

Philos 1850: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion



COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

Is there a God and if so, what is this God like? Is the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good creator compatible with the kinds of evils we observe in the world? Are there good arguments for or against the existence of a God, and is there anything wrong with believing in a God in the absence of good evidence? What is the relation between morality and religion? If you are curious about these kinds of questions, this course is a great place to explore them, whether you are a believer, an atheist, or an agnostic.

It is one important goal of this course—as you would expect—to familiarize participants with some of the major figures and debates in the philosophy of religion. Doing so will also contribute to two further goals. First, because the central questions in philosophy of religion represent all of the major areas of philosophy (that is, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and logic), participants will become familiar with a wide range of philosophical issues. In fact, this course can function as an introduction to philosophy more generally. Second, participants will learn a number of techniques for studying and evaluating philosophical texts and philosophical arguments.

By the end of the semester, students should

- possess a firm understanding of the main questions in the philosophy of religion and be able to describe and assess some of the most promising answers to these questions
- have at least a rudimentary understanding of the central areas of philosophy as well as of the nature and methods of philosophy
- be able to evaluate and construct philosophical arguments

ASSESSMENT AND DUE DATES¹

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| Midterm exam (taken in class on February 19 th) | 20% |
| Short Writing Assignment (due before class, March 26 th) | 20% |

¹ I reserve the right to change the due dates.

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| 1,500-word paper (outline due before class, April 9, final draft before class, April 23) | 30% |
| Final exam (April 30 th , 2–3.45pm, in McPherson 2015) | 30% |

NOTE ABOUT LAPTOP USE

I strongly discourage the use of laptops and other electronic devices during class. First of all, it distracts other students as well as yourself. Moreover, research shows that laptop use impairs learning. For instance, two psychologists just published this finding: “In three studies, we found that students who took notes on laptops performed worse on conceptual questions than students who took notes longhand.”² I understand why some students prefer to take notes on a laptop. But unless your handwriting is quite bad, you might consider using an old-fashioned notebook or legal pad for your philosophy notes, in light of these study results. If you do use a laptop to take notes or look at PDFs of the readings, please avoid using your computer in ways that might distract other students. I reserve the right to ban laptops and other electronic devices if I see evidence of too much inappropriate use during class!

EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

- *Read.* If you don’t keep up with the assigned readings, you will not get very much out of the lectures, and the discussions will be much less engaging. So, to make this class worthwhile for everybody, please come to class prepared, ready to discuss! You may find it helpful to jot down questions, objections, or summaries of the readings each week. I have made sure that the readings are manageable, and I will provide reading questions for all mandatory readings that will help you figure out what is most central.
- *Discuss.* The best way to do philosophy is through lively discussions and I will try to reserve a decent chunk of class time for this. If you didn’t get the chance to ask a question or express an idea in class, I encourage you to come to my or Kevin Wutke’s office hour, or see me after class. Alternatively, you can email either of us with questions or comments.
- *Listen.* Know when it’s appropriate for you to jump in the discussion, without interrupting others. You can learn a lot by listening to your classmates, trying to understand their points, even if you end up disagreeing with them.
- *Question.* If you don’t understand what someone (including me!) is saying, ask. If you have a doubt, express it. Be respectful of the opinions and comments of others: criticize ideas, not people.
- Please note my *policies* concerning late work, extensions, and plagiarism: **Late work** will receive a penalty of 1/3 of a grade per day after the deadline. **Extensions** are granted only in exceptional circumstances; if you absolutely need an extension, please contact me as soon as possible, and before the deadline. **Plagiarism** or academic dishonesty will not only be reflected in your grade, but will also be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. See the university Academic Misconduct statement below. For more information, you can consult <http://studentconduct.osu.edu/page.asp?id=1> and <http://oaa.osu.edu/coamresources.html> (the

² Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, ‘The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,’ *Psychological Science* 25 (2014): 1159–1168.

latter page contains OSU videos on academic honesty as well as links to websites with useful tips on avoiding plagiarism); if you still have questions, please talk to me. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the university's policies.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

TEXTBOOKS

There are two books you are expected to purchase (both comparatively inexpensive); they should be available at SBX, Barnes and Noble on campus, and other campus bookstores:

- Linda Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2007 [referred to as '**Zagzebski**' in the schedule below]
- Louise Antony (ed.), *Philosophers without Gods*. Oxford University Press, 2010 [referred to as '**Antony**' in the schedule below]

All other assigned readings will be available electronically through Carmen.

Note about the readings: always bring the texts we're working on to class! We will consult them regularly.

You will also require a **TurningTechnologies clicker** or the ResponseWare smartphone app with a ResponseWare subscription (the app is free, the subscription costs \$19 for one year). You can also check out a clicker at the beginning of every class from Kevin Wutke, at no cost.

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE [NOTE: SUBJECT TO CHANGE!]³

| | Date | Topic | What to prepare |
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| 1. | Jan. 13 (I) | Introduction and Overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional: read Zagzebski, ch. 1 |
| 2. | Jan. 15 (Th) | What is Religion? (Also: some logic) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch Appiah's TED talk 'Is Religion Good or Bad?' (on Carmen) • Read Pojman and Vaughn, 'Excursus: A Little Bit of Logic,' pp. 33–41 (on Carmen; the section starting on p. 41 is optional) |
| 3. | Jan. 20 (I) | The Classical Arguments for the Existence of God | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 25–37 [sections 2.1–2.2] • Read Paley, selections from <i>Natural Theology</i> (on Carmen) |
| 4. | Jan. 22 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 37–48 [section 2.3] |

³ The schedule on Carmen, under 'Content,' will always be kept up to date.

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| | (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch Yenter’s Wi-Phi video ‘Cosmological Argument,’ parts 1&2 (on Carmen) • Optional: listen to Adamson’s podcast ‘By All Means Necessary: Avicenna [= Ibn Sina] on God’ (on Carmen) • Optional: watch Holt’s TED talk ‘Why Does the Universe Exist?’ (on Carmen) |
| 5. | Jan. 27 (I) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 48–54 [sections 2.4–2.5] • Read Anselm’s argument and Gaunilo’s objection (on Carmen) • Optional: listen to Adamson’s podcast ‘Somebody’s Perfect: Anselm’s Ontological Argument’ (on Carmen) |
| 6. | Jan. 29 (Th) | Pragmatic and Fideist Approaches to Religious Belief | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 56–65 [sections 3.1–3.2] • Read Garber, ‘Religio Philosophi’ (in Antony, pp. 34–40) |
| 7. | Feb. 3 (I) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 65–76 [sections 3.3–3.4] • Optional: Read Adams, ‘Kierkegaard’s Argument against Objective Reasoning in Religion’ (on Carmen) • Optional: Read Hyman, ‘Wittgensteinianism’ (on Carmen) |
| 8. | Feb. 5 (Th) | Who or What is God? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Maimonides, selections from <i>The Guide for the Perplexed</i> (on Carmen) |
| 9. | Feb. 10 (I) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 85–92 [section 4.3] • Read Leftow, ‘Eternity’ (on Carmen) |
| 10. | Feb. 12 (Th) | Fate, Freedom, and Foreknowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 100–110 [sections 5.1–5.2] • Read Pike, ‘Problems for the Notion of Divine Omniscience’ (on Carmen) |
| 11. | Feb. 17 (I) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 111–121 [sections 5.3–5.4] |
| 12. | Feb. 19 (Th) | MIDTERM EXAM | |
| 13. | Feb. 24 (I) | Religion and Morality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 122–131 [sections 6.1–6.2] • Read Curley, ‘On Becoming a Heretic’ (in Antony, pp. 87–89) • Read Kant, excerpt from <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> (on Carmen) |
| 14. | Feb. 26 (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 131–141 [sections 6.3–6.5] • Read Antony, ‘Good Minus God’ (on Carmen) |
| 15. | March 3 (I) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Homiak, ‘An Aristotelian Life’ (in Antony, pp. 133–149; you may skip pp. 140–145) |
| 16. | March | The Problem of Evil | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 143–163 [sections 7.1–7.3] |

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| | 5 (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional: watch Haslanger's Wi-Phi video 'The Problem of Evil' (on Carmen) |
| 17. | March 10 (T) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Zagzebski pp. 163–167 [section 7.4] Read Curley, 'On Becoming a Heretic' (in Antony, pp. 80–87) Read Shapiro, 'Faith and Reason, the Perpetual War' (in Antony, pp. 3–6) |
| 18. | March 12 (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Lewis, 'Divine Evil' (in Antony, pp. 231–238 [skip the last section, which starts on p. 238]) Read Burley, 'Karma, Morality, and Evil' (on Carmen) Optional: read Kaufman, 'Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil' (on Carmen; you may skip the section 'Preliminary Qualifications' and the section 'The Verifiability Problem.') Optional: read Ghaly, 'Evil and Suffering in Islam' (on Carmen) Optional: read Goldschmidt, 'Jewish Responses to the Problem of Evil' (on Carmen) Optional: read Anderson, 'If God is Dead, Is Everything Permitted?' (in Antony, pp. 218–221) |
| 19. | March 24 (T) | Death and the Afterlife | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Zagzebski pp. 168–89 [chapter 8] Optional: watch Cave's TED talk 'The four stories we tell ourselves about death' (on Carmen) |
| 20. | March 26 (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Aurobindo, 'A Hindu View of Rebirth' (on Carmen) Read Badham, 'Problems with Accounts of Life After Death' (on Carmen) |
| 21. | March 31 (T) | The Problem of Religious Diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Zagzebski pp. 190–199 and 203–210 [i.e., all of chapter 9 except 9.3] Optional: read Dalai Lama, 'Buddhism and Other Religions' (on Carmen) |
| 22. | April 2 (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Hick, 'Religious Pluralism' (on Carmen) Read Zagzebski pp. 199–203 (i.e., section 9.3) |
| 23. | April 7 (T) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Feldman, 'Reasonable Religious Disagreement' (in Antony, pp. 194–214) |
| 24. | April 9 (Th) | Paper Workshop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the sample paper(s) (on Carmen) |
| 25. | April 14 (T) | Faith, Reason, and the Ethics of Belief | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read Zagzebski pp. 220–222 [section 10.1.3] Read Shapiro, 'A Drop in the Sea' (on Carmen) |

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| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional: read Hume, ‘Of Miracles’ (on Carmen) |
| 26. | April 16 (Th) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Zagzebski pp. 222–230 [section 10.2] • Watch Donaldson's WiPhi video ‘The Will to Believe’ (on Carmen) • Optional: read Clifford, excerpt from <i>The Ethics of Belief</i> (on Carmen) • Optional: read selections from James (on Carmen) |
| 27. | April 21 (F) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shapiro, ‘Faith and Reason, the Perpetual War’ (in Antony, pp. 6–16) • Watch: Ganssle’s Wi-Phi video ‘Faith and Reason’ (on Carmen) |
| 28. | April 23 (Th) | General Reflections and Review | |
| | April 30 (Th) | FINAL EXAM | |

GE CATEGORY AND GOALS

This is a GE cultures and ideas course.

GE Goals: Students evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas in order to develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; and interpretation and evaluation.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression.
2. Students evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

PHILOS 1850 will satisfy these expected learning outcomes by engaging students in an evaluation of religion, without doubt an incredibly important cultural phenomenon. The students will encounter a wide variety of reflections about religious practices and ideas, and they will learn to analyze and interpret these reflections philosophically. Human beliefs, perceptions of reality, and moral as well as cultural norms will be recurring themes in the course.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.