

Introduction to Philosophy of Religion PHIL5300
Online
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
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Summer 2016

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.

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.

Class Requirements and Policies

Late Work will NOT be accepted. Ensure you have enough time to complete the assignments based upon the schedule in the syllabus. If you know you will not be able to turn in an assignment for a certain date, you may work ahead and turn in that assignment early. Manage your time wisely .

Due Dates for all assignments. All assignments must be submitted by the end of each unit. A unit runs from Monday to Sunday of each week of the semester. Therefore, all work for a particular unit (quizzes, worksheets, etc.) must be submitted by Sunday midnight of each week.

Philosophy of Religion Worksheets. Students will complete 3 worksheets of not less than 15 nor more than 20 pages in length (1 inch margins, 12 Times New Roman or comparable font) over assigned questions related to course material. Students may cite other sources where appropriate. Citations from the primary sources (Melville Stewart or Brian Davies or Ed. L. Miller) are to be parenthetical, while other sources are to be documented in footnotes according to Turabian.

Here is a rough guide to paper grades.

A Paper: Demonstrates a *superior* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, and presents very good, clear, and thoughtful arguments, with very few, if any, significant grammatical and/or form and style problems.

B Paper: Demonstrates a *good* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, presents an argument that exhibits good reasoning, with minimal significant 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.

Monographs. Students are required to read one of the optional texts for the class during the semester. Students will submit a reading report when they turn in the final worksheet.

Quizzes will be given over the reading in the primary text. Three quizzes will be given during the term of the course. Quizzes will primarily cover vocabulary and concepts from the chapters assigned.

Reading Inventories listing all required and optional reading done for the course will be due at the final worksheet date. Failure to read all assigned readings will result in a decrease in the final score for the course.

Grades will be assigned on the basis of the NOBTS grading scale.

The final grade will be determined accordingly:

Quiz Average	15%
Discussion Posts	10%
First Worksheet	20%
Second Worksheet	20%
<u>Final Worksheet</u>	<u>35%</u>
	100%

Extra Credit may be earned in one of four ways. All extra credit will be added to the final grade.

(1) Additional Reading. Extra credit may be earned for significant reading over and above the class assignments within the field. Consideration will be given not only to the amount but also to the quality of material read. No extra credit will be given if all the assigned readings have not been read.

(2) Book Reviews may also be done for extra credit. The review must be of a book listed by the instructor for reading reviews unless the instructor has approved another book. Reviews may be written over the optional texts. The review should include: (1) biographical data concerning the author; (2) an identification of the major elements of content; (3) an assessment of the author's aim or purpose; (4) an evaluation of the degree of its fulfillment; and (5) a critical evaluation of the book which includes some documented research on the general topic. Students should cite the work of others in the critique section. Guidelines for research papers are given in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th edition. A thorough review should be in the neighborhood of 8-12 pages.

(3) *The Truman Show*. Viewing and reflecting on the movie “The Truman Show” in an 8-12 page paper.

(4) *Research Paper*. Students may write a research paper over a topic agreed upon by the student and the professor.

The maximum amount that a student may receive for any single activity is 2 points. Students will not be given credit for more than 3 extra credit activities.

Texts

Required

William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003.

Optional

Budziszewski, J. *What We Can't Not Know*. Dallas: Spence, 2003.

Colson, Charles and Nancy Pearcey. *Developing a Christian Worldview of the Problem of Evil*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2001.

Geivett, Douglas and Gary R. Habermas. *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997.

Erickson, Millard J. *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001.

McGrath, Alister. *Science and Religion: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999.

Naugle, David K. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Quinn, Philip L. and Charles Taliaferro. *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997.

Stiver, Dan R. *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

Tiessen, Terrance. *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000.

Recommended (One or the other—not both—is required for worksheets.)

Davies, Brian. *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Stewart, Melville. *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology of Contemporary Views*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 1996.

**UNIT 1: KNOWING AND DEFENDING GOD:
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND APOLOGETICS;
LOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR BELIEF IN GOD**

Unit	TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT
1	Introduction to the Course, What Is Philosophy of Religion?	Ch 1
2	Logic and Critical Thinking	Ch 2
3	Metaphysics-What is reality?	QUIZ 1 (CH 1,2,8) Ch 8
4	Ontology-What is being?	Ch 9
5	How Do We Know That We Know What We Think We Know?; Representative Approaches to Epistemology	Ch 7
6	The Value and Nature of Arguments for God's Existence; Arguments for God's Existence	1st WORKSHEET Due Ch 23
7	Arguments for God's Existence	Ch 24
8	Justification of Beliefs	QUIZ 2 (CH 23, 24,5) Ch 5
9	The Problem of Evil	Ch 27

**UNIT 2: OBJECTIONS TO THEISM:
EVIL AND SUFFERING, EVOLUTION, DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, MIRACLES, THE PERSON AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS**

Unit	TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT
10	Attributes of God	Ch 25-26
11	Creation, Providence, and Miracles	2nd WORKSHEET DUE Ch 28
12	The Person of Christ	Ch 30

**UNIT 3: CONTINUING & CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS:
HISTORY, LANGUAGE, POSTMODERNISM, NEW AGE WORLDVIEW,
ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ANAFTERLIFE**

13	Relativism/Postmodernism	Ch 6 QUIZ 3 (CH 25,26,28,30,6)
14	Pluralism/Theology of Religions	Ch 31
15	The Mind-Body Problem and Life after Death	LAST WORKSHEET DUE Ch 11, 12, 14

Worksheet 1 (Melville Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology of Contemporary Views*): Faith and Reason/Religious Knowledge

Research Assignment—Read pages 17-190

1. **Explain Pannenberg’s position on faith and reason. Do you agree with him? Why do you hold the position you do on faith and reason?**
2. Explain the difference between Adams and Piety regarding Kierkegaard. Which of the two positions do you prefer? Why?
3. Why is the position that Plantinga and Wolterstorff hold called “Reformed Epistemology?”
4. What is a properly basic belief? Do you agree that belief in God is properly basic? Why or why not? Do you accept Plantinga’s rejection of strong foundationalism? Why or why not?

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 1 (Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*):
Philosophy and Religious Belief/God-Talk**

Research Assignment—Read pages 25-170 in Davies

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

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Worksheet 2 (Melville Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology of Contemporary Views*): The Question of God/The Problem of Evil

Research Assignment—Read pages 195-202, 217-455

5. **Summarize William Rowe’s evaluation of the cosmological argument. Do you agree with his position on PSR? Why or why not? If Rowe is right, what is the significance of his position on PSR?**
6. What qualifies as a theistic proof for Stephen Davis? What respective strengths and weaknesses does Davis see in the concept of theistic proofs? What do you think with regard to the value of theistic proofs? Why?
7. Compare and contrast Mackie and Yandell on the problem of evil. Do you agree with Yandell that theists must be committed to some version of the “greater good defense?” Why or why not?

Bible Investigation

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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

4. 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?
5. 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?

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

4. **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?**
5. 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?
6. 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?

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Worksheet 3 (Melville Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology of Contemporary Views*): Divine Attributes/Miracles/Life After Death

Research Assignment—Read pages 469-709

8. **Peter Geach discusses four views of omnipotence. Briefly state each view and discuss how the different views differ from one another. How does Geach distinguish between omnipotence and almightiness? How do you personally resolve the “paradox of power” (i.e., the “paradox of the stone”)?**
9. Explain Richard Purtill’s position on miracles with regard to what a miracle is (definition), the two stages of miracles, and limiting criteria. Do you agree with him concerning each of these issues? If not, why not? If so, then why do you think many others do not?
10. How does Reichenbach distinguish between immortality and life after death? Do you think that immortality is logical? If so, why? If not, why not?

Bible Investigation

6. 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?
7. 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

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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? In light of your position on the mind/body problem, how do you deal with the issue of cloning?

**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

7. **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?**
8. 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?
9. 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?

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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?
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Bibliography

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