

Syllabus

Professor

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Course Description

In Western philosophy of religion, we attempt to answer fundamental questions concerning the important doctrines of the major Western religions, especially the doctrines concerning God. We attempt to answer questions about

- *The Nature of God.* Assuming God exists, what is God like? What are the divine attributes?
- *Puzzles about Omnipotence.* God is supposed to be omnipotent, but what does this mean? Is the notion of omnipotence even coherent?
- *God and Morality.* What is the relationship between God and morality? Do moral truths depend upon God?
- *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge.* God is supposed to be omniscient, but is this compatible with human freedom?
- *Pascal's Wager.* Is it in our best interest to believe in God? Does this give us reason to think God exists?
- *The Ontological Argument.* Can we prove the existence of God from the very concept of God?
- *The Cosmological Argument.* Does the fact that the universe exists give us reason to think God exists?
- *The Argument from Design.* Some features of the natural world appear designed. Does this give us reason to think God exists?
- *Religious Experience.* Can "religious experience" justify believing that God exists?
- *Faith.* Is it ever legitimate to believe something on faith – that is, without any evidence?
- *The Problem of Evil.* Does the amount of evil in the world give us reason to think God does not exist?
- *Immortality.* What would human beings have to be like for life after death to be possible? Is there any reason to think we are that way?

- *The Meaning of Life*. If there is no God, is everything pointless? If there is no afterlife, is everything pointless?

Unfortunately, we will have time to cover only some of these topics. We will approach them by way of the writings of some important philosophers, both classic and contemporary. In each case, our goals will be to carefully formulate, understand, and evaluate some of the important theses and arguments on the topic.

This is a course in the *philosophy of religion*. It is not a course in comparative religion, the history of religion, or the psychology of religion. We will not be asking what the religious beliefs of this or that group are, or how they differ from the beliefs of this other group, or what cultural circumstances led them to adopt their religious views. We will actually be trying to figure out the *correct answers* to the questions above.

This is a challenging course. Much of the reading is difficult and must be read slowly and more than once. Many of the ideas and arguments presented in lecture and in the readings are unfamiliar, difficult, and technical. On the exams, you will be expected to know the material thoroughly, to think deeply, and write very clearly and precisely about the issues. If you are looking for a blow-off course, look elsewhere.

Prerequisites

Two courses in philosophy.

Course Website

The course website, which you should check regularly, can be found here:

<http://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil3600/>

Readings

One book is required:

Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, Third Edition (Oxford University Press, 1998), edited by William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright.
ISBN: 0195155114.

The book is available at the CU Bookstore. Additional required readings will be made available on the course website. In addition to bringing your book to class, you are required to print out and bring these readings to class as well, on the relevant days.

Requirements

Class Participation (20% of your grade): You must attend class regularly, arrive on time, complete each reading assignment on time, bring the book and/or relevant readings with you to class, take detailed notes on readings and in class, ask questions when you have them, contribute to class discussions, and be an active member of your group during group activities. I will be keeping track of all of this, and it will affect your grade.

In addition to these parts of class counting directly towards your grade, you will do poorly on the exams (and in general get a lot less out of the course) if you don't do these

things. Some questions on the exams will be in reference to material discussed only in lecture and not in any reading. Furthermore, I am much more likely to “bump up” a borderline grade to the higher grade if I see that a student has attended class regularly, taken good notes, asked questions (either in or outside of class), participated in class, and generally put a lot of effort into the course.

A further element of the class participation requirement involves *technology*. You must have an email account and regular access to the internet, and you must check your colorado.edu email address and the course website frequently. If you don't, you will miss crucial information about course content, assigned readings, or exams. You also must have regular access to a printer in order to print out readings from the website.

Exams (80% of your grade): There will be four in-class, bluebook exams:

Exam 1: A short essay-type exam around Week 5 (late September).

Exam 2: A very short answer-type exam around Week 8 (mid-October).

Exam 3: A short essay-type exam around Week 12 (mid-November).

Final Exam: A very short answer-type cumulative final exam during Finals Week.

For the short essay-type exams, you will have the possible essay questions in advance, but you won't know which one or two will be on the exam. The very short answer-type exams will contain true-false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and/or short answer questions.

If you miss an exam, you will be permitted to take a make up exam only if you have a legitimate, documented excuse (e.g., non-trivial illness, death in the family, religious obligation). Whenever possible, *please let me know in advance* that you must miss an exam.

Grading

Your final grade for the course is calculated as follows:

Class Participation	20%
Exam 1	10%
Exam 2	20%
Exam 3	25%
Final Exam	25%

We will use the following grading scale:

93-100	A	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+
90-92	A-	83-86	B	73-76	C	60-66	D
		80-82	B-	70-72	C-	0-59	F

A Possible Course Schedule Certain Not to Be Ours

Week 1: What Is the Philosophy of Religion?, The Nature of God

Week 2: Puzzles about Omnipotence

Week 3: God and Morality

Week 4: The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge
Week 5: The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge [Exam 1 probably this week]
Week 6: Pascal's Wager; The Ontological Argument
Week 7: The Ontological Argument
Week 8: The Cosmological Argument [Exam 2 probably this week]
Week 9: The Cosmological Argument
Week 10: The Argument from Design
Week 11: The Argument from Design
Week 12: The Problem of Evil [Exam 3 probably this week]
[Thanksgiving Break]
Week 13: The Problem of Evil
Week 14: Immortality
Week 15: God and the Meaning of Life

Finals Week: Final Exam

Additional Notes:

- There will be occasional group exercises, some of which will be on topics not listed above.
- There will be **no class Friday, September 15**, as I will be out of town at a philosophy conference.

Academic Integrity

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/>.

Anyone caught violating the academic integrity policy (in any way) will automatically receive an F for the course.

Disability Services

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit a letter to me from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

Religious Observances

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. If you must miss an exam or a class meeting due a religious obligation, please let me know this *in advance*. We'll schedule a make-up exam or see to it that you know what you missed in class. You can find more details on the university's religious observances policy at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See polices at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Discrimination and Harassment

The University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships applies to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>.