

# Philosophy of Western Religion

Summer 2018

## Instructor

Eric Sampson  
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Office: Caldwell 210D  
Office Hours: T, W (9-10am) or by appt.

## Meeting Details

Days: MTWRF  
Time: 11:30am – 1:00pm  
Place: Caldwell 213  
Course: Phil/Reli 134

## Course Description

In this course, we'll consider a range of philosophical questions about western religion and religious belief. Among them are: What are the best arguments that God exists? What are the best arguments that he doesn't? Lots of religions claim to be authenticated by miracles. Can we rationally believe that any of them really happened? Lots of people claim to have had religious experiences. Can we rationally believe that any of these people really did? If there is a God, why does he allow so much suffering? And why doesn't he reveal himself to people who sincerely want to know him? If, however, there is no God, then where did the universe come from? And why does the universe seem fine-tuned to support intelligent life like us (just as we'd expect if God exists and cares for us)? What role (if any) would God play in making our lives meaningful? And given all the disagreement about religion among very smart, well-informed, sincere people, are we really justified in being confident that our own view about religious matters (either theist, atheist, or agnostic) is correct?

## Texts

- [\*The Philosophy of Religion Reader\*](#), (ed. Chad Meister), ISBN: 0415408911
- All other readings are available on Sakai under the "Resources" tab.

## Course Requirements

- |                     |     |                                  |
|---------------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| • Participation     | 10% |                                  |
| • Quizzes           | 15% |                                  |
| • Exam 1 (5 pp.)    | 25% | Due: Saturday, July 7 (11:59pm)  |
| • Exam 2 (in class) | 25% | Date: Friday, July 20 (in class) |
| • Exam 3 (5 pp.)    | 25% | Due: Monday, July 30 (11:59pm)   |

## **Participation**

Participation begins by reading the assigned readings carefully. If no one reads, we have nothing to talk about. Second, you'll have to contribute to class discussion by asking questions or making comments. Some people are shy. I get that. Shy people can either rack up their participation points on the back half of the semester once they become more comfortable with the class setting, or by coming to office hours, or by chatting with me about course material over email or after class. Making lots of comments in class is not the only (or even the best) way to receive a good participation grade. Quality matters too. The best thing to do is strike a nice balance between quality and quantity. Sometimes you'll say stuff that doesn't quite make sense. That's fine. Philosophy is hard, and you're allowed to struggle. It means you're trying. So contribute even if you're not 100% clear about what's going on.

## **Attendance**

Attendance is expected. You can miss three (3) meetings without any notice and without penalty. Each absence beyond those three will result in a 2-point deduction from your participation grade.

## **Grading Scale**

A: 94 – 100    A-: 90 – 93    B+: 87 – 89    B: 84 – 86    B-: 80 – 83    C+: 77 – 79  
C: 74 – 76    C-: 70 – 73    D+: 67 – 69    D: 64 – 66    D-: 60 – 63    F: < 60

## **Office Hours & Accessibility**

I'm happy to meet with you at any time to discuss assignments or simply to talk more about the topics of the class. Come to my office hours, or if those times don't work, email me to set up an appointment.

I'm committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If I can do anything to help make the class more accessible to you, let me know, or (if you would prefer) have the Accessibility Office contact me on your behalf.

## **Plagiarism**

Don't plagiarize. According to UNC, plagiarism is "deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise." If you quote something, you need to put it in quotes and cite it using whichever citation convention you like. If you use someone's ideas, you must cite them and put the idea in your own words. If you break these rules, deliberately or not, you'll go to Honor Court. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, talk to me.

## Tentative Course Schedule

Mon.	June 25	Nature of God, Theism, Atheism, Agnosticism (no reading)
Tues.	June 26	Aquinas, "The Classical Cosmological Argument" (pp. 187-95)
Wed.	June 27	Craig, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument" (pp. 197-212)
Thu.	June 28	Collins, "A Recent Fine-Tuning Argument" (pp. 267-75)
Fri.	June 29	Anselm, "The Classical Ontological Argument" (pp. 291-99)
Mon.	July 2	Copan, "The Moral Argument" (pp. 315-331)
Tues.	July 3	Freud & Geivett, "Religious Experience" (pp. 502-519)
Wed.	July 4	No Class for Independence Day
Thu.	July 5	Pascal, "The Wager" (pp. 389-93)
Fri.	July 6	Rowe, "The Problem of Evil" (pp. 523-234)
Mon.	July 9	Hick, "A Soul-Making Theodicy" (pp. 537-48)
Tues.	July 10	Adams, "Horrendous Evils" (pp. 564-73)
Wed.	July 11	McBrayer, "Skeptical Theism" (on Sakai)
Thu.	July 12	King, "Religious Diversity and its Challenges" (on Sakai)
Fri.	July 13	King, "Religious Diversity and its Challenges" (on Sakai)
Mon.	July 16	Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness", Part 1 & 2 (on Sakai)
Tues.	July 17	Hume, "The Unreasonability of Belief in Miracles" (pp. 397-406)
Wed.	July 18	Walls, "Heaven and Hell" (on Sakai)
Thu.	July 19	Q&A with a Theist and an Atheist (no reading)
Fri.	July 20	In Class Exam
Mon.	July 23	Smith, "Reflection on Petitionary Prayer" (on Sakai)
Tues.	July 24	Craig, "The Absurdity of Life without God" (on Sakai)
Wed.	July 25	Wielenberg, "God and the Meaning of Life" (on Sakai)
Thu.	July 26	Wrapping it All Up (no reading)