not present. In general, I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences (for example, in the case of illness), but if you need to be absent for some extraordinary circumstance, please notify me well in advance. **I will allow a grace period of four absences before I start deducting points.** 5 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 2 final percentage points; 6 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 final percentage points. More than 6 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 final percentage points, plus an additional 4 final percentage points per absence over 6. Additionally, punctuality is expected; if you come to class late, it is your responsibility to make sure I know you are there, preferably by seeing me at the end of class so I can mark you on the attendance sheet.

Late Work Policy: Five percentage points will be deducted from the student's assignment grade for each late day (including weekends). For example, a student who has earned an 85% (B) on a paper but who has turned it in a day late may receive a maximum grade of 80% (B-).

Extra Credit: I have included several **recommended readings** in the schedule. These are clearly marked as "Recommended" and appear in a slightly smaller font size. You are not required to read these for class, but if you choose, you may read one and write a short (2-3 paragraph) response summarizing the main argument of the article. These should be similar in style to a normal reading response, and each will be worth a maximum of **2 final percentage points**. You may write a maximum of **two** extra credit reading responses during the semester. These may be turned in (hard copy please) any time up to and including _____.

Grading: Grading rubrics for the critical paper and the reading responses will be posted on D2L.

Writing: Good writing is a basic skill in any professional field, and I expect you to put in the necessary effort to make sure that your paper, reading responses, and exam essays are lucid and well organized. A "**Tips for Writing Philosophy Papers**" document will be posted online. Please use it. If you need additional help with this, please visit the writing center on campus.

Reading: The reading for this course is difficult. Despite this, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading schedule and engage the material (especially since the lectures and all assignments are based on the readings). This means setting aside adequate time to engage the material *before class*. I have tried to keep the assigned readings to a length that allows you to wrestle with the material without getting overwhelmed. If something from the reading is unclear, you may always bring it up in class, or in a meeting with me.

Academic Dishonesty: The university's guidelines on academic dishonesty will be enforced. *Ignorance is not an excuse*. Please refer to these policies for more details or contact me with particular questions in order to avoid any problems. The university's policies can be found online here: [URL].

More information on plagiarism can be found here: <http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism/>

*A useful, but not foolproof, rule of thumb: When in doubt, err on the side of over-citing.

In this course you will be required to submit written assignments in electronic form to a plagiarism detection website called Turnitin (this is done automatically via the online paper dropbox). Your assignments become a permanent part of the Turnitin database, but will not be used for any other purpose than checking for plagiarism.

Disabilities: Students with documented physical or learning disabilities wishing to have special accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. In addition, the Office of Disability Services is available to assist you. They can be reached here: _____.

Phones and Computers: Unless a legitimate reason is provided, mobile phones and computers are to be off and put away for the duration of the class. Texting, or any other form of electronic communication, is strictly prohibited. Use of phones, computers, tablets, etc., will lower your participation grade.

Food and Drink: Please try to avoid bringing food into the classroom. However, in the exceptional case, choose being engaged in class while eating a snack over not eating and being unable to focus. Beverages in closed containers are welcome.

Conduct: Disagreement is a basic feature of philosophy and all other academic discourse. In this class, we will be discussing important and controversial issues. We may be engaging in discussions which challenge some of our most deeply held beliefs, and disagreement is sure to arise. For this reason, it is vital for each student, and myself, to always conduct ourselves with the utmost generosity and sensitivity toward one another and our authors. I reserve the right to steer discussions in whatever way I deem most appropriate to the day's lesson, and I will not tolerate rude, disrespectful, or offensive comments. If you are unsure whether something you plan to say or do could possibly be offensive, always talk to me before sharing it with the class.

Tentative Schedule

All readings should be completed by the date assigned.

Readings marked with an * will be available online as PDF files.

“**R**” indicates a Reading Response assignment

“**V**” indicates a Video Response assignment

Date	Text	Page #
The Concept of God		
Week 1	Intro to Course	
	Sushanta Sen: The Vedic-Upanisadic Concept of Brahman (The Highest God)	61-69
	Christopher Ives: Emptiness: Soteriology and Ethics in Mahayana Buddhism	70-77
Week 2	Sallie McFague: God and the World	37-47
	William Rowe: The Idea of God V	4-15
	<i>Recommended:</i> George Mavrodes: Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence	106-107
Week 3	Thomas Morris: The Concept of God	12-22
	Clark Pinnock: The Openness of God – Systematic Theology R	23-36
	<i>Recommended:</i> *Nicholas Wolterstorff: God Everlasting	181-203
Week 4	Paul Tillich: The Reality of God	48-54
	Martin Buber: The Love of God and the Idea of Deity	55-60
	*Tina Beattie: Redeeming Mary	107-122
Week 5	<i>Recommended:</i> *Elizabeth Johnson: Selection from <i>She Who Is</i>	TBD
	*Pamela Sue Anderson: An Epistemological-Ethical Approach to Philosophy of Religion	87-102
The Existence of God: Arguments For		
Week 6	*William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the Cosmological Argument from Contingency	1-5
	William Rowe: The Cosmological Argument	19-34
	*William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the <i>Kalam</i> Cosmological Argument	5-10
Week 7	Paul Draper: A Critique of the <i>Kalam</i> Cosmological Argument R	189-194
	*William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the Moral Argument	10-13
	*C.S. Lewis: The Moral Argument	TBD
Week 8	William Rowe: The Design Argument (Old and New)	54-65
	*William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the Teleological Argument	13-24
	<i>Recommended:</i> Robin Collins: A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God	210-227
Week 9	William Rowe: The Ontological Argument	37-50
	*William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the Ontological Argument	24-27
	<i>Recommended:</i> *Anselm: “The Ontological Argument”	709-710
Week 10	Review / Catch-up	
The Existence of God: Arguments Against (Hiddenness)		

Week 7	*J.L. Schellenberg: Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism *Paul Moser: Divine Hiddenness Does Not Justify Atheism *Replies	R V	30-41 42-53 54-58
	Michael Murray: Deus Absconditus Michael Rea: Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence		369-382 383-392
The Existence of God: Arguments Against (Evil)			
Week 8	*Midterm Exam*		
	William Rowe: The Problem of Evil Paul Draper: Evolution and the Problem of Evil <i>Recommended:</i> *Bruce Russell & Stephen Wykstra: "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil: A Dialogue"	V	112-130 271-282 495-511
The Existence of God: Arguments Against (Theodicy)			
Week 9	Grace Jantzen: Whose Problem Is the "Problem of Evil"? Alvin Plantinga: The Free Will Defense <i>Recommended:</i> John Hick: Evil and Soul-Making <i>Recommended:</i> *Paul Draper: The Skeptical Theist	R	283-287 300-318 319-323 163-173
	Laura Ekstrom: Suffering as Religious Experience Marilyn McCord Adams: Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God	R	360-368 351-359
Week 10	Fyodor Dostoevsky: Rebellion Ursula LeGuin: The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas	V	243-249 250-253
	NO CLASS: BREAK		
Religious Experience			
Week 11	William Rowe: Religious and Mystical Experience Selections of Mystical Experiences	V	69-88 397-398
	William James: Mysticism Grace Jantzen: Mysticism and Experience		399-414 415-430
Week 12	*William Alston: Religious Experience Justifies Religious Belief *Evan Fales: Do Mystics See God? *Replies	R	135-144 145-157 158-163
	Jeff Jordan: Religious Experience and Naturalistic Explanations *Critical Paper Due*		449-456
Faith and Reason: The Nature of Faith			
Week 13	Lara Buchak: Can It Be Rational to Have Faith?	R	524-541
	Daniel Howard-Snyder: Propositional Faith: What It Is and What It Is Not		542-557
Faith and Reason: Reasons for Belief			
Week 14	W.K. Clifford: The Ethics of Belief William James: The Will to Believe	R	574-577 578-586
	Michael Bergmann: Rational Religious Belief without Arguments *Amy Hollywood: Practice, Belief, and Feminist Philosophy of Religion		609-624 225-240
Open Topics*			

Week 15	*We'll vote on the following: miracles, religious pluralism, afterlife, prayer, forgiveness	
	TBD	
Final Exam		
Week 16	Day/Time	