

PHIL 2430 - Philosophy of Religion
3 Credit Hours

Course Description:

Philosophical examination of religion; issues include the existence and nature of God, relationship between faith and reason, and challenges to religious belief.

Throughout history individuals have pondered whether or not God exists. Many consider it the most important question that can be asked. The reason? As Mortimer Adler, a well-known philosopher, points out, "More consequences for thought and action follow from the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other basic question."* In this class we will address philosophical issues as they relate to God's existence or absence. One of the first issues to be examined will be the relationship between faith and reason in religious belief. Next, we will examine the major challenges to theism (e.g., the problem of evil) and provide potential responses to these difficulties. This will be followed by a discussion of reasons for belief in God: classical arguments, religious experience, pragmatic reasons, and the like. It is my aim to provide a platform for serious discussion of these fundamental issues. In familiarizing themselves with the philosophical issues surrounding their religious beliefs, students typically find their positions strengthened and confirmed.

*The Great Ideas (New York: Scribner, page 250)

Course Outcomes:

By the end of the course students will:

1. Have a better understanding of philosophy and its major fields.
2. Be able to describe and identify types of arguments as well as some basic fallacies in reasoning
3. Have a better understanding of the difficulties surrounding what constitutes a religion.
4. Be able to describe traditional and nontraditional conceptions of God
5. Describe the potential ways in which faith is related to reason.
6. Be able to identify and evaluate the major challenges to religious belief.

7. Be able to describe the standard arguments for the existence of God
8. Be able to explain the non-evidential reasons for religious belief.
9. Be able to explain religious experience as it relates to God's existence.
10. Be able to address the metaphysical and axiological consequences of God's existence or absence.
11. Have developed interpersonal skills by being involved in discussions.
12. Have acquired the critical thinking skills necessary to communicate and defend their own positions.

Prerequisites and Corequisites:

ENGL 1010 with a grade of C or better.

Course Topics:

Module 1: Background

Introduction to Philosophy and Logic

Module 2: Preliminary Considerations

Defining Religion and Philosophy of Religion

The Nature of God Faith and Reason

Module 3: Challenges to Religious Belief

Problems of Alternative Explanations

Problems of Religious Language

Problems of Inconsistency

Module 4: The Existence of God—Natural Theology

Mitigating Factors

Cosmological, Teleological, Ontological, and Moral Arguments

Module 5: The Existence of God—Other Approaches

Non-Evidential Approaches

Religious Experience

Required Textbooks:

Please visit the [Virtual Bookstore](#) to obtain textbook information for this course. Move your cursor over the "Books" link in the navigation bar and select "Textbooks & Course Materials." Select your Program, Term, Department, and Course; then select "Submit."

Hardware and Software Requirements:

Minimum hardware requirements can be found [here](#).

Minimum software requirements can be found [here](#).

Common applications you might need:

To read a PDF file download the latest version of [Adobe Reader here](#)

Don't have Microsoft Word? Explore an alternative [OpenOffice here](#)

Accessing a PowerPoint file? Download the [PowerPoint Viewer here](#)

Web Resources:

Purdue [OWL Online Writing Lab](#) (for APA, MLA, or Chicago style)

The Writing Center [Online Writer's Handbook](#)

Student Resources:

- Technical support information can be found on the [TN eCampus Help Desk](#) page.

- Smarthinking virtual tutoring is available **FREE** of charge. to access Smarthinking, visit the course homepage and select Smarthinking under Course Resources. You also view [sample sessions](#) to see what Smarthinking offers and how it works.
- Information on other student issues or concerns can be located on the [TN eCampus Student Resources](#) page.

Instructor Information:

Please see "Instructor Information" in the Getting Started Module for instructor contact information, virtual office hours, and other communication information. You can expect to receive a response from the instructor within 24-48 hours unless notified of extenuating circumstances.

Testing Procedures:

Self-Check Quizzes (accessible under "Assessments"):

Students must complete self-assessments following the completion of most topics. Once the assigned material has been read/viewed the student should complete the short assessment covering the material. These 'self-tests' are provided solely for the student's benefit. They do not constitute any portion of your final grade. Rather, they are provided in order that the student can confirm that he or she understands the fundamentals of the material covered.

Homework (accessible under "Assessments"):

Students are required to complete and submit the homework assignment the week it is due. The homework assignment is worth 50 points and covers the "Introduction to Philosophy" and "Logic" portions of the course material. It is not permissible to submit the homework assignments late.

Discussion (accessible under "Discussions"):

Students are required to post and defend their positions regarding four particular issues in the philosophy of religion:

Topic #1: How do you define God? Do you believe that such a being exists? Why or why not?

Topic #2: What is a miracle? Are miracles possible? How does one determine whether a miracle has occurred?

Topic #3: Can a theist consistently maintain a belief in hell? If so, which interpretation of hell do you find the most persuasive and why?

Topic #4: Who won the debate between Shook and Craig? Why? Which arguments did you find weak/strong and why?

You may post in a particular forum any time after the respective topic has been studied. Just make sure that you do not wait until the very end of the 'posting window' to post your thoughts. One of the main purposes of the forum is to encourage interaction between students where you can critique and question the arguments and claims of others. If one waits until the very end to post not only is this opportunity lost but vague statements remain vague (resulting in a potential loss of points).

Each of the four topics is worth 25 points (for a total of 100 points). A student will not receive the total number of points if the topic is not adequately addressed or reveals a lack of understanding of the material. In other words, mere participation is not sufficient to receive credit for the discussion group portion of the grade; it is the quality of the participation that is relevant. The post should not simply present the positive reasons for embracing the position but also address the deficiencies of the opposing view(s). To adequately discuss the respective areas students should plan on contributing a minimum of 250 words per discussion topic. The bulk of this minimum should come from an initial statement and defense of one's own position. Additional contributions should also be made in response to the posts of other students (although students are not required to respond to every post, interaction with several other posts is expected). If there is no participation in any of the four areas that student will receive a zero for the participation portion of their grade. Contributions to the topic after the time period that the discussion topic is open for postings is not permitted (i.e. late posts are not allowed).

Students may also post their thoughts in the 'General Discussion' forum. This forum is open to any and all topics/questions relevant to the course that a student may have throughout the course of the semester. As with all other public posts, students should solely post thoughts and questions that pertain to the course material and should do so in a civil way. Posts made in the 'General Discussion' forum do not apply toward the discussion portion of the final grade.

Exams: Students are responsible for taking two course exams: a Mid-Term Exam and a Final Exam. Both exams are PROCTORED. This means that students may NOT take the exams on their personal computer. Both the mid-term and the final exams have to be taken on a computer at an approved proctoring location (as only the approved proctor has the password necessary to access the exams). Students are responsible for making arrangements to take the exams during the respective time slots that each is available and must secure a proctor and testing site for BOTH exams no later than the last day of the third week of class. A link for scheduling both of your proctored exams can be found on the course home page under 'News'.

NO BOOKS, NOTES, OR OTHER STUDY MATERIALS WILL BE ALLOWED INTO THE EXAM. STUDENTS MAY NOT VISIT WEB SITES OTHER THAN THE COURSE TESTING SITE DURING THE EXAM. ANY INFRACTION OF THESE RULES WILL RESULT IN A

GRADE OF "0" FOR THE EXAM.

The proctored Mid-Term Exam (90 minute time limit) is worth 75 points and covers the first half of the course material: All of Modules 1 and 2 and the first half of Module 3 (Problems of Alternative Explanations, Religious Language, Inconsistency/Internal, and Inconsistency/External —Human Freedom). The Mid-Term Exam will be composed of three questions randomly chosen from nine essay questions posted in the 'News' section on the course homepage.

The proctored Final Exam (90 minute time limit) is worth 75 points and covers the second half of the course material (i.e., the Final Exam is not comprehensive): The second half of Module 3 (Problem of Inconsistency/External: Evil and Evil/Hell) and all of Modules 4 and 5. The Final Exam will be composed of three questions randomly chosen from thirteen essay questions posted in the 'News' section on the course homepage.

Make-up exams will only be given under extenuating circumstances.

Paper

Students will write one paper dealing with either "Life after Death as Proof for the Existence of God" or "God and the Meaning of Life: Is the Existence of God Necessary for Life to be Meaningful?" It is the student's choice which of the two options to choose. The paper must be a minimum of 1000 words in length and a minimum of three sources must be utilized (a 'Works Cited' page must be included). Keep in mind that your paper must approach the topic from a philosophical point of view. In other words, although one may supplement the analysis by appealing to non-philosophical writings and/or anecdotes, the primary focus should be on evaluating the topic philosophically/rationally. Late papers will be assessed a five point penalty for each calendar day late.

Extra Credit: Evaluate either the film "Contact" or "The Tree of Life" (available for rent/purchase at numerous locations) in light of the material found in the Faith and Reason, Problem of Alternative Explanations (Scientific), and Non-Evidential Approaches sections. Prepare a 1000 word typed paper addressing the following:

What role does/should evidence, proof, and faith play in matters of science and religion? How are the two disciplines similar/different? Is the issue of meaning relevant? What did you like or dislike about the film? Do you think that all positions were fairly represented or characterized?

Date due: No later than the last day of Week 13 (Week 9 for the summer term). LATE EXTRA CREDIT PROJECTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

Cheating:

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of

academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly through participation or assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class. In addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular institutional procedures as a result of academic misconduct, the instructor has the authority to assign an "F" or zero for an activity or to assign an "F" for the course.

Grading Procedures:

The homework, discussion postings, examinations, and paper constitute the sole means by which the student's grasp of the course material will be ascertained.

Homework: 50 potential points

Discussion: 100 potential points (4 @ 25 points apiece)

Exams: 150 potential points (2 @ 75 points apiece)

Paper: 50 potential points

350 points total

Grading Scale:

90 – 100	A	(314 – 350 points)
80 – 89	B	(279 – 313 points)
70 – 79	C	(244 – 278 points)
65 – 69	D	(226 – 243 points)

Assignments and Projects:

Module I: Background

Overview

Module Learning Outcomes

Key Words and Concepts

Topics

Introduction to Philosophy

[View corresponding video](#)

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

Logic

[View corresponding video](#)

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

[Submit homework](#)

Additional Resources

Assessments and Evaluation

Summary and Reflection

Module 2: Preliminary Considerations

Overview

Module Learning Outcomes

Key Words and Concepts

Topics

Defining Religion and Philosophy of Religion

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 1

[View corresponding video](#)

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

The Nature of God Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 5

[View corresponding video](#)

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

Post to Discussion Forum #1: How do you define God? Do you believe that such a being exists? Why or why not?

Faith and Reason

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 4

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Additional Resources

Assessments and Evaluation

Summary and Reflection

Module 3: Challenges to Religious Belief

Overview

Module Learning Outcomes

Key Words and Concepts

Topics

Problem of Alternative Explanations

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 13

View corresponding videos

PowerPoint video

Faith and Reason video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 10

Post to Discussion Forum #2: What is a miracle? Are miracles possible? How does one determine whether a miracle has occurred?

Problem of Religious Language

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapters 2 and 12

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Problem of Inconsistency: Internal

View corresponding video

Problem of Inconsistency: External—Human Freedom

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 9

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

MID-TERM EXAM (PROCTORED)

Problem of Inconsistency: External—Evil

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 8

View corresponding videos

PowerPoint video

Return of the Archons video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Problem of Inconsistency: External—Evil/Hell

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Post to Discussion Forum #3: Can a theist consistently maintain a belief in hell? If so, which interpretation of hell do you find the most persuasive and why?

Additional Resources

Assessments and Evaluation

Summary and Reflection

Module 4: The Existence of God—Natural Theology

.Overview Module Learning Outcomes

Key Words and Concepts

Topics

Mitigating Factors

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Natural Theology

Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 6

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Cosmological Argument

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Teleological Argument

View corresponding video

Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz

Submit Paper

Ontological Argument

View corresponding video

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

[Moral Argument](#)

[View corresponding video](#)

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

[Additional Resources](#)

[Assessments and Evaluation](#)

[Summary and Reflection](#)

[Module 5: The Existence of God—Other Approaches](#)

[Overview](#)

[Module Learning Outcomes](#)

[Key Words and Concepts](#)

[Topics](#)

[Non-Evidential Approaches](#)

[Read Reason and Religious Belief chapter 7](#)

[View corresponding video](#)

[Complete corresponding online 'self-check' quiz](#)

[Post to Discussion Forum #4: Who won the debate between Shook and Craig? Why?](#)

[Which arguments did you find weak/strong and why?](#)

[Religious Experience](#)

[Read Reason and Religious Belief chapters 3 and 14](#)

[View corresponding videos](#)

[PowerPoint video](#)

“Does God Exist?” debate video

Complete corresponding online ‘self-check’ quiz

Additional Resources

Assessments and Evaluation

Summary and Reflection

FINAL EXAM (PROCTORED; NOT COMPREHENSIVE)

Class Participation:

Students are expected to communicate with the instructor as a learning resource and students must check the course bulletin board frequently for announcements.

Course Ground Rules:

The following two statements (1., 2.) were derived from the TBR System-wide Student Rules document, released January 2012:

**RULES OF THE TENNESSEE BOARD OF REGENTS STATE UNIVERSITY AND
COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM OF TENNESSEE SYSTEMWIDE STUDENT RULES
CHAPTER 0240-02-03 STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY SANCTIONS**

[Read the document in its entirety here.](#)

1. Standards of Conduct:

- Students are required to adhere to the same professional, legal and ethical standards of conduct online as on campus. In addition, students should conform to generally accepted standards of "netiquette" while sending e-mail, posting comments to the discussion board, and while participating in other means of communicating online. Specifically, students should refrain from inappropriate and/or offensive language, comments and actions.

2. [Review the TN eCampus Academic Integrity/Academic Honesty Policy:](#)

- In their academic activities, students are expected to maintain high standards of honesty and integrity. Academic dishonesty is prohibited.

Such conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- an attempt by one or more students to use unauthorized information in the taking of an exam
- to submit as one's own work, themes, reports, drawings, laboratory notes, computer programs, or other products prepared by another person,
- or to knowingly assist another student in obtaining or using unauthorized materials.

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited.

Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly through participation or assistance, are subject to disciplinary action through the regular procedures of the student's home institution. Refer to the student handbook provided by your home institution to review the student conduct policy.

In addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions that may be imposed, the instructor has the authority to assign an "F" or zero for an activity or to assign an "F" for the course.

Other Course Rules:

Students are expected to:

- Participate in all aspects of the course
- Communicate with other students
- Learn how to navigate in Brightspace
- Keep abreast of course announcements
- Use the assigned course management (Brightspace) email address rather than a personal email address
- Address technical problems immediately:
 - [Contact Technical Support](#)
 - [View Term Calendar here](#)
- Observe course netiquette at all times.

Guidelines for Communications:

Email:

- Always include a subject line.
- Remember without facial expressions some comments may be taken the wrong way. Be careful in wording your emails. Use of emoticons might be helpful in some cases.
- Use standard fonts.
- Do not send large attachments without permission.
- Special formatting such as centering, audio messages, tables, html, etc. should be avoided unless necessary to complete an assignment or other communication.
- Respect the privacy of other class members

Discussions:

- Review the discussion threads thoroughly before entering the discussion. Be a lurker then a discussant.
- Try to maintain threads by using the "Reply" button rather starting a new topic.
- Do not make insulting or inflammatory statements to other members of the discussion group. Be respectful of other's ideas.
- Be patient and read the comments of other group members thoroughly before entering your remarks.
- Be cooperative with group leaders in completing assigned tasks.
- Be positive and constructive in group discussions.
- Respond in a thoughtful and timely manner.

Library:

The [Tennessee Virtual Library](#) is available to all students enrolled in TN eCampus programs and courses. Links to library materials (such as electronic journals, databases, interlibrary loans, digital reserves, dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps, and librarian support) and Internet resources needed by learners to complete online assignments and as background reading will be included within the course modules. To access the Virtual Library, go to the course homepage and select the ***Virtual Library*** link under Course Resources.

Students with Disabilities:

Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable and necessary academic accommodations if determined eligible by the appropriate disability services staff at their home institution. Prior to granting disability accommodations in this course, the instructor must receive written verification of a student's eligibility for specific accommodations from the disability services staff at the home institution. It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with their home institution's disability services staff and to follow the established procedures for having the accommodation notice sent to the instructor.

Syllabus Changes:

The instructor reserves the right to make changes as necessary to this syllabus. If changes are necessitated during the term of the course, the instructor will immediately notify students of such changes both by individual email communication and posting both notification and nature of change(s) on the course bulletin board.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this syllabus is for general information purposes only. While we endeavor to keep this information up-to-date and accurate, there may be some discrepancies between this syllabus and the one found in your online course. The syllabus of record is the one found in your online course. Please make sure you read the syllabus in your course at the beginning of the semester. Questions regarding course content should be directed to your instructor.