

Philosophy Department

Freshman Seminar: God

Professor: Dr. Christian Miller
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Texts:

Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction. William Rowe. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth Publishing, 2007. Fourth Edition.

The End of Faith. Sam Harris. New York: Norton Publishing, 2004.

Additional articles will be available in a course packet which I will distribute during the first week or two of the semester.

Course Objectives:

- (1) To make progress in developing and defending our own personal views about religious issues.
- (2) To evaluate arguments and thereby become better able to critically assess competing views about important philosophical issues.
- (3) To appreciate the importance of philosophical reflection and the relevance of philosophical issues to our ordinary lives.
- (4) To improve our analytical reading and writing skills.

Course Requirements:

- (1) Four papers, the first three of roughly 4-5 pages in length each, and the final paper of roughly 6-8 pages. Paper assignments will be distributed at least two weeks in advance of the due date, and will contain very detailed advice about both style and content. There will be no exams.
- (2) Class attendance and participation. I will take attendance every class, and I take this very seriously. If you have an excused absence (i.e., illness, death in the family, debate tournament, sports competition, or other university recognized excuse), then of course I will not hold that against you. Just be sure to let me know by email what happened, and I will send you the class notes by attachment. Additionally, you can have two *unexcused* absences without any penalty. *More than two* unexcused absences, however, can result in a decrease in the final grade.
It is my hope that the seminar will be a comfortable place to participate and I expect everyone to come to class prepared to participate each day. Good participation does not necessarily mean frequent participation but rather thoughtful participation. If you make a helpful comment once every 2 classes, for example, that would be fine. Also, if you are shy or do not feel comfortable talking in front of groups, please feel free to meet with me outside of class (i.e., swing by office hours or make an appointment) and that can count as your participation.
- (3) Watch two movies outside of class. I will arrange a group showing of each movie during a particular evening which will be announced in advance and which will try to accommodate as many schedules as possible. After the showing, the movie will be put on library reserve for those who were unable to make the scheduled time.

- (4) Presentations. I will pass around a signup sheet next week for you to pick a particular class for your presentation. However, these will be a bit unusual. You will be asked to attend that particular class, and then by midnight of the following day (i.e., by midnight of either Wednesday or Friday) you will need to email the rest of the class with a specific illustration of one of the main issues we talked about that day. This illustration can be taken from any source you like *other than* a philosophical text. It can be a piece of poetry, a work of art, a selection from a fictional work, a song, a cartoon, a movie clip, and so forth. In your email, you will need to do two things:

(a) Provide us with the example, whether by typing it into the email or providing a link to the internet or whatever is appropriate.

(b) Write one paragraph of background on the author, the context, the time period, or whatever you think is needed in order to appreciate the work in question.

Then, when we meet again, you will start off class by explaining to everyone how the example you chose relates to our material from that previous class. For example, you might consider whether the author/painter/musician would agree with the position of a work we read or not. You can also say whether you personally agree with the stance taken by the person in question. Aim for about a 3-4 minute presentation here at the start of class.

Please do not spend too much time on this in general – it is not intended to be a stressful task. It will also be graded on a pass/fail basis.

- (5) I reserve the right to have unannounced in-class quizzes on the reading if it becomes apparent that most of the class is not doing it. Those quizzes would be factored into the final grade.

Office Hours:

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:30pm or by appointment

Note: Please email me or catch me in person any time to set up an appointment for any day of the week. I would love to meet and will do whatever I can to help out in whatever way needed.

Grading:

First Paper:	20%
Second Paper:	20%
Third Paper	20%
Final Paper:	30%
Attendance, Participation, and Presentation:	10%

Please Note: If you have a disability that may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (758-5929) within the first two weeks of the semester and also let me know.

Bird Flu Policy: In the event of an outbreak, the university may want professors to go ahead with their courses, in which case we will continue the class over email. I will send you the handouts for each of the remaining class meetings. I will also change the course requirements so that you will have to submit by email attachment a 1-2 page paper on each week's material.

The university honor code should be respected at all times.

Tentative Reading Schedule

Thursday, January 14

First Day of Class
Recent Attacks on Religious Belief
Harris, *The End of Faith*, chapter one

Tuesday, January 19

Clarifying "God"
Aquinas, Mavrodes, and Frankfurt readings in course packet
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter one

Leading Arguments for the Existence of God

Thursday, January 21

Presenting the Cosmological Argument
Taylor reading in course packet

Tuesday, January 26

Criticizing the Cosmological Argument
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter two

Thursday, January 28

The Original Teleological Argument
Paley, Dawkins readings in course packet
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter four

Tuesday, February 2

Contemporary Teleological Arguments
Behe reading in course packet
Collins reading in course packet (the appendix is optional)
First Paper Assigned

Thursday, February 4

Religious and Mystical Experiences
Selections on Mystical Experiences in course packet
Merton reading in course packet
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter five, 69-84

Tuesday, February 9

Evaluating Religious and Mystical Experiences
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter five, 84-88
Broad, Pojman readings in course packet

Thursday, February 11

Pascal's Wager
Pascal, Lycan and Schlesinger readings in course packet

Leading Arguments Against the Existence of God

Tuesday, February 16

Logical Problem of Evil

Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter seven, 112-117
Dostoevsky, Mackie readings in course packet
First Paper Due

Thursday, February 18

Main Response to Logical Problem and Initial Presentation of Evidential Problem
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter seven, 117-119
Plantinga reading in course packet (this is a tough reading - just try to get the main idea)
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter seven, 119-120
Rowe reading in course packet

Tuesday, February 23

Responses to the Evidential Problem of Evil
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter seven, 121-131
Hick, van Inwagen readings in course packet
Optional Reading: Second van Inwagen reading in course packet

Thursday, February 25

Religious Harms
Harris, *The End of Faith*, chapters three and four

Tuesday, March 2

Responses to Religious Harms Objection
Strobel, *Wall Street Journal* Brooks Review, and Brooks readings in course packet

Thursday, March 4

Defending Hell
Walls reading in course packet
Second Paper Assigned

Tuesday, March 9

Thursday, March 11
Spring Break
No Class

Tuesday, March 16

Against Hell
Talbot, Reply to Talbot, Reply to Walls readings in course packet

Faith and Reason

Thursday, March 18

Evidentialism
Clifford reading in course packet
Harris, *The End of Faith*, chapter two
Second Paper Due

Tuesday, March 23

Reformed Epistemology
Clark reading in course packet
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter six

Thursday, March 25

Exclusivism
Plantinga reading in course packet (this is a tough reading - just try to get the main idea)

Miracles

Tuesday, March 30

Hume's Famous Attack on Miracles
Hume, Mackie readings in course packet
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter eight, 133-141
Third Paper Assigned

Thursday, April 1

Out of Town at American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting
No Class

Tuesday, April 6

Evaluating Hume's Argument
Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, chapter eight, 142-145
Swinburne reading in course packet

Divine Providence

Thursday, April 8

Theological Determinism
Flint, Helm readings in course packet

Tuesday, April 13

Middle Knowledge/Molinism
Basinger reading in course packet
Third Paper Due

Thursday, April 15

Open Theism
Lucas reading in course packet

Specific Theistic Religions

Tuesday, April 20

Judaism
Book of Genesis (use whatever translation you like)

Thursday, April 22

Christianity
Book of John (use whatever translation you like)

Tuesday, April 27

Islam
Readings to be Announced
Last Day of Class

Note: I will leave it up to you as a class to decide when you want to have the final paper due. We will vote on this well in advance.