

## **Syllabus: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion Winter 2015/2016**

**Instructor:** Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini

**Office:** Philosophy Department Room 514, 106 Somerset Street, 5th Floor

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 12:00-1:00 pm (or by appointment)

**Email:** philrelw2015@gmail.com (all assignments should be submitted to this address)

**Classroom:** Scott Hall 206

**Class Hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 1:00-4:10 pm

### **Class Description**

The course will focus on what is arguably the most central question in the philosophy of religion: *Is there a God?* In the first half of the course, we will discuss arguments for the existence of a God, including ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, and arguments from fine-tuning in physics. In the second half of the course, we will discuss arguments against the existence of a God, including arguments from evil, arguments from religious disagreement, and arguments based on the cognitive science of religious belief.

### **Learning Objectives**

First, this course will give you a detailed understanding of some of the most important issues in the philosophy of religion. Second, this course will help you develop crucial philosophical abilities like reconstructing and evaluating arguments, articulating your ideas in conversation, and writing clearly and cogently.

### **Assignments and Grading**

There will be three significant course requirements. First, you will be required to write a short (approximately 300 word) response to the reading on each online class day (in general, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday). Second, there will be two 900-1200 word papers. Third, you will be expected to actively contribute to class discussions on our on-campus class days.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Attendance and class participation: 20%
- Reading Responses: 40%
- Midterm Paper: 20%
- Final paper: 20%

## Semester Overview

### Part 0: Preliminaries

#### 12/23: Online

Subject: What is Theism?

Reading: William Rowe, "Divine Power, Goodness, and Knowledge"

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

### Part 1: Arguments for Theism

#### 12/28: Online

Subject: The Ontological Argument

Reading: J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Ch 3 (pages 41–63)

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

#### 12/29: Online

Subject: The Cosmological Argument (I)

Reading: William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, Ch 2 (pages 20–47)

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

#### 12/30: Online

Subject: The Cosmological Argument (II)

Reading: J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Ch 5 (pages 81–101)

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

#### 1/4: Online

Subject: The Argument from Fine-Tuning (I)

Reading: John Leslie, *Universes*, Ch 1 (pages 1–24)

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

#### 1/5: In-Class

Discussion: Rowe, Mackie, and Craig

Assignment: None

**1/6: Online**

Subject: The Argument from Fine-Tuning (II)

Reading: Neil A. Manson, "The Fine-Tuning Argument"

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

**1/7: In-Class (Guest Lecturer Dr. Sam Lebens)**

Discussion: Mackie, Leslie, and Manson

Assignment: None

**Part 2: Arguments Against Theism****1/8: Online**

Subject: The Problem of Evil (I)

Reading: J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

**1/9: (No Class) MIDTERM PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT EST****1/11: Online**

Subject: The Problem of Evil (II)

Reading: Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, (pages 9–44)

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

**1/12: In-Class**

Discussion: Mackie and Plantinga

Assignment: None

**1/13: Online**

Subject: The Problem of Religious Diversity

Reading: T.J. Mawson, "Mill's Argument Against Religious Knowledge"

Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

**1/14: In-Class**

Discussion: Mawson and others (as needed)

**1/15: Online**

Subject: The Cognitive Science of Religion

Reading: Paul Draper and Ryan Nichols, "Diagnosing Bias in Philosophy of Religion"  
Assignment: Reading response due by midnight EST

**1/16: (No Class) FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT EST**

### **Class Participation**

Vocal participation in class is an extremely important part of learning to do philosophy. I will be keeping track of who participates in class and how often they do so. This will enable me to both assign participation grades and ensure that those who have spoken less have priority when they wish to participate. Feel free to ask a question at any time — remember, it's likely that someone else in the class has the same question and would benefit from you asking!

### **Lateness Policy**

Reading responses may not be turned in late. Other assignments may be turned in late, but will be subject to a 1/3-letter-grade penalty per day late (a 1/3-letter-grade drop is the difference between an A and a B+ and between a B and a B-).

If you would like an extension on an assignment, you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline for that assignment. Extensions will be granted on a discretionary basis.

### **Corrupt Files**

It is your responsibility to ensure that you provide your written work to me in a format I can access. If you submit a corrupt file, I will do my best to notify you as soon as possible. It is then your responsibility to send me another copy of the file in a timely manner. This means it is very important that you open and read emails from me. If I request a second copy of a file and you do not reply in a timely manner, I will regard the assignment as not having been submitted.

### **Laptop Use**

Laptops may not be used in the classroom. Use of cell phones is also not permitted.

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism of any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, see: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>. Please note

that submitting the same material for credit on more than one assignment, whether in the same class or in different classes, is self-plagiarism and will be treated like any other form of plagiarism.

### **Collaboration**

There are two kinds of collaborators. *Reviewers* offer comments on a pre-existing piece of writing. They are not responsible for the writing or major aspects of the argument of the pieces on which they comment. You are encouraged to seek reviewers for your pieces of writing. Please acknowledge your reviewers by name in a footnote at the end of your essay.

*Co-authors* enter into the creative process with the author. They are responsible for significant parts of the writing and/or argument of the pieces which they co-author. You are not permitted to submit co-authored work for credit in this course.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Every effort will be made to accommodate students who present a valid Letter of Accommodations. For more information, see: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations>

### **Religious Observance**

I am happy to accommodate special needs related to students' religious practices. However, I require that you notify me in writing within the first two weeks of class if you will need such accommodation at any point during the semester.

### **No Extra Credit**

There will be no opportunities to earn extra credit in this course.

### **Confidentiality**

Please note that I am required to report certain sensitive information you might relate to me to the University. If you would like to confidentially report sensitive information, you may do so through CAPS. For more information, see: <http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu/>.