

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

PHIL 5300

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New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Seminary Mission Statement

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Course Description

A philosophical examination of the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism. Lectures and readings address classical and contemporary perspectives on the relationship of faith and reason, arguments for the existence of God, religious experience, the nature and persistence of evil, miracles, death and immortality, the nature of religious language, and issues related to postmodernism, pluralism, and the New Age worldview. The course constitutes a call to intellectual reflection and accountability in relation to issues of ultimate concern to Christian faith.

Core Value Focus

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has five core values: Doctrinal Integrity, Spiritual Vitality, Mission Focus, Characteristic Excellence, and Servant Leadership. These values shape both the context and manner in which all curricula are taught, with “doctrinal integrity” and “mission focus” especially highlighted in this course. The core value focus for the 2016-17 academic year is *Characteristic Excellence*.

As part of the larger Seminary goal of *equipping effective leaders of healthy churches*, the Seminary core value of *Characteristic Excellence*, and the key competency in the Seminary curriculum of being able to understand and interpret the *Christian theological heritage*, the objectives of this course are for the successful student to be better prepared to minister to persons with doubts about the Christian faith by:

- mastering the basic vocabulary of philosophy.
- improving the student’s ability to express his/her thoughts clearly, concisely, and logically.
- gaining knowledgeable acquaintance with the major philosophical movements and thinkers.
- thinking through the student’s own presuppositions to achieve a more cohesive Christian worldview.
- increasing the student’s ability to defend the faith once delivered to the saints.

- improving the student's skill in witnessing effectively to persons from other world religions and other non-Christian perspectives.
- gaining greater confidence in the reasonableness of his/her own faith.

Course Objectives

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- gaining greater confidence in the reasonableness of his/her own faith.

Student Learning Outcomes

In order to think rationally as a Christian, the student, by the end of the course, should:

1. Be able to apply his/her knowledge and comprehension of the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism.
2. Value the following concepts:
 - ◆ Rational reflection on the issues of ultimate concern and religious significance.
 - ◆ Intellectual accountability in relation to issues of ultimate concern to Christian faith.
 - ◆ Convincing presentations of the Christian faith.
3. Be able to:
 - ◆ Analyze objections to the Christian faith for logical structure or lack thereof and to grasp the presuppositions that lie beneath such arguments.
 - ◆ Present valid counterarguments that are coherent, intelligible, cogent, plausible, and/or compelling as best fits the context.

Texts

Davies, Brian. *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. This text will serve as a reference for your worksheets.

Lemke, Steve. *A User-Friendly Guide to Philosophy of Religion*. New Orleans: NOBTS, 1998. This text will essentially be your class notes. It is available online at the Blackboard site.

Nash, Ronald. *Faith and Reason*. Grand Rapids: Academic, 1988.

Class Policies

Late Work will be penalized. No assignment will be accepted that is over two weeks late, and all late work will be assessed a proportional penalty (two points per office day).

Participation in Class Discussions is a crucial element in a philosophy course. Each student has a positive contribution to make to the class, and is expected to participate meaningfully in both the regular class meetings and the online discussions. We will be dealing with some difficult and controversial issues, however, and language that is disrespectful of other class members or the instructor is unacceptable.

Extra Credit can be given if a student completes the extra credit activity. 5 points will be added to your final grade.

The Class Web Site is an important supplement for the class meetings. Sign up by following these steps:

1. Open your web browser to the seminary home page at <http://www.nobts.edu>
2. Click on the **Blackboard** link in the upper right corner. **(If you already have a Blackboard account, log in and skip to step 6. You need only one Blackboard account.)**
3. When the new page opens, choose the **Create Account** button on the left.
4. Enter in your information. (Note: Fields with a red asterisk are required fields). When finished entering your information, click **Submit**.
5. When the next page loads, confirming your registration, click **OK**.
6. Now, your personal NOBTS—Blackboard home page should appear. To enroll in a class, click on the **Courses** tab at the top of the page.
7. Under the **Course Catalog** section, choose the **Graduate** category.
8. You will see all courses for which you can register. Scroll down the page and choose to register for **PHIL5300** by clicking on the **Enroll** button beside the course's name. Be sure to look for the correct course under the instructor's name.
9. Enter the access code provided by the Professor. The code is **Brooksphilo**. (Note: The access code is case sensitive).
10. Click **OK** when the confirmation page appears.

Class Assignments

Class Participation-Every person is expected to participate fully in the class discussion. Philosophy is the type of area of study that lends itself well to participation by dialogue. Each student is expected to read the assignments before class.

Worksheets- Each student is expected to complete the three worksheets assigned. These worksheets are designed to allow the student to reflect on both philosophical, theological, and practical reflection on topics. Each worksheet is to be at least 15 pages long, double-spaced, Times New

Roman 12 point font. Page numbers to the reference texts are given.

Class quizzes- Pop quizzes may be given over any terms found in the *User Friendly Guide to Philosophy*. The quizzes may the terms found in bold face print, or prominent figures mentioned in the text. Normally the quizzes will consist of 5 to 10 questions and will be multiple choice or matching.

Extra Credit- Students have three options for extra credit for the class:

- 1) The Truman Show reflection paper. See attached questions.
- 2) Book review-Students may review a book that has been approved by the professor. The book review must be at least 5 pages long, double spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font.
- 3) Research paper-Students may write a mini-research paper on a given philosophical topic approved by the professor. The paper must be at least 7 pages long, in Turabian format, double-spaced, and in Times New Roman 12 point font.

Grading

Class participation	10%
Worksheet (3)	80%
Class quizzes	10%
Total	100%

The grading scale is given in the current graduate catalog of the seminary.

IMPORTANT NOTICES:

1. All students are required to silence all noise-producing equipment (cell phones, pagers, etc.) before the class begins. The first incident will result in a warning and each succeeding occurrence will result in the student's final grade average being reduced by one point. The use of phones, etc. during class is rude and prohibited. The professor reserves the right to answer the student's phone in class on behalf of the student.
2. Inappropriate dress will not be tolerated in this class. Students who violate the policy will be barred from class, counted absent, and will not be able to make up work missed that class.
3. Cheating: Any kind of cheating on a quiz or exam is prohibited, along with plagiarism in research. As a violation of the Academic Integrity code to which you have agreed, cheating will be taken seriously. Each incident is handled in a case by case manner. However, penalties may include a zero on the assignment or failure of the course, and could lead to suspension or dismissal from the seminary.

4. Electronic Device Usage: Students are prohibited from using any electronic device which distracts them from full participation in class. Computers and PDAs are allowed for students to take notes. Examples of activities prohibited during class on electronic devices: internet usage, text messaging, games, etc. If a student is found using such a device, one point will be deducted from their final grade.

Class Schedule

UNIT 1: LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR MINDS: DEVELOPING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW		
Date	Class Discussion Topic	Assignment
8/22	Introduction and syllabus	
8/29	Introduction to Philosophy and Apologetics	SWL 1-12; FR 11-18 Review these sections of the <i>User-Friendly Guide</i> and <i>FR</i>
9/5	The Relation of the Church to the World	SWL 13-23
9/12	Idealism, Realism, and Naturalism	SWL 25-29; FR 21-34
9/19	Pragmatism and Existentialism	SWL 30-45, 111-121

UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING GOD: EVIDENCE FOR BELIEF IN THE ONE TRUE GOD		
Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
9/26	Worksheet 1 Due	
9/26	Faith and Reason, and Epistemology A Primer in Logic	SWL 61-66; FR 51-92 SWL 67-71; FR 106-110

10/3	Arguments for the Existence of God Arguments against Belief in God;	SWL 73-80; FR 105-173
10/10	The Nature and Attributes of God; Western Religious Views of God	SWL 46-50, 84-99, FR 35-50
10/17	Fall Break	

**UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING GOD’S CREATION:
ANSWERING CHALLENGES TO THE FAITH**

Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
10/24	Worksheet 2 due	
10/24	Eastern Religious Views of God; Exclusivism and Pluralism	SWL 100-121
10/31	Exclusivism and Pluralism	SWL 100-121
11/7	The History of Cosmology, The Relation of Faith and Science	SWL 124-135
11/14	Creation and Evolution	SWL 143-148
11/21	Fall Break	
11/28	Miracles	SWL 136-142, 162-163; FR 225-272
12/5	Worksheet 3 due	
12/5	The Problem of Evil	SWL 215-229; FR 177-221, 275-285

Worksheet 1: Philosophy and Religious Belief/God-Talk

Research Assignment—Read pages 25-170 in Davies and parts 1,2, and 3 of Nash

1. How does Thomas Aquinas understand the relationship between faith and reason? Do you agree with him that certain doctrines, such as the Trinity, are not subject to rational verification? Why or why not? Do you agree with Aquinas that the existence of God can be known by reason? Do you agree with him that philosophers have proven God's existence to be certain? Why or why not?
2. Compare and contrast the positions of Plantinga (1.4) and Kretzmann (1.5). What does Plantinga mean when he says that belief in God is properly basic? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Plantinga's position? Why?
3. Briefly state Ayer's reasons for considering God-talk as meaningless. Does Swinburne sufficiently answer his objections? How do you propose to talk meaningfully about God?

Bible Investigation

1. Identify three biblical passages that teach something about faith. State three things that the Bible teaches about faith. What is the significance of the biblical teaching about faith for understanding the relationship between faith and reason? Why?
2. Identify two biblical passages that speak, either explicitly or implicitly, of reason or the use of one's mind. How do you relate these passages to those that speak of faith? What is the significance of the biblical teaching about reason/mind for understanding the relationship between faith and reason? Why?

Integration & Application

1. How does your understanding of the authority and truthfulness of the Bible affect your approach to philosophy of religion? How does your understanding of the authority and truthfulness of the Bible affect how you relate faith to reason?
2. Can you use general revelation as a starting point to witness to an unbeliever? If so, describe how you would do this? If not, why not?
3. A friend of yours comes to you and tells you that she is doubting God, her salvation, or questioning whether God even exists, and perhaps even considering leaving the faith. She tells you that she had an experience in worship that she took as confirmation that she was to quit her job because God was going to give her the job she had applied for earlier that month. She learned a week ago that someone else had been hired for the job she desired. On top of that she learned yesterday that her old job had already been filled. What do you tell her?

Worksheet 2 (Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*): The Question of God/The Problem of Evil

Research Assignment—Read pages 179-388, 571-629 of Davies and part 3 and 4 of Nash

1. Which of the cosmological arguments that you read (Anselm, Thomas, Duns Scotus, Leibniz, McCabe) seemed most convincing to you? Why? Which of the criticisms of the cosmological argument(s) seemed the most serious to you? Why? Even if one agrees that individual things in the universe need to be causally accounted for, why should one assume that the same is true of the universe as a whole?
2. Briefly summarize (and cite) the three most significant objections of Hume and Kant to design arguments. How do you respond to these objections? Whose position on design do you prefer, Swinburne's or Hambourger's? Why?
3. Summarize the positions of Swinburne and McCabe with respect to God and evil. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each author's position? Which do you prefer? Why? Can they be used together as one defense or are they mutually exclusive positions?

Bible Investigation

1. List two passages in Scripture that support the idea of a freewill defense or theodicy in the face of evil and explain how they do this.
2. List two passages in Scripture that support the idea of a soul-building theodicy in the face of evil and explain how they do this.
3. List two passages in Scripture that support the idea of an eschatological theodicy in the face of evil and explain how they do this.

Integration & Application

1. A member of your church comes to you one Sunday morning visibly shaken. She tells you that her husband's sister, found her way onto the website of Dr. Jack Kevorkian. After sharing with him some of her medical history, she flew to Detroit, where he assisted in her suicide. The family learned of this earlier this morning via a telephone call from a Detroit police officer. A few days later, it is determined that the sister did not suffer from MS, as she had told everyone for years, but was rather a hypochondriac who suffered from frequent bouts of depression. Later the husband (brother) comes to you to ask how God could allow this to happen. What do you tell him?
2. A friend of yours who professes to be an agnostic asks you why you believe in God. You tell him you believe in God because the world could not exist apart from him—he caused everything that exists. He then asks you, "So, if everything needs a cause, what caused God?" How do you answer him?
- 3.

Worksheet 3 (Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*): Divine Attributes/Miracles/Life After Death

Research Assignment—Read pages 397-567, 633-733 of Davies and part 5 of Nash

1. What are Wolterstorff's arguments for God being everlasting rather than eternal? How do the positions of Stump and Kretzmann, as well as Helm's compare to Wolterstorff's? Which of the three do you personally find the most convincing? Why?
2. Compare and contrast Swinburne and Hume on miracles? How do you think a miracle should be defined? Why? What do you consider the most significant objection to miracles, and how do you deal with it?
3. What are the arguments of Davis, Russell, and Geach for or against life after death? Who, of the three, do you find to be the most insightful/compelling on this issue? Why? What do you see as the crucial issue/question in regard to this question? How do you address this issue/question?

Bible Investigation

1. List two passages in Scripture that speak of God's omnipotence and explain how they do this. List two passages in Scripture that express the idea that God is in some sense limited (there are some things God cannot do), and explain how they do this. How do you harmonize them, or do you? If you do not seek to harmonize them, why don't you?
2. List two passages in Scripture that seem to imply an intermediate state (i.e., the conscious continued existence of a person after death and before the general resurrection of the dead), and explain how they do this. List two passages that seem to reject such a position and point instead to resurrection (or recreation) of a person after a period of non-existence, or at the very least non-consciousness, and explain how they do this. What do you think happens to believers after they die and before the return of Christ? Why?

Integration & Application

1. You are taking a science class at a local community college. The instructor makes the comment that science is concerned with facts and religion with faith. He goes on to say that science has disproved miracles, and thus religious people believe impossible things on the basis of faith. How do you answer him on these points?
2. A friend of yours tells you that it doesn't matter whether or not the biblical miracles actually occurred. The issue is whether or not you have faith. How do you answer her?
3. Everyday we read or hear of someone proposing to clone a human being. Assuming that such a thing is possible, how do you understand the relationship of the mind or soul to the brain or body? Does it make sense to think of something immaterial (mind/soul) relating to something material (brain/body)? If so, why? If not, why not?

The Truman Show Discussion Questions

Write down any statements that you are struck by or that you think might be significant as you watch the movie. Listen closely. Pay attention to names.

Answer the questions below as you watch the movie

1. What *single* philosophical system do you think is most represented in the movie? Why?

Idealism?

Realism?

Naturalism/Materialism?

Pragmatism?

Existentialism?

2. Why does Truman accept his world?

3. What does the movie say about truth and where or how it is found?

4. What do you think this movie says about God? Why? What does this movie say about God's knowledge and power?

5. What do you think this movie says about human beings? Why?

6. What does it say about our culture? Why?

Tips for Research Papers/ Philosophy of Religion

Quotations

1. Always cite the sources you quote. If you don't, you're committing plagiarism.
2. Don't overuse block quotations. They can be helpful, but when you use too many, it indicates that you really haven't processed the material for yourself.
3. Vary the way in which you introduce your quotations—it just makes your writing more interesting.
4. The Davies/Stewart books can be cited parenthetically. If you cite an outside source, you must cite them with footnotes according to Turabian formatting procedures.

Form & Style (in no particular order of importance)

1. Proofread.
2. Be consistent in your formatting. Sometimes, in this type of paper, you will need to use your judgment about a form/style issue that Turabian just doesn't address. Consistency covers a multitude of sins. Even if your formatting isn't strictly Turabian-proof, make sure you don't mix and match different ways of doing the same thing at different points in your paper.
3. Don't begin sentences with "However." The word "however," however, *can* and *should* be used as a postpositive (like the Greek word *gar*). Lots of people use this word incorrectly (including very smart, often-published writers). But that doesn't mean we have to as well.
4. Don't insult the philosopher/theologian about whom you're writing. If you disagree with him or her—fine. Make a good (biblical and logical) case for your disagreement.
5. Vary your sentence structure—this is *one* of the keys to interesting writing.
6. Always make sure your subjects and verbs agree in number. A singular subject cannot be followed by a plural verb (e.g., "*Plantinga think* that a belief in God...")
7. Always make sure your nouns and pronouns agree in number. A singular noun cannot be referred to pronominally with a plural pronoun (E.g., God gave *mankind* [sg.] *their* [pl.] ability to reason..."; "*One* [sg.] must make use of both *their* [pl.] reason and faith...")
8. Proofread.
9. Avoid one- and two-sentence paragraphs.
10. *Always* indent the first line of a new paragraph.
11. If a sentence does not contain both a noun and a verb, it is a fragment. While fragments are standard fare in fiction, informal essays, and the like, they are taboo in academic writing.
12. If a sentence has *two or more* complete sentences within it (i.e., a subject + verb expressing a complete thought), with no conjunction, and no good reason for the two sentences to be linked together, it is a run-on. These are taboo no matter what kind of writing you're doing. Avoid them like the plague.
13. Two fragments do not equal a sentence.
14. Proofread.
15. Avoid clichés in your writing.
16. If you feel like you need to place an expression in quotation marks (e.g., "Margaret showed a marked tendency to **fly off the handle** in these crises"), just avoid the expression altogether. If you think you need quotation marks, chances are it's a weak clichéd expression anyway—you don't want it cluttering up your paper. If you can bring yourself to use the expression *without* quotation marks, by all means, use it—just be discriminating. (See Mary-Claire van Leunen's *A Handbook for Scholars*, Revised Edition [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 86.)
17. Avoid undue metaphors in your papers. While metaphors are wonderfully useful when used sparingly, too many of them can make your writing seem a bit silly—even when the content is otherwise very good. You don't want that.
18. Use Turabian for any questionable formatting procedures. She ain't much, but she's all we've got.
19. Make sure you have commas wherever you need them.
20. Make sure you don't have commas where you don't need them.
21. Proofread.
22. Feel free to come by the office and ask any questions you might have about the Philosophy of Religion papers you're working on. Admittedly, not everyone in the world is a stickler for good grammar; but, as Christians (in

- a *Masters*-level program), we should strive for excellence to the glory of God in *all* we do—even (or especially) in the technical aspects of our coursework here at NOBTS.
23. If you have trouble with style issues, buy a style manual. Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* is a classic—compact, cheap and readily available. Any mid- to large-sized bookstore should stock it. So buy it and use it. I certainly could not get by without one. (The aforementioned van Leunen book is also very good.)
 24. Never list your answers. These are essay worksheets. Your answers have to be in the essay form.
 25. It is okay not to understand everything you read (I certainly can't claim to understand the intricacies of Plantinga's project...), but in an academic paper you should never give up and write "I didn't understand this...." The professor is a valuable resource. If you have questions about the material, you may certainly ask him during class or (I'm sure) he'd be happy to answer a few questions during office hours from time to time. If you are having trouble understanding something, keep your explanations simple and rely on the text. You will never be docked undue points for writing about complex issues in a simple manner (indeed, this is a *virtue*), but you *will* be docked for writing "this doesn't make sense"; or, "I didn't understand this."
 26. You don't need to pepper your papers with phrases like "In my opinion," "I believe," "I think," etc. All those notions are inherent in the fact that it is *your* paper. If what you're writing is the opinion of one of the authors, you will indicate it by (1) direct quotation, (2) a footnote citation, or (3) by attributing it to him or her in your text (e.g., "Plantinga believes that..."). Otherwise, it is assumed that you are expressing your own opinion/understanding about the material.
 27. Make sure your cover page looks like the standard NOBTS cover page. (See below.) You will be docked points for bizarre title pages (or the lack thereof) even on the first paper. To avoid losing points on these or other papers save the example below in your computer as "Title Page Template." Whenever you need a title page, just open up the "Title Page Template" file, copy it, and drop it into the paper you're working on. It's *too* easy.

Rough Grading Scale

A Paper: Demonstrates a *superior* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, presents very good, clear, and thoughtful argument.

B Paper: Demonstrates a *good* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, presents an argument that exhibits good reasoning, with minimal grammatical and/or form and style problems.

C Paper: Demonstrates an adequate though perhaps limited understanding of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, mixed with a significant number of incorrect claims, presents weak arguments, contains significant grammatical or structural problems.

D Paper: Demonstrates significant misunderstandings of factual matters, uses poor logic or fallacious reasoning (if any) to argue points (e.g., merely makes a series of unconnected assertions), fails significantly with respect to technical specifications.

F Paper: no paper submitted, a paper that commits plagiarism, or a paper that presents no argumentation.

Note: *If you're not altogether pleased with your grade on the first paper, don't worry. The first is worth less than the last two. Grammar and formatting, however, will count a bit more on subsequent papers. And papers will be graded in a stricter fashion according to the above rough guide.*

TITLE

A Work Sheet

Submitted to Drs. Page and Littlefield

of the

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

Philosophy of Religion: PHIL5300

in the Division of Theological and Historical Studies

Your Name Here

Your Degree, Your School, Your Year of Graduation

Month Day, Year