

PHIL5300

Philosophy of Religion

Spring 2015
HSC 295
TR 6:00-8:50 pm

“Love the Lord your God . . . with all of your mind.”
Matthew 22:37

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The Mission of the Seminary

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 2014–2015 academic year is spiritual vitality.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

1. Comprehend and state coherently the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism.
2. Apply their knowledge and comprehension of the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism to their own lives.
3. Value the following concepts:
 - Intellectual accountability in relation to issues of ultimate concern to Christian faith.
 - Coherent and comprehensive presentations of the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism.
 - Convincing presentations of the Christian faith.

Biblical Authority

This course operates under the assumption that the Bible is the inspired, totally true and trustworthy Word of God. While history, tradition, and reason play no small role in the theological task, the Bible holds ultimate authority in Christian doctrine and practice. *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) provides the structure of this course's content.

Primary Texts

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

Ganssle, Gregory. *Thinking about God: First Steps in Philosophy*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004.

Review Monographs

Adler, Mortimer J. *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth*. NC: Touchstone, 1990.

Erickson, Millard J. *Truth or Consequences? The Promises and Perils of Postmodernism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003.

Lennox, John C. *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002.

McGrath, Alister E. *Why God Won't Go Away: Is the New Atheism Running on Empty?* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011.

Peterson, Michael L. *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*. New York: Westview, 1998.

Sire, James. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004.

Smith, James K. A. *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Recommended Texts

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7th ed. Rev. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (10%)

Students are expected to participate in classroom discussion and to read the required materials prior to class attendance. *Students will be required to hand in a reading report at the end of the semester.*

2. Lecture & Reading Quizzes (15%)

Each week class will **begin** with a reading quiz based on lecture notes and the readings from Ganssle that week. Quizzes will consist of a variety of questions, including true/false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank. At least one quiz will be dropped, *but NO make-up quizzes will be given.*

3. Anthology Assignments (40%) **See Schedule Below**

Students are assigned with answering a series of questions based on the readings from Brian Davies's *Philosophy of Religion* anthology text. For each assignment, the student will read selections from the anthology and answer questions based on the reading material. **Assignments** must be between 400-1200 words in length. Cite the Davies text **parenthetically** and use footnotes for any *external* sources that you may use.

Students are required to submit their anthology assignments by Saturday at midnight on the days they are due. **NO LATE ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENTS** will be accepted.

- **A-assignments (93-100)** demonstrate 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-assignments (85-92)** demonstrate 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-assignments (77-84)** demonstrate 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-assignments (70-76)** demonstrate 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-assignments (0-69)** result from a failure to submit a paper, a paper that commits plagiarism, or a paper that presents no argumentation.

4. Critical Book Review (20%) Due April 4

Students must write one (1) critical book review of from the pre-approved list of **optional review texts**. The review should include (1) a bibliography entry, (2) a brief biographical data about the author(s) (e.g., his or her position, degrees, research interests, and books), (3) an assessment of the main purpose and/or thesis of the book, (4) a concise summary of the book's contents, (5) a thorough critical analysis of the book, and (6) a conclusion with a recommendation or dismissal. The review should be between **2000-4000 words** and should conform to **Turabian**. Because book reviews are primarily about one source, use parenthetical citations for the primary text and footnotes only for external sources.

A few questions to consider while reading these texts: What is the main purpose or thesis of this book? To whom is this book written? Did the author(s) fulfill his or her purpose? What are some of the author's working assumptions (e.g., his or her denominational background, field of research, or view of Scripture)? Does the author provide strong biblical, philosophical, and historical support for his or her positions? Are there any points of contact between this book/writer and other texts read during the course of the semester? How might the content of this book affect ministry in the local church or ministry within your particular calling? Are there any ideas that changed your particular way of thinking on the subject matter at hand? Would you recommend this book to someone else?

- **A papers (93-100)** clearly state the book's thesis, successfully and succinctly outline its argument in its own terms, demonstrate advanced critical engagement with the argument and content of the book, make clear and well structured arguments, and exhibit a proficient grasp of grammar, spelling, and style.
- **B papers (85-92)** clearly state the book's thesis, show an attempt to understand the book on its own terms and critically reflect on the issues at hand, make arguments, and show sufficiency in grammar, spelling, and style.
- **C papers (77-84)** state the book's thesis, present the content of the book, raise preliminary critical questions for further evaluation, limit evaluation to approval or disapproval of the author's arguments, and make repeated mistakes in grammar, spelling, and style.
- **D (70-76) and F (0-69) papers** lack evidence of grasping the book's thesis and content, limit evaluation to preformed judgments without serious consideration of the book's ideas, contain major grammatical, spelling, and stylistic errors, and demonstrate little or no attempt to proofread.

5. Greer-Heard Forum Assignment (15%)

Due May 9

Students are required to attend the 2015 Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum (April 10-11). Each student will write a **1500-2000 word-length** report/critique of the forum that highlights critical issues discussed at the meeting. Students who cannot attend the conference in person can purchase audio files from the conference in Dodd 112. Registration and conference information is available at greerheard.com.

Course Evaluation

Grades will be determined on the basis of the NOBTS grading scale—an A for 93-100, B for 85-92, C for 77-84, D for 70-76, and F for 69 or below. Borderline grades will normally be determined by the numerical grade received (I round up from .5), unless the student's promptness and faithfulness in class attendance, positive attitude and contribution in class discussions, and preparedness and attentiveness in class warrants special consideration. These factors only apply when the student is fractionally close to the next highest grade.

Blackboard

An important instrument in the implementation of this course is the Blackboard Learning System. *All assignments will be submitted using Blackboard SafeAssign technology.* Tests will also be conducted in Blackboard. Because this technology is accessible at home or office, there is a **trust policy** in place that the student will not compromise his or her integrity by looking at notes or books during the test. And as the proverb notes, "Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered" (Prov. 28:18).

Class Policies

1. Attendance and Class Participation

As noted above, attendance and class participation are necessary for meeting the requirements of this class. Students are expected to be attentive and prepared for each class session. Students who are engaged in private conversations or doing work for other classes may be asked to leave the class; repeat violations may result in removal from the course. Rude or disruptive behavior is also not permitted.

2. Laptop Guidelines

Laptops are permitted in class as long as they are used for taking notes or accessing Blackboard materials related to this particular course. *Students using laptops are requested to sit in the front of the classroom for accountability purposes.* Gaming, e-mail, social networking, and web browsing of any kind are strictly prohibited. Failure to heed this policy *will* result in dismissal from the class session; repeat violations may result in removal from the course. *Any student using Facebook during a class meeting may be asked to leave the class for the remainder of the semester.*

3. Plagiarism

The instructor calls attention to the policy on plagiarism found in the NOBTS Graduate Catalog and Student Handbook. Remember the words of the proverb: *“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out”* (Prov. 10:19).

Extra Credit

1. Book Review

Students may write one (1) additional critical book review of another book from the list of review texts for extra credit. All of the requirements for the critical review listed above apply to extra credit book reviews. Students can earn up to **five (5) points** on their final grade with a quality critical book review.

2. ETS Report

Students attending the Southwest regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in New Orleans on April 10–11 may write a 1000-word report on papers attended (at least three). Students can earn up to seven points on their final grade with submission. For registration information, please visit <http://www.etsjets.org>.

**PHIL5300 Spring 2015 // TR 6:00-8:50 p.m.
Lectures, Readings, and Anthology Assignments Schedule**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Class Topic</u>	<u>Readings / Anthology Questions</u>
01.23	Course Introduction	
01.30	What is Philosophy?	
02.06	Introduction to Logic	<p>Read Ganssle 9-24.</p> <p>Read Davies pp. 25-30. 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? Do you agree with Aquinas that the existence of God can be known by reason? Why or why not?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENT #1 Due 2/08 at midnight</p>
02.13	Faith & Reason	Read Ganssle 25-40.
02.20	Worldviews	<p>Read Davies 36-41. What is the “presumption of atheism”? Do you think the burden of proof rests on the atheist or on the theist? Why?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENT #2 Due 2/22 at midnight</p>
02.27	Epistemology	
03.05	Metaphysics	<p>Read Davies pp. 42-107. Compare and contrast the positions of Plantinga and Kretzmann. What does Plantinga mean when he says that belief in God is properly basic? Do you agree with him? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Plantinga’s position?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENT #3 Due 3/07 at midnight</p>
03.12		SPRING BREAK

	<i>"...give him rest from days of trouble..."</i> (Psalm 94:13)	
03.19	Religious Language	<p>Read Davies pp. 129–67. Briefly state Ayer’s reasons for considering God-talk as meaningless. Does Swinburne sufficiently answer his objections? How do Augustine, Flew, and Aquinas speak of religious language?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENT #4 Due 03/21 at midnight</p>
03.26	Atheism	<p>Read Ganssle 43–106.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">BOOK REVIEWS Due 03/31 at midnight</p>
04.02	The Existence of God	<p>Read Davies pp. 179–241. 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?</p> <p>Read Davies pp. 245–301. Briefly summarize 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 Hamburger’s? Why?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENTS #5–6 Due 04/04 at midnight</p>
04.09	The Problem of Evil	Read Ganssle pp. 109–29.
04.16	Divine Attributes	<p>Read Ganssle pp. 153–81.</p> <p>Read Davies pp. 571–627. 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?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENT #7</p>

		Due 04/21 at midnight
04.23	Religious Pluralism	
04.30	Miracles	<p>Read Davies pp. 422-35. 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?</p> <p>Read Davies pp. 476-530. 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?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ANTHOLOGY ASSIGNMENTS #8-9 Due 05/02 at midnight</p>
05.07	Hermeneutics and Postmodernity	GREER-HEARD ASSIGNMENT Due 05/09 at midnight

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- Collins, Raymond. *Introduction to the New Testament*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1983.
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