

Philosophy of Religion
Texas A&M University
PHIL 331.500 (33365)
Mon, Wed, Fri 9:10-10:00am
Liberal Arts and Arts & Humanities (LAAH) 264

Instructor

David Blanks, Ph.D.
dblanks@tamu.edu
Office hours Thursday from 1:30-3:30 and by appointment in YMCA 420.
Office Phone: (979) 862-4856

Texts

Science, Evolution, and Religion: A Debate about Atheism and Theism, Michael Peterson & Michael Ruse (Oxford; 2016).

Course Description

Philosophical problems of Western religion such as the existence of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between science and religion, the rationality of faith, comparing naturalism with theism.

Cross-listed with RELS 331.500 (33460).

Learning Outcomes

You will develop critical thinking skills to read, speak and write effectively about important topics in the philosophy of religion, including arguments for and against the existence of God, the relationship between religion and science, faith and rationality, and whether God is the best explanation for consciousness, morality and meaning in life. This involves identifying issues, presenting arguments, and formulating replies.

Assignments

- *Two Exams* (40%):
There will be one in-class written midterm (18%) and a final (22%). Exams may contain true-false, fill-in-the-blank, defining terms, and/or short essay questions. The final exam will be Monday, December 11th from 8:00-10:00am in our normal room.
- *Two Short Papers* (20%):
Each student must write two short papers (2-3 pages, double spaced) in response to questions posted by the instructor on eCampus (see the Schedule below). Each paper is worth 10% of the course grade.
- *One Term Paper* (20%):
Each student must write a term paper (no more than 5 pages, double spaced) due in class on Friday, December 8th. No late papers will be accepted. *You must consult with Dr. Blanks about your intended paper topic, thesis, and sources.* More information regarding the term paper will be provided later in the semester.

- *Reading Responses (5%):*

Throughout the semester the instructor will post reading response questions on eCampus. The questions are designed to encourage students to think critically about an important issue from the readings. Students must bring their typed reading response (one or two paragraphs) to class the day the reading response is due.

- *Presentations (5%):*

Throughout the semester each student must read three of his or her reading responses in front of the class, allowing students an opportunity to articulate their view on the issue. Other students will provide feedback in response to the presentation and the presenting student will have an opportunity to respond to the feedback.

- *Class Participation (10%):*

It's important to the life of your mind, and your education to actively engage with the ideas discussed in this course. Class participation includes being present, paying attention, not using electronic devices, contributing to class discussion, bringing the readings to class, asking questions, participating in group discussion and class activities, coming to office hours when appropriate, etc. In an effort to foster class participation and reduce classroom distractions, please refrain from using laptops and tablets in class.

Grading Policy

Grading scale for final grade: A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, F=0-59

Attendance Policy

Your Participation grade is determined, in part, by your attendance and by the extent to which you participate in class discussion and in in-class activities, all of which require you not being absent.

Make-Up Policy

If an absence is excused, the instructor will either provide the student an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the final grade or provide a satisfactory alternative by a date agreed upon by the student and instructor. If the instructor has a regularly scheduled make-up exam, students are expected to attend unless they have a university approved excuse. The make-up work must be completed in a timeframe not to exceed 30 calendar days from the last day of the initial absence. The reasons absences are considered excused by the university are listed in Student Rule 7 (<http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>). The fact that these are university-excused absences does not relieve the student of responsibility for prior notification and documentation. Failure to notify and/or document properly may result in an unexcused absence. Falsification of documentation is a violation of the Honor Code. Other absences may be excused at the discretion of the instructor with prior notification and proper documentation. In cases where prior notification is not feasible (e.g. an accident or emergency) the student must provide notification by the end of the second working day after the absence, including an explanation of why notice could not be sent prior to the class.

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.” If you violate the code, you may fail the course. See the Aggie Honor Code: <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>

Tentative Schedule

Wk.	Dates	Topic	Readings
1	Aug 28, 30 Sep 1	Introduction—Syllabus The Idea of God	van Inwagen, “The Idea of God”
2	Sep 4, 6, 8	Faith and Rationality	Murray & Rea, “Faith and Rationality” Davies, “Taking Science on Faith”
3	Sep 11, 13, 15	Science and Religion	P&R, “Introduction” and “Autobiographical Reflection” (Ch 1) Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria”
4	Sep 18, 20, 22	<i>First Short Paper Question Posted, Fri</i>	Plantinga, “When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible” P&R, “Science” (Ch 2)
5	Sep 25, 27, 29	Cosmic Origins	Aquinas, “The Five Ways” Murray & Rea, “Cosmological Arguments”
6	Oct 2, 4, 6	<i>First Short Paper Due, Fri</i>	P&R, “Cosmic Origins” (Ch 3) White, “The Argument from Cosmological Fine-Tuning” Gleiser, “Is the Universe Conscious?”
7	Oct 9, 11, 13	Review MIDTERM, Wed Origin and Complexity of Life	Complete Study Guide P&R, “Origin of Life” (Ch 4)

8	Oct 16, 18, 20		Paley, “The Watchmaker” Behe, “Molecular Machines: Experimental Support for the Design Inference”
9	Oct 23, 25, 27	<i>Second Short Paper Question Posted, Fri</i>	Kitcher, “Born-Again Creationism” P&R, “Darwin and Design” (Ch 5)
10	Oct 30 Nov 1, 3	Mind and Rationality	P&R, “Evolutionary Directionality” (Ch 6) Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
11	Nov 6, 8, 10	Morality <i>Second Short Paper Due, Fri</i>	P&R, “Mind and Rationality” (Ch 7) Murray & Rea, “Moral Arguments”
12	Nov 13, 15, 17	Evil and Suffering	P&R, “Morality” (Ch 8) Rowe, “The Problem of Evil”
13	Nov 20, 22, 24	<i>No class Wed or Fri— Thanksgiving Break</i>	Hick, “Evil and Soul-making”
14	Nov 27, 29 Dec 1		Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa’” P&R, “Evil and Suffering” (Ch 9)
15	Dec 4, 6	Meaning and Purpose Review <i>Term Paper Due Friday</i>	P&R, “Meaning and Purpose” (Ch 10) Complete Study Guide
	Mon, Dec 11 th	FINAL EXAM 8:00-10:00am	