



PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION PHIL-2333/4333

Department of English, Humanities, and Philosophy
Course Syllabus
Spring 2022

Course Information

Class time: TR 12:30-1:50 p.m.
Class location: 201 Prothro-Yeager Hall
Section number: PHIL-2333/4333, 201

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Tyler M. Williams
Office: 236 Bea Wood Hall
Office hours: MW 1:00-2:30, TR 1:50-2:50
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Course Description (from Catalog)

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. Individual research and evidence of the ability to explain and critically analyze philosophical ideas being studied will be required.

Course Description (for this section)

Within the purview of the above course description, this semester we will focus on the nature of religious faith and consider various subtopics relevant to the question "what does it mean to have faith?" Throughout, we will study how the history of philosophy has defined the boundaries between faith and reason. As a result, we will consider the implications of philosophical arguments about the rationality of belief in God; the rationality of disbelief in God; the problem of evil in a divinely-created universe; the nature of agnosticism; whether theology can be considered a science; the nature of faith as a unique form of religious experience; and psychological and social bases for God's anthropomorphism. While some students might be interested in the relevance of these topics to their own religious lives, the purpose of this class is not to advocate a particular religious or irreligious perspective. Instead, we will be interested in studying how the history of philosophy continues to regard the aforementioned questions as unresolved and thus open to analysis and discussion. Texts for this course will come predominately from the Western philosophical canon. Students interested in Eastern philosophy of religion are encouraged to continue their study by enrolling in PHIL-2213/4213.

Required Texts

- Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. 2nd Edition. Hackett Publishers, 1998.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling & The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton University Press, 2013.
- All other readings will be posted to D2L for students to download, print, and bring to class.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook 2017-18](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Enrollment in *any* college class comprises a binding social contract, which includes a respect for every student's right to learn. Conduct that diminishes the quality of other students' learning will not be tolerated. Every student is expected to engage with the course material in a responsible and respectful manner. Sleeping or chatting in class, coming unprepared, projecting disengagement, texting, doing another course's work—all of these actions *directly* disrespect the material and imply an unwillingness to take seriously the privileges of being able to learn in a college classroom.

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. Additionally, grading will abide by the University's plagiarism policy.

"Plagiarism" includes but is not limited to using the published or unpublished works of another person without recognition, either by paraphrase or direct quotation. The use of materials generated by agencies engaged in "selling" term papers is also plagiarism.

A student who makes use of plagiarized material, or anyone that profits from (or abets) cheating, will be DISMISSED from the course. Cases will also be referred to the Dean of Students for possible dismissal from the university.

Please visit the Office of Student Conduct for more information about guidelines regarding Academic Dishonesty, its prevention, and the procedures for its prosecution.

Grading

Table 1: Final grades for the course will be determined according to the following distribution:

Assignments	Weight
Engagement	20%
Quiz Average	10%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Paper 3/Final Research Paper	30%

Table 2: Grades will be administered on an A-F scale according to the following percentages:

Grade	Value
A	100-89
B	88-79
C	78-69
D	68-59
F	58-0

Quizzes

Routine quizzes will ensure that students do the reading at the pace outlined on the syllabus. Quizzes can only be taken on the day they are assigned. When quiz averages are calculated for the final course grade, the lowest single quiz grade will be dropped. A separate schedule announcing the due dates of each quiz will be provided after the first week of class. Quizzes will be taken online and will comprise a single multiple choice question relevant to major ideas presented in the readings and lectures. Quizzes are designed to be "easy" for any student current with the course content.

Papers

For students registered in PHIL-2333, three short papers are due throughout the semester. Each paper should be roughly 4-5 double spaced pages. These papers will be analytical in nature, pertaining to the texts read for that section of the course, and will not use outside sources. Students registered for PHIL-4333 will substitute a Final Research Paper for the third paper. Final Research Papers will be of the student's own design (in consultation with the professor), should be at least 10 double-spaced pages (including cover page and bibliography page), and will require a 400-word proposal and annotated bibliography. Further details about the Final Research Paper will be provided on a separate assignment page.

Extra Credit

No extra credit will be accepted in this course. Students are therefore encouraged to keep pace with the syllabus and maintain strong engagement grades from the start of the semester to avoid a situation in which extra credit would be desired.

Make Up Work/Tests

Quizzes cannot be made up retroactively. Written work can be submitted late but will accrue a late penalty of 5% per calendar day late, effective the first day the assignment is not submitted in class. Email submissions of late writing assignments are permitted provided that a hard copy of the exact paper is also submitted during the very next class session. If there are discrepancies between the emailed and hard copies, the paper will be assessed according to the hard copy's date of submission.

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. Although in general students are graded on intellectual effort and performance rather than attendance, absences may lower the student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member.

Note that ENGAGEMENT—not attendance—is on the Grade Breakdown (above). This means that just coming to class and physically occupying a classroom seat will not earn course credit. Students are expected to come to class "engaged" as active learners. Since philosophy is an inherently dialogical discipline, active engagement, which includes attendance and participation, is required.

All students are permitted to miss three class sessions for any reason without penalty to their grade. Any student who misses more than three class sessions will have their final grade reduced by 5% per missed session in excess of the free three. A student who misses more than five sessions risks failure of the class.

Extensions, class notes, lecture summaries, make-ups, recaps, etc. will not be available to those who skip a class session (except under special circumstances). Lastly, those who choose to come to class are expected to stay for the entire session. Students who leave early without prior approval will be recorded as absent for the day.

Instructor Class Policies

Students are expected to come to class, come to class on time, and come to class prepared. “Prepared” means having satisfactorily done the work due for the day, bringing the text to class, being ready to discuss the material and/or ask questions, and being attentive to the comments of fellow class members. Course policies will encourage this engagement.

Help — Students should discuss any concerns with the instructor as soon as possible. Many of the readings will be difficult, so *please* ask questions in class for clarification.

Deadlines — Papers will lose one-third of a letter grade per day late. Students are encouraged to speak with the instructor in advance about deadline accommodations.

Technology — Unless expressly permitted by the instructor, any student who makes deliberate use of his/her phone, tablet, or laptop in class will be marked absent for the day. The professor is not responsible for notifying a student if he/she has been marked absent because of personal technology use. Please use pen/pencil to take notes.

Recordings — Lectures, lecture notes, and whiteboard notes remain the intellectual property of the instructor. Students are not permitted to record (photo, video, or audio) the class session without the express consent of the instructor. This policy does not apply to a student’s own handwritten notes.

Readings — Students are required to bring a hard copy of the reading due each day. Many class sessions will be devoted to “close-reading,” so failure to bring the text *to* class is a failure to participate *in* class.

Conduct — Actions that diminish the quality of fellow students’ learning will not be tolerated. Every student is expected to engage with the course material in a responsible and respectful manner. Sleeping or chatting in class, coming unprepared, projecting disengagement, texting, doing another course’s work—all of these actions *directly* demonstrates a refusal to participate seriously in class and will therefore justify counting as “absent” any student who engages in such behavior.

Email — Check emails regularly, since that will be the method by which students are informed about class cancellations or any changes to the course. Please check the syllabus before emailing with a question about the course. If the syllabus does not include the answer to your question, don’t hesitate to email your professor with your question. Please allow at least 24 hours for a reply to emails.

Disability Support Services

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 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 <http://www.mwsu.edu/student-life/disability>.

Grade Appeal Process

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [Undergraduate Catalog](#)

Changes to Syllabus

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. All details of any changes made to the course will be made available to students via email.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Northwestern State University (NSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to NSU 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).

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.

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 Northwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits 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.

Course Schedule

This portion of the syllabus outlines a day-by-day itinerary for the semester. Each day lists the in-class topic to be covered as well as the reading preparation that is due on that class session. Texts marked with "(PDF)" are posted for download on the course's D2L page.

UNIT ONE: PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Week One

Tuesday 1/11: Introduction to the course, major themes, and to one another.

Thursday 1/13: Anselm *Proslogion* ch. 2-3 (PDF)

Week Two

Tuesday 1/18: Avicenna, *The Salvation* bk. 2, ch. 12 (PDF)

Thursday 1/20: Avicenna and Anselm wrap-up, Aquinas preview

Week Three

Tuesday 1/25: Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* “Five Ways” (PDF)

Thursday 1/27: Pascal’s Wager (PDF)

UNIT TWO: PROBLEMS OF EVIL AND CREATION

Week Four

Paper #1 due in D2L dropbox by 11:59 p.m. Monday, 1/31

Tuesday 2/1: Plato, *Euthyphro* (PDF)

Thursday 2/3: Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, Part 2

Week Five

Tuesday 2/8: Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, continued

Thursday 2/10: Hume, “Of Miracles” (in *Dialogues*, pages 107-125)

Week Six

Tuesday 2/15: Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness” (PDF)

Thursday 2/17: The Epicurean Paradox (PDF)

Week Seven

Tuesday 2/22: St. Augustine, *Confessions* bk. 7, chs. 11-13 (PDF)

Thursday 2/24: Leibniz, “Theodicy” (PDF)

Week Eight

Tuesday 3/1: Leibniz, “Theodicy” continued, preview Hume

Thursday 3/3: Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, Parts 10-11

UNIT THREE: WHAT DOES RELIGIOUS FAITH ENTAIL?

Week Nine

Paper #2 due in D2L dropbox by 11:59 p.m. Monday, 3/7

Tuesday 3/8: Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, “The Nature and Domain of Sacred Doctrine” (PDF)

Thursday 3/10: Aquinas continued

Week Ten

Tuesday 3/15: No class. Spring break.

Thursday 3/17: No class. Spring break.

Week Eleven

Monday 3/21: Last day to drop with a "W." Drops after this day will be registered as "F."

Tuesday 3/22: Spinoza, *Ethics* bk.1 "On God" (PDF)

Thursday 3/24: Spinoza continued

Abstracts for Final Research Essay (for 4333 students) due in D2L dropbox by 11:59 p.m. on 3/25

Week Twelve

Tuesday 3/29: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 22-37

Thursday 3/31: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 38-64

Week Thirteen

Tuesday 4/5: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 64-77

Thursday 4/7: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 78-91

Week Fourteen

Tuesday 4/12: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 91-129

Thursday 4/14: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* pp. 129-132

Annotated bibliographies (for 4333 students) due in D2L dropbox by 11:59 p.m. on 4/15

Week Fifteen

Tuesday 4/19: Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (PDF)

Thursday 4/21: Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* ch. 6 (PDF)

Week Sixteen

Tuesday 4/26: Irigaray, "Divine Women" (PDF)

Thursday 4/28: Irigaray continued & course wrap-up

Paper #3 (for 2333 students) or Final Research Paper (for 4333 students) due by 11:59 p.m. in the D2L dropbox on the date assigned to our course on the university's Final Exam Schedule.