



Course Syllabus: Philosophy of Religion

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

PHIL-2333/4333 Section 201

Spring 2025

Contact Information

Professor: Dr. Tyler M. Williams

Office location: Bea Wood 236

Office hours: Mon 2:30-3:30; Tues/Thurs 8:30-9:30; Tues 1:00-2:00; & by appointment

Office phone: (940) 397-4125

E-mail: tyler.williams@msutexas.edu

Class Information

Course title: Philosophy of Religion (PHIL-2333/4333)

Classroom location: Prothro-Yeager Hall, PY-201

Class meeting times: Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:50 a.m.

Course Catalogue Description

A critical examination of the definitions, assumptions, and arguments central to religion. Topics may include interpreting the nature of religion, arguments for and against the existence of God, the relation between theology and philosophy, the relation between God and the world, the problem of evil, and the nature of religious experience.

THECB Course Objectives and Assessments

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - To assess the student's critical thinking skills, the Final Examination Rubric will be applied to the Take-Home Final Examination.
- Communication Skills
 - To assess the student's written communication skills, the Final Examination Rubric will be applied to the Take-Home Final Examination.
- Personal Responsibility
 - To assess ethical use of sources as a measure of personal responsibility, the Final Examination Rubric will be applied to the Take-Home Final Examination.
- Social Responsibility
 - To assess the student's ability to understand differing points of view, the Final Examination Rubric will be applied to the Take-Home Final Examination.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Course objectives for PHIL-2333/4333 are:

1. To help students learn, understand, and evaluate the basic issues of philosophy of religion from both a historical and theoretical perspective.
2. To help students gain familiarity with various pivotal texts in the history of philosophy of religion.
3. To help students develop their skills in interpreting and critically analyzing texts.
4. To help students develop their skills in identifying and evaluating arguments as well as in formulating their own arguments through the effective and responsible use of evidence.
5. To help students improve their ability to read and write clearly and critically.
6. To help students appreciate the relevance of the philosophical study of religion in public and private life and to gain a greater understanding of their personal philosophical and religious commitments.
7. To inculcate students with a love of wisdom and a desire to live a philosophical life.

Curriculum Statement

This course is dual listed as PHIL-2333 and PHIL-4333. Students taking “Philosophy of Religion” to satisfy the “Language, Philosophy & Culture” requirement of the Core Curriculum must be registered for PHIL-2333. Students enrolled in PHIL-4333 should be advised that this is an upper-level course that is officially recognized by the university (effective Spring 2022) as “Writing Intensive.”

Students enrolled in PHIL-4333 will have their written work and their in-class discussion skills evaluated to a higher standard. For this reason, the course catalogue states that students are required to have completed 3 credit hours in philosophy (or get the permission of the instructor) before enrolling in upper-level philosophy courses. Students concerned about these standards are encouraged to speak with the instructor during the first week of the course.

Textbook & Instructional Materials:

Textbooks have all been ordered through the Follett Campus Bookstore. However, you are welcome to source your books wherever you choose. Please be sure to get these specific editions in hard copies (unless you need an e-text to accommodate a disability):

- Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. 2nd Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Students are expected to uphold the standards of “Academic Integrity” set forth by the [MSU Student Honor Creed](#). The instructor will notify the appropriate authority of any infringement of academic honesty.

“Cheating” includes the unauthorized use of certain information, materials, or devices in exams, papers, or assignments. “Plagiarism” includes but is not limited to using the published or unpublished works of another person without recognition. This includes attempts to portray AI-generated material as evidence of a student’s personal knowledge of course content and/or academic skill. A student who makes use of plagiarized material, or anyone that profits from (or abets) cheating, will be dismissed from the course and referred to the Dean of Students.

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work, not the individual to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

Grading

Table 1: Value of each assignment to overall course grade for PHIL-2333 only

Assignments	Percent value	Point value
Quiz average	20%	100
Take-Home Midterm Exam	20%	100
Multiple-Choice Midterm Exam portion	10%	50
Take-Home Final Exam (for 4333: Final Research Project)	25%	125
Multiple-Choice Final Exam portion	10%	50
Engagement	15%	75
Total	100%	500

Table 2: Value of final letter grades

Letter grade	Percentage range
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Homework

Homework assignments comprise daily reading assignments, which should be completed by the time class session starts. Class activities will be based on the readings and will work under the assumption that students have come to class with the reading prepared. Students are encouraged to meet with the professor for help on reading strategies or on the reading’s content. All other homework assignments are listed below.

Quizzes

Routine quizzes will be administered in class throughout the semester to ensure that students are keeping pace with the syllabus and doing the reading. Missed quizzes cannot be retaken after the fact, except when the absence is for official university activity.

The quizzes are designed to be easy for those who did the reading, even if they did not understand absolutely everything. For this reason, quizzes exist (1) to incentivize students to do the reading, and (2) to identify when students are struggling throughout the semester so that appropriate interventions and adjustments can be made.

A 15-week semester is a marathon, not a sprint. Treat these quizzes like mile-markers and pacesetters: they keep you steady, so you never have to sprint to catch up. Of course, mistakes happen, people forget things, and sometimes people just have bad days. That's okay. Also, one of the objectives of this course is to sharpen critical reading skills: each student's reading quiz adeptness should be stronger by the end of the semester than at the beginning. Therefore, when quiz averages are tallied at the end of the semester, every student's lowest two quiz grades will be dropped from consideration. A total of 12 quizzes will be administered on a pop basis on days new reading is due.

Exams

Two exam deadlines are listed on the Course Schedule, one midway through the semester and one at the end. Specific descriptions of each exam will be posted to D2L two weeks prior to each due date. Exams are divided between an online multiple-choice portion and a 6-page (double-spaced) take-home written portion.

Take-home exams will be evaluated according to the Final Examination Rubric, which is available for students to view in the Assignment Descriptions folder in D2L. Students registered for PHIL-2333 will complete midterm and final exams. Students registered for PHIL-4333 will write a Final Research Project (see description below) instead of the final exam.

Access to the multiple-choice portion of both exams will require that students use a LockDown browser and webcam monitoring. Read the instructions closely before starting the exam. If you do not have (or do not want to download) this software on your personal devices, the Moffett Library has laptops at the circulation desk and desktop computers in the labs.

Engagement Reports

Students will submit two self-assessment "engagement reports" throughout the semester. These reports are not individually graded; they are taken as a "completion" grade and factored into the overall Engagement grade. Failure to write a report will reduce the overall engagement grade by a full letter grade. Given the self-reflective nature of our course material and the very strong emphasis our course places on engagement, these reports provide students the opportunity (a) to pause and reflect thoughtfully and creatively on their own accountability with the course objectives, (b) to provide "real time" feedback about the course, and (c) receive "real time" feedback from the instructor.

By the deadlines provided on the Course Schedule, students will submit to the appropriate D2L dropbox a 1-page, single-spaced reflection on the following prompt:

- In what ways has your participation in this course fostered a collaborative relation to the course material and contributed to the open, discussion-oriented nature of our classroom environment?
- What aspects of your engagement do you plan to retain, and what aspects will you improve (or, for the second Engagement Report, have since improved)?
- Are there ways that the course itself helps foster your engagement, or are there changes that can be made to the course to help you engage better?

Final Research Project (PHIL-4333 only)

Students registered for this course at the upper level are required to submit a final research project. Development of the final project works in stages. Students will consult with the instructor to brainstorm ideas. Once a topic idea is approved, students will outline the project and, if needed, make appointments with the instructor to discuss their outline as it develops. To ensure that revision plays a forefront of this project, all PHIL-4333 projects must incorporate the earlier essay assignment (and the revisions mentioned in the grading comments) in a substantial way. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students recognize the development and continuity of ideas across the philosophical tradition, as well as to see their own philosophical work as developmental and ongoing.

Extra Credit

There are no extra credit assignments in this course. Students are encouraged to meet with the professor to strategize study skills and to clarify course content before the need for extra credit would arise.

Late Work

Late submissions of written work must be arranged ahead of time with the instructor and include reasonable justification. Instances that warrant such rescheduling include documented illness, medical emergency, or official university activity. Otherwise, late submissions will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day late. Missed quizzes will not be re-administered unless due to absences caused by official university activity.

Important Dates

Last day for term schedule changes: August 29, 2024

Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" November 25, 2024

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. However, students in this course are graded on "Engagement," which includes but is not limited to attendance. You must be in attendance to be engaged, but attendance alone does not constitute engagement. "Engagement" describes the *minimum* expectations for good standing in this course: participating in class discussion, active listening, bringing the text with you to class, having done the assigned reading before coming to class, refraining from disruptive and/or disrespectful behavior, etc.

If you come to class, plan to stay for the entire session. Early departures are disruptive and, therefore, will be recorded as an absence. Of course, if you know ahead of time that you will need to leave a class session early, please let the professor know at the start of class (or via email beforehand) and try your best to sit near the exit on that day.

Students do not get a formal attendance grade in this course, but a significant number of absences can affect a student's overall grade. Here is how this course treats absences:

- There is no distinction in this course between “excused” and “unexcused” absences (except for absences for official university business, like athletics). Any student can miss class for any reason without penalty to their grade; they do not need to give an “excuse” for their absence.
- Quizzes and other deadlines missed because of an absence will not be rescheduled. (This policy does not apply to absences caused by official university business, which will be brought to the professor's attention ahead of time.)
- Any student who misses 6 or more class sessions (i.e. three weeks of a Tues/Thurs schedule) will receive a zero for their overall Engagement grade.
- The professor will reach out via email to students who have accumulated a “dangerous” number of absences. Those students will be required to make an appointment with the professor during office hours to collaborate on an action plan to get back on track.
- Any student who misses 8 or more class sessions (i.e. four weeks of a Tues/Thurs schedule) will be dropped from the course.
- The professor will give the student a verbal and/or written warning before being dropped from the class.
- Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences.

Online Computer Requirements

Portions of this course make use of online materials. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ****Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered a reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. ****Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!*** There are many places to access your class! Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world that is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

Instructor Class Policies

Help

Students should discuss any concerns with the instructor as soon as possible. Office hours are available throughout the week and appointments can also be made on a case-by-case basis.

Recordings

Lectures, lecture notes, assignments, etc. remain the intellectual property of the instructor. Students are not permitted to record class or disseminate the content of our class without the prior permission of the instructor. This policy does not apply to a student's own hand-written notes.

Conduct

Actions that diminish the quality of other students' learning will not be tolerated. Insults, slurs, or attacks of any kind will be grounds for permanent removal from the course. Every student is expected to engage with the course material in a responsible and respectful manner. This course requires discussion of a diverse array of philosophical ideas. Students are likely to find some ideas popular and others unpopular. That's normal. Neither the course nor the instructor will defend any one philosophical viewpoint except insofar as it advances the teaching outcomes of the course. Therefore, disagreement is normal in classes of this nature; disagreement is conducive to positive learning outcomes, regardless of whether this disagreement happens between texts themselves, between texts and readers, or between students. Disagreement that turns negative, derogatory, hostile, or otherwise demeaning *in any way* will not be tolerated in class.

Course Texts

Please bring readings to class on the day due, and please bring the hard copy (no e-text, unless it is needed to accommodate a disability registered with the Office of Disability Support Services).

Personal Technology

All personal electronic devices must remain stowed for the duration of the class session. Unless permitted to accommodate a disability officially recognized by and registered with the Office of Disability Support Services, all notes must be taken by pen/pencil on paper rather than a laptop. This policy exists to enhance engagement by mitigating distraction.

Email

Check your MSU Texas email inboxes regularly. This is the only way students will be informed about class cancellations or any changes to the course. All email related to this course must take place between official MSU Texas email addresses. Please allow 24 hours for a reply to all emails.

Use of AI-generated Content in Writing Assignments

Unless explicitly permitted in the individual assignment description, students are not allowed to produce written work that includes content and/or revisions that utilize AI-generated content. Please refer to the Academic Misconduct policy outlined above. Students suspected of using AI-generated content in their writing assignments will be notified by the professor and will be required to meet with the professor within five business days of notification. Failure to meet with the professor after notification will be treated as an admission of guilt.

Course Content Warning and Student Acknowledgement

This syllabus has been distributed to all enrolled students and discussed in class on the first day of the semester. All students who remain enrolled in this course after the first session acknowledge the terms, requirements, content, and expectations outlined in this syllabus.

Course content will include discussions of religious belief from a variety of philosophical angles. It is inevitable that students will be exposed to challenging ideas, regardless of their personal religious or irreligious beliefs. At all times, these ideas will be treated with respect because the ability to engage thoughtfully with challenging ideas is a hallmark of intellectual maturity. Disagreement on matters of religion is inevitable in a course of this sort. Part of the value of this—and any—philosophy course is

the opportunity to develop critical skills at productive disagreement. Students who already know themselves to be unwilling to handle these topics with the intellectual seriousness that this course requires should consider dropping the class.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees, and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. However, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans, and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library. (The first assignment of the semester requires that students read the syllabus in its entirety. Send your professor an email with the name of your [current] favorite candy bar no later than 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, January 22 to prove you have read it.)

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make an application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibit the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state, and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License-to-carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by the MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “Run. Hide. Fight.” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: [“Run. Hide. Fight.”](#)

Mandatory Reporting

Under Title IX, all MSU faculty are “mandatory reporters” of any disclosure from a student of sexual assault, abuse, harassment, dating violence, stalking, or other forms of sexual misconduct. It is the legal responsibility of a “mandatory reporter” to notify the Title IX coordinator if a student reports being the victim of any of the aforementioned abuses. For more information, please visit the [Sexual Misconduct Resource](#).

Grade Appeal Process

Update as needed. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

***Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule

Readings are listed according to their due date. Unless indicated otherwise, all readings come from the required course textbook. Texts marked “(PDF)” can be for free on our D2L course page.

Week 1

- Tuesday 1/21: Course introductions. (Homework: read the entire syllabus before next class)
- Thursday 1/23: The Concept of “God” (in-class lecture: no reading due)

Week 2

- Tuesday 1/28: Anselm, *Proslogion* chs. 2-3 (PDF)
- Thursday 1/30: The Ontological Argument (in-class lecture; no new reading due; Anselm continued)

Week 3

- Tuesday 2/4: Aquinas’s “The Five Ways” (PDF)
- Thursday 2/6: The Cosmological Argument (in-class lecture; no new reading due; Aquinas continued)

Week 4

- Tuesday 2/11: The Teleological Argument (in-class lecture; no reading due; Aquinas continued)
- Thursday 2/13: The Teleological Argument, continued

Week 5

- Tuesday 2/18: Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* part 2
- Thursday 2/20: Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* part 2 continued

Week 6

- Tuesday 2/25: The Fine-Tuning argument for the existence of God (in-class lecture; no reading due)
- Thursday 2/27: Hume, “Of Miracles” (in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* textbook)
- Engagement Report #1 due to the D2L assignments folder no later than 11:59 p.m. on Sunday 3/1

Week 7

- Tuesday 3/4: Flex day for catch-up and/or open discussion
- Thursday 3/6: Optional in-class review session
- Midterm Exam due
 - Take-Home Written Exam is due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. on 3/9
 - Multiple-Choice portion can be taken in the D2L tests folder anytime between 11:00 a.m. on 3/6 and 11:59 p.m. on 3/9
 - Multiple-Choice portion will require that students use LockDown browser and webcam monitoring.

Week 8

- Tuesday 3/11: No class. Spring break.
- Thursday 3/13: No class. Spring break.

Week 9

- Tuesday 3/18: The Epicurean Paradox (in-class lecture; no reading due)
- Thursday 3/20: Leibniz, *Theodicy* (PDF)

Week 10

- Tuesday 3/25: Leibniz, *Theodicy* (PDF)
- Thursday 3/27: Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* parts 10-11

Week 11

- Tuesday 4/1: Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness" (PDF)
- Thursday 4/3: Pascal's Wager (in-class lecture; no reading due)

Week 12

- Tuesday 4/8: Faith without evidence (in-class lecture; no reading due)
- Thursday 4/10: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 22-37
- Engagement Report #2 due to D2L assignments folder by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday 4/13

Week 13

- Tuesday 4/15: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 38-64
- Thursday 4/17: No class. Holiday.

Week 14

- Tuesday 4/22: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 64-77
- Thursday 4/24: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 78-91

Week 15

- Tuesday 4/29: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 91-129
- Thursday 5/1: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 129-132

Week 16

- Tuesday 5/6: Course conclusions and wrap-up
- Thursday 5/8: Optional in-class review session

Exam Week

- Take-Home Final Exam is due to the D2L drobox no later than 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, May 14.
- Multiple-Choice portion can be taken in the D2L tests folder anytime between 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, May 13 and 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, May 15.
- Multiple-Choice portion will require that students use LockDown browser and webcam monitoring.
- ***Important:** The exam slot allocated by the university to our specific class time is 8:00-10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, May 13. Since the final exam for this course is divided between a take-home written exam and an online multiple-choice exam, we will not meet in our classroom during our designated exam slot. However, Students who wish to use this time slot for last-minute help on their writing are welcome to use this period as an extended office hours session.