

PHILOSOPHY 327:
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
M 2:30–3:50 PM/W 1:00–2:20 PM
SMITH HALL 243

Instructor: Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on the most central question in the philosophy of religion: *Is there a God?*

In the first half of the course, we will discuss a number of traditional arguments for the existence of a God, including ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, arguments from fine-tuning in physics, and pragmatic arguments.

In the second half of the course, we will discuss a number of arguments against theistic belief, including arguments from evil, arguments from religious disagreement, and arguments based on the cognitive science of religious belief.

We will also consider some work in philosophy of religion from non-Christian traditions, and in particular some work from Jewish and Hindu traditions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- By critically engaging with the course material, students will gain a detailed understanding of some of the most important issues in the philosophy of religion.

- The topics covered in the course will also serve as convenient introductions to major concepts in metaphysics and epistemology like: knowledge, justification, defeat, explanation, necessity, contingency, and probability.
- Through class discussion and structured writing exercises, students will develop crucial philosophical abilities like reconstructing and evaluating arguments, articulating ideas in conversation, and writing clearly and cogently.

TEXTBOOK

There will be no textbook for this course. All readings will be made available online.

LEARNING MATERIALS

I will upload course handouts and other materials to the course's Canvas site.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There will be three significant course requirements. First, students will be required to attend class meetings and participate in discussion of the materials. Second, there will be two short in-class papers written on topics related to the themes of the course. Third, students will be responsible for preparing a final paper and accompanying 10-minute oral presentation, which will be part of a simulated academic conference at the end of the semester.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 30%
- In-Class Papers: 40%
- Final Paper and Presentation: 30%

Grading Scale:

- A = 89.5-100
- B+ = 84.5-89.49
- B = 79.5-84.49
- C+ = 74.5-79.49
- C = 69.5-74.49
- D = 59.5-69.49
- F = 0-59.49

SEMESTER OVERVIEW

Week 1 (Week of Wednesday 9/4):

Readings: None (Course Introduction)

PART I: THEISM AND THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

Week 2 (Week of Monday 9/9):

Reading:

1. William Rowe, "Divine Power, Goodness, and Knowledge"

Week 3 (Week of Monday 9/16):

Reading:

1. J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Ch 3 (pages 41-63)

Week 4 (Week of Monday 9/23):

Reading:

1. William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, Ch 2 (pages 20-47)

Week 5 (Week of Monday 9/30):

Reading:

1. J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Ch 5 (pages 81-101)

Week 6 (Week of Monday 10/7):

Reading:

1. John Leslie, *Universes*, Ch 1 (pages 1-24)

Week 7 (Week of Monday 10/14):

Reading:

1. Neil A. Manson, "The Fine-Tuning Argument"

Week 8 (Week of Monday 10/21):

[FIRST IN-CLASS PAPER WEDNESDAY 10/23]

Reading:

1. Jeffrey Jordan, "Pascal's Wagers and James's Will to Believe"

PART II: ANTI-THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

Week 9 (Week of Monday 10/28):

Reading:

1. J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"

Week 10 (Week of Monday 11/4):

Reading:

1. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, (pages 9–44)

Week 11 (Week of Monday 11/11):

Readings:

1. John Hick, "On Conflicting Religious Truth-Claims"
2. Alvin Plantinga, "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism"

Week 12 (Week of Monday 11/18):

Readings:

1. Paul Draper and Ryan Nichols, "Diagnosing Bias in Philosophy of Religion"
2. Joshua C. Thurow, "Does cognitive science show belief in god to be irrational?"

PART III: BEYOND CHRISTIAN THEISM

Week 13 (Week of Monday 11/25):

[SECOND IN-CLASS PAPER MONDAY 11/25]

Readings:

1. Samuel Lebens, "Is There a Primordial Torah?"

Week 14 (Week of Monday 12/2):

Readings:

1. Samuel Lebens, "On Where God Isn't: Excrement and the Philosophy of Religion; Two Jewish Perspectives"
2. Shlomo Biderman, "A 'Constitutive' God — An Indian Suggestion"

Week 15 (Week of Monday 12/9):

[NO CLASS MONDAY 12/9; PROFESSOR AWAY]

Readings:

1. A.L. Herman, "Indian Theodicy: Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja on Brahma Sūtra II. 1. 32–36"

ATTENDANCE

During each class meeting, I will distribute a unique attendance code to each student present. You are responsible for filling out the online attendance form with your name, email, and unique attendance code. To do this, visit <http://www.cd.kg/teaching/> and click on the 'Attendance' link next to the name of this course. **Forms must be completed within 24 hours of the end of each class session or you will receive only half credit.**

COURTESY

It is important that all discussion be conducted calmly and respectfully. Professional courtesy and consideration for our classroom community are especially important with respect to topics dealing with differences such as race, color, gender and gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, disability, age, and veteran status.

Meaningful and constructive dialogue requires mutual respect, a willingness to listen, and tolerance of opposing points of view. Respect for individual differences and alternative viewpoints will be maintained at all times in this class. Our choices of words and use of language are critical components of respectful discourse as we work together to achieve the full benefits of creating a classroom in which all people can feel comfortable expressing themselves.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment

based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academicintegrity-policy/>

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 take-home 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 essays for credit in this course.

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.

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.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Counseling services are available at the Counseling Center, Room 101, Blumenthal Hall. For more information, call (973) 353-5805 or visit <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/>. Please note that I am required to report certain sensitive information you might relate to me to the University.