

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
Philosophy 185
Winter 2017

Dana Kay Nelkin

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Course Description: We will explore five related and hotly debated topics in the philosophy of religion, and, in doing so, address the following questions:

- (i) What makes something a religion?
- (ii) Is it rational to hold religious beliefs? Should we care about rationality when it comes to religious belief?
- (iii) Could different religions be different paths to the same ultimate reality, or is only one, at most, a “way to God”?
- (iv) What is the relationship between science and religion?
- (v) What is the relationship between morality and religion? Must religious beliefs be true in order for morality to exist?

As we will see, the philosophy of religion leads naturally into just about every other area of philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and the history of philosophy, and into particular central philosophical debates such as the debate over the nature of free will. This means that you will gain insight into many fundamental philosophical issues in this course. At the same time, the subject matter can be difficult. To do well in the course and to benefit from it, you must be willing to work hard and to subject your own views (whatever they may be) to critical evaluation. Evaluating our conception of ourselves and of the world is one of the distinguishing features of philosophy.

Requirements:

- Short reading responses/formulations of questions (150-200 words for each class meeting; 20 out of 27 required) 25%
- 1 midterm 20% (2/8)
- 1 paper (about 2200 words) 25% (Due 2/27)
- 1 take-home final exam (30%) (Due 3/20, 2:30)
- up to 5% extra credit for participation in class group assignments and discussion.

Note: A hard copy of your paper must be turned in, and an electronic copy uploaded to turnitin.com on our TED web site.

Note: Each assignment must be turned in order to receive credit for the course.

Specific course topics and readings

Reading can be found on our TED website in the form of PDFs or links to articles. You can access library materials remotely through the library web site.

1/9: Introduction

I. What Makes Something a Religion?

1/11: What Makes Something a Religion?

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (excerpt)

George Freeman III, *The Misguided Search for the Constitutional Definition of Religion* (excerpt)

1/13: What is Religion?

Brian Leiter, *Religion* (chapter 2 of *Why Tolerate Religion?*)

II. Rationality and Religious Belief

1/16: **Martin Luther King Junior Holiday**

1/18: The Cosmological Argument

Aquinas, *The Five Ways*

1/20: The Cosmological Argument

Richard Taylor, *The Cosmological Argument: A Defense*

1/23: The Cosmological Argument

William Rowe, *An Examination of the Cosmological Argument*

1/25: The Teleological Argument

David Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, excerpt

1/27: The Teleological Argument

Richard Swinburne, *The Argument from Design*

1/30: The Argument from Religious Experience

Selections of Mystical Experiences

C.D. Broad, *The Argument from Religious Experience*

2/1: The Argument from Religious Experience

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

Patricia Churchland, *Brainwise* (excerpt)

2/3: The Argument from Religious Experience

William James, *Mysticism*

Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "The Science of Spirituality" (NPR segment, in class)

2/6: The Ontological Argument
Anselm, *The Ontological Argument*

2/8: **Midterm**

2/10: The Problem of Evil
David Hume, *The Argument from Evil*
John Hick, *Evil and Soul-Making*

2/13: The Problem of Evil
Madden and Hare, *A Critique of Hick's Theodicy*
William Rowe, *The Inductive Argument from Evil against the Existence of God*

2/15: The Problem of Evil
Marilyn Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*

2/17: The Problem of Evil
Laura Ekstrom, *Suffering as Religious Experience*

2/20: **President's Day Holiday**

2/22: Rationality Without Evidence
Blaise Pascal, *The Wager*
Simon Blackburn, *Pascal's Wager: A Critique*

2/24: Rationality without Evidence
W.K. Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief*
William James, *The Will to Believe*

2/27: The Role and Value of Rationality **Paper Due**
Linda Zabzebski, *Intellectual Virtue in Religious Epistemology*

II. Religious Pluralism and Exclusivism

3/1: Pluralism
John Hick, *Religious Pluralism and Ultimate Reality*
Edmund Gettier, *Justified True Belief*

3/3: Exclusivism and Disagreement
Alvin Plantinga, *A Defense of Religious Exclusivism*

3/6: Disagreement
David Christensen, *Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News*

III. Religion and Science

3/8: Religion and Science
Richard Dawkins, *Science Versus Religion*
Stephen Jay Gould, *Overlapping Magisteria*

3/10: Religion and Science
TBA

IV. Religion and Morality

3/13: Religion and Morality
Plato, *Morality and Religion*

3/15: Religion and Morality
George Mavrodes, *Religion and the Queerness of Morality*
Bertrand Russell, *A Free Man's Worship*

3/17: Religion and Morality
David Brink, *The Autonomy of Ethics*

Notes

- Laptops, phones and other electronic devices may not be used in class **except by permission of the instructor.**
- If accommodations are needed for a disability or for religious reasons, please notify me during the first class period or as soon as possible.
- The Academic Honor Code must be observed in this course. Please note that the policies and readings described above are subject to minor change.