

**Philosophy 1580-001  
Spring 2024**

**Stephen P. Steinberg, Ph.D.  
Lecturer in Philosophy**

## ***Philosophy of Religion***

### **SYLLABUS**

This seminar course is an introduction to the philosophical examinations of questions regarding the nature of religious experiences and beliefs; arguments for and against the existence of God; the problem of evil; the relationships of faith, reason, and science; the possibility of religious knowledge; the role of religious communities; etc. Readings from the history of philosophy, 20<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary analytic philosophy, and the European phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutic traditions.

- Seminar.
- No prerequisites.
- No previous knowledge of philosophy or the philosophy of religion required.
- Requires student use of Canvas, Zoom, and other online applications.

**Course Format:**     **Twice-weekly seminar meetings  
                          Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00-1:30 p.m.**

**Course Location:**   **302 Van Pelt-Library (Class of 1954 Teaching Seminar Room)**

**Instructor:**         **Stephen P. Steinberg, Ph.D., *Lecturer in Philosophy***  
                          **Email: [sps@upenn.edu](mailto:sps@upenn.edu)**  
                          **Office: 429 Claudia Cohen Hall**  
                          **Office Hours:   In-Person Office “Drop-ins”: Tuesdays 2:30-3:00 pm**  
  **Brief conversations immediately after class.**  
  **By appointment (in person or via Zoom).**

#### **Course Goals:**

- Develop familiarity with and an understanding of the classic philosophical arguments about God’s nature and for and against the existence of God.
- Develop familiarity with and an understanding of the nature, varieties, and ethics of religious belief.
- Develop familiarity with and an understanding of some of the philosophical problems of religious belief, including the problems of evil, free will, scientific explanation, religious language, biblical interpretation, and religious exclusivism, diversity, and pluralism.



## Required Assignments & Assessments

- **Weekly:**
  - **Assigned Readings.**
  - **Posting questions and comments on the weekly Canvas Discussion Forums.**
  - **Active participation in twice-weekly Seminar Discussions.**
- **Two Short Mid-Term Essays** (*approximately* 5 pp. or 1250 words each) on topics selected from lists distributed on Canvas.
- **Roundtable discussions** of students' preliminary paper topics.
- **Brief Written Proposal** (1-2 pp.) for the student's final paper.
- **Final Paper** (*approximately* 12 pp. or 3000 words) on a topic of the student's choice, approved by and developed in consultation with the instructor.

## Weekly Student Schedule

- **Thursday to Tuesday:** Critically read and take notes on the weekly assigned readings.
- **Thursday to Wednesday:** Submit questions and comments on the readings on the Canvas Discussion Forum for Thursday's seminar discussion.
- **Tuesdays and Thursdays:** Participate actively in the twice-weekly seminar discussions focused on student questions/comments and important aspects of the lectures and readings.

## Estimated Total Student Workload

Approximately 10-15 hrs./wk., including class time, reading, and preparation of student papers. [The amount of reading and paper preparation time will vary from week-to-week.]

## About this COURSE

Critically engaging the **readings and seminar discussions** are the primary learning modalities in this course, so keeping up with the assigned readings, contributing to the weekly discussion forums on Canvas, and participating regularly and actively in the weekly seminar discussions should be prioritized. There is a lot of reading, and good philosophical reading often requires repeated readings and carefully analyzing and evaluating what you are reading.

## About SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

The **Tuesday and Thursday Seminar Discussions** will provide an opportunity for in-depth discussion of each week's topic. Active participation in the seminar discussions will be essential to developing a deeper engagement with the philosophy of religion. Each discussion will highlight and explain important aspects of the required readings. Student questions and comments *submitted by noon on Wednesdays* on the Twice-Weekly Canvas Discussion Forums or raised during the weekly seminar discussions will be a central focus of these conversations.

## About CANVAS

The University's Canvas learning management system serves as the central resource for course information and materials and integrates many of the functions and utilities you will need to utilize during the course of the semester. *It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with Canvas before the beginning of the Spring semester and quickly achieve a level of comfort using it to access course materials and participate in the work of the course.* For an introduction to or help with Canvas, go to [Canvas for Students](#) or the [Canvas Student Guide](#). You should also review Canvas's [basic computer requirements](#) and [supported browsers](#), and consider downloading the Canvas Student app on your [iOS](#) or [Android](#) devices.

## About the CANVAS DISCUSSION FORUMS

The **Canvas Discussion Forums** are fully integrated with and accessed from the course's Canvas website. Students in this course are *required* to post their reflections, questions, and comments on each week's readings to the weekly Canvas Discussion Forum *by noon on Wednesdays*. These questions and comments will be an important focus of each week's seminar discussions.

## About OFFICE HOURS

Students in this course should take full advantage of the instructor's office hours, including the Tuesday, 2:30-3:00 p.m., office "drop-ins." I will usually be available immediately after each seminar meeting, which is often the most convenient time to answer short questions, briefly discuss student work, or schedule a longer conversation (either in-person or via Zoom). If you can't stay after class, or wish to speak more privately or at greater length, just email me to set up an appointment to meet either online via Zoom or in person at a more convenient time. (In your email, please list several times when you're available to meet.)

## About READINGS

The course readings are divided into **Required Readings** and optional **Recommended Readings**. The **Required Readings** will be the focus of each week's seminar discussions. Students should come to class having read and reflected on the Required Readings and well prepared to discuss them. The **Recommended Readings** are intended to provide useful background (especially for those with no previous study of philosophy) and opportunities for deeper exploration of particular topics.

## About TEXTS and RESOURCES

All of the required and recommended texts (new or used) for this course can be purchased or rented online or in-person from the **University of Pennsylvania Bookstore** or (often at lower cost) from Amazon.com or other online bookstores using the ISBN numbers listed below. Some texts may be available as e-textbooks or in other digital formats.

### Required Texts:

- Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufman (Simon & Schuster; Touchstone edition, 1996, pb.), ISBN #9780684717258.
- Davies, Brian, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2000, reprinted 2013, pb.), ISBN #9780198751946.
- Dennett, Daniel C. and Plantinga, Alvin, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (Oxford University Press, 2011, pb.), ISBN #9780199738427.
- Freud, Sigmund, *The Future of an Illusion* (Series: *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*), translated by James Strachey, edited by Peter Gay (W. W. Norton & Company; The Standard Edition, 1989, pb.), ISBN #9780393008319.
- Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (Routledge, 1992, pb.), ISBN #9780415080248.
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell, 2007, pb.), ISBN #9781405118729.

### Additional Required and Recommended Readings:

- Additional required and recommended readings (marked by “[PDF]” in the reading assignments below) will be distributed as PDF files on the course's Canvas website.

## Online Philosophy Resources

The [Philosophy Department website](#) provides an excellent list of online philosophy resources and texts. Among these, the following may be especially helpful:

- [Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Names](#)
- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

## About FUTURE CHANGES

Please keep in mind that it may be necessary to make changes in the course plans described in this Syllabus, either before the start of or during the Spring semester. *All changes will be announced on Canvas to all students registered for the course.*

## *In case of EMERGENCY....*

Life is unpredictable. Stuff happens. In the event that you encounter sudden health emergencies (for yourself or your family), or any other personal circumstances or issues that may interfere with your participation in this course please ***inform your instructor as soon as possible*** – either directly via email or via the new **Course Absence Notices** system (accessible from [Path@Penn](#)) -- so that alternative arrangements can be made.

**Course Outline:  
Class Schedule, Modules, Weekly Topics, and Reading Assignments**

**PLEASE NOTE:**

- Readings marked by “[PDF]” will be distributed as PDF files on Canvas.
- Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are especially important or useful.

**MODULE I: INTRODUCTION**

*Jan. 14<sup>th</sup> Pre-Course Survey Available on Canvas [Due 1/31]*

**Wk.1 Jan. 18<sup>th</sup> What Does Faith Owe to Reason?**

**TOPICS:**

- Introductions, Motivations, and Overview of the Course
- The Personal and the Philosophical
- What is the Philosophy of Religion?
- The Varieties of Religious Belief: Theism, Monotheism, Polytheism, Pantheism, and Non-theism
- The Sources of Religious Belief: Authority, Revelation, Experience, Emotion, and Reason
- Can Religious Beliefs Be Rationally Justified?
- Monotheism and the Philosophy of Religion

**REQUIRED READINGS:** *These can be read after the first class meeting.*

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - \**“General Introduction,”* (pp. 1-14)
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - *“Preface”*
  - \**Ch. 1: “The Philosophical Approach to Religion”* (pp. viii-24)

## MODULE II: THE GOD OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

### Wk.2 Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> The Nature of God

#### TOPICS:

- Simple/One?
- Person?
- Omnipotent?
- Omniscient?
- Omnibenevolent?
- Eternal?

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - \*Part IV: “Introduction” to “What Is God?” (pp. 393-395)
  - Omnipotence:
    - \*Excerpt from “Introduction” (pp. 397-398)
  - Omniscience:
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 439-445)
  - Eternality:
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 476-481)
  - Simplicity:
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 533-538)
- \*Helm, Paul, “Goodness,” from *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro. **[PDF]**
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Ch. 4: ”Who or What is God?” (pp. 77-99)

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Ch. #40: Aquinas, Thomas, “Why think of God as omnipotent?” (pp. 415-421)
  - Ch. #43: Aquinas, Thomas, “Why ascribe knowledge to God?” (pp. 446-455)
  - Ch. #45: Pike, Nelson, “Problems for the notion of divine omniscience” (pp.465-472)
  - Ch. #46: Aquinas, Thomas, “Why call God “eternal”?” (pp. 482-484)
  - Ch. #50: Aquinas, Thomas, “A classic defense of divine simplicity” (pp. 539-544)
  - Ch. #51: Morris, Thomas V., “Problems with divine simplicity” (pp. 545-548)

**Wk.3 Jan. 30<sup>th</sup> & Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> The Existence of God I:  
The Cosmological Argument**

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

- \*Aquinas, Thomas, “The Five Proofs of God,” from *Summa Theologiae*, pp. 348-350 (i.e., the first, second, third, and fourth "ways") in *Western Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by John Cottingham [PDF]
- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part III: “Arguments for the Existence of God”
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 173-178)
    - \*“Introduction” to “Cosmological Arguments” (pp. 179-185)
    - \*Ch. #13: Anselm of Canterbury, “A concise cosmological argument from the eleven century” (pp. 186-187)
    - Ch. #15: John Duns Scotus, “A fourteenth-century cosmological argument” (pp. 188-193)
    - \*Ch. #16: G. W. Leibnitz, , “A seventeenth-century cosmological argument” (pp. 194-195)
    - \*Ch. #20: David Hume, “Why is a cause always necessary?” (pp. 230-232)
    - \*Ch. #22: James A. Sadowsky, “Can there be an endless regress of causes?” (pp. 239-244)

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Ch. 2, Sec. 2.1: “What Question Does a Theistic Argument Answer?” (pp. 25-30)
  - \*Ch. 2, Sec. 2.3: “The Cosmological Argument” (pp. 37-48)

**Wk.4 Feb. 6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> The Existence of God II:  
The Ontological Argument**

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part III: “Ontological Arguments”
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 304-310)
    - \*Ch. #29: Anselm of Canterbury, “Anselm argues that God cannot be thought not to exist” (pp. 311-312)
    - \*Ch. #32: René Descartes, “Descartes defends an ontological argument” (pp. 327-329)
    - Ch. #33: Pierre Gassendi, Johannes Caterus, René Descartes, “Descartes replies to critics” (pp. 330-336)
    - \*Ch. #34: Immanuel Kant, “A classic repudiation of ontological arguments” (pp. 337-341)

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Ch. 2, Sec. 2.4: “The Ontological Argument” (pp. 48-52)
  - \*Ch. 2, Sec. 2.5: “Conclusion: Connecting the Arguments” (pp.52-55)

***Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> First mid-term essay topics available on Canvas (due March 1<sup>st</sup>)***

**Wk.5 Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> The Existence of God III:  
The Teleological Argument**

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

- \*Aquinas, Thomas, “The Five Proofs of God,” from *Summa Theologiae*, pp. 350-351 (i.e., the fifth “way”), from *Western Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by John Cottingham [PDF]
- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part III: “Design Arguments”
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 245-250)
    - \*Ch. #23: Th. Aquinas, “Is the world ruled by providence?” (pp. 251-252)
    - \*Ch. #24: Wm. Paley, “An especially famous design argument” (pp. 253-259)
    - \*Ch. #25: David Hume, “We cannot know that the world is designed by God” (pp. 260-270)
    - \*Ch. #26: Immanuel Kant, “The limits of design arguments” (pp. 271-273)

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Ch. 2, Sec. 2.2: “The Teleological Argument” (pp. 30-37)

**Wk.6 Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> The Existence of God IV:  
The Moral Argument**

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

- \*Aquinas, Thomas, “Selection from *Treatise on Law*,” from *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: Ancient to Contemporary*, edited by Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski and Timothy R. Miller. [PDF]
- Cottingham, John, ed., *Western Philosophy, An Anthology*:
  - Robert M. Adams, “God’s Commands as the Foundation for Morality,” from *Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief* [PDF]
  - \*William Lane Craig, “Religious Belief as Necessary for Meaning,” from *The Absurdity of Life without God* [PDF]
- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part VI: “Morality and Religion”
    - \* “Introduction” (pp. 633-638)
    - \*Ch. #58: Immanuel Kant, “God as a ‘postulate’ of sound moral thinking” (pp. 639-645)
    - \*Ch. #60: Illyd Trethowan, “Moral thinking as awareness of God” (pp. 659-667)
    - \*Ch. #61: Kai Nielsen, “Morality does not imply the existence of God” (pp.668-682)
- \*Plato, *Euthyphro*, from *Five Dialogues*, translated by G.M.A. Grube. [PDF]

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* [PDF]
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Ch. 6, Secs. 6.1-6.2 and 6.4-6.5: “Religion and Morality” (pp. 122-131, 134-142)

## MODULE III: The Varieties of Religious Experience

### Wk.7 Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> Miracles and Mysticism

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part III: “God and Human Experience”
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 356-361)
    - \*Ch. #36: C. B. Martin, “Why ‘knowing God by experience’ is a notion open to question” (pp. 362-369)
    - Ch. #37: Peter Donovan, “Can we know God by experience?” (pp. 370-381)
    - \*Ch. #38: William P. Alston, “Why should there not be experience of God?” (pp. 382-386)
  - Part IV: “What Is God?”
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 398-401)
    - \*Ch. #41: Richard Swinburne, “Miracles and laws of nature” (pp. 422-429)
    - \*Ch. #42: David Hume, “Why we should disbelieve in miracles” (pp. 430-435)
- \*James, William, Lectures XVI-XVII: “Mysticism,” from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [PDF]
- \*Russell, Bertrand, “Mysticism” from *Religion and Science* [PDF]
- \*“Selections of Mystical Experiences” from *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, edited by Michael Rea and Louis Pojman [PDF]

**Mar. 1<sup>st</sup> First Midterm Essays Due Via Canvas**

**Mar. 3<sup>rd</sup> Mid-Course Survey Available on Canvas [Due 3/24]**

**Wk.8 Mar. 5<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> NO CLASS – Spring Break [3/2-3/10]**

**Wk.9 Mar. 12<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> Encountering the Eternal Thou**

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- \*Buber, Martin, “First Part,” “Third Part,” and “Afterword” from *I and Thou* (pp. 51-85 and 123-183)

**Mar. 14<sup>th</sup> First Roundtable Discussion on Final Paper Topics**

**Mar. 17<sup>th</sup> Second Mid-term Essay Topics Available on Canvas**

## MODULE IV: THE ETHICS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

### Wk.10 Mar. 19<sup>h</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> The Logics of Religious Belief

#### TOPICS:

- The Principle of Sufficient Reason
- Evidentialism
- Pragmatism and Pascal's Wager
- Properly Basic Beliefs

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part 1: "Philosophy and Religious Belief"
    - \*"Introduction" (pp.17-24)
    - Ch. 1: Th. Aquinas, "Faith and reason in harmony" (pp.25-30)
    - \*Ch. 2: W.K. Clifford, "The ethics of belief" (pp. 31-35)
    - \*Excerpts from Ch. 4: Alvin Plantinga, "Religious belief as 'properly basic' (pp. 42-43, 81-94)
- \*Jordan, Jeffrey, Excerpt from "Pascal's Wager and James's Will to Believe" (pp.168-179) from *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William J. Wainwright [PDF]
- \*Pascal, Blaise, "Pascal's Wager," excerpt from *Pensées* [PDF]

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Excerpt from Ch. 3: "Pragmatic and Fideist Approaches to Religious Belief" (Sec. 3.1-3.2, pp. 56-65)
  - \*Excerpt from Ch. 10: "Faith, Reason, and the Ethics of Belief" (Secs. 10.2.2-10.3, pp. 224-234)

## **Wk.11 Mar. 26<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> Faith Beyond Reason**

### **TOPICS:**

- Fideism and “The Will to Believe”
- Kierkegaard and “The Leap of Faith”

### **REQUIRED READINGS:**

- \*James, William, “The Will to Believe” from *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* [PDF]
- \*Jordan, Jeffrey, Excerpt from “Pascal’s Wager and James’s Will to Believe” (pp.180-187) from *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William J. Wainwright [PDF]
- \*Kierkegaard, Søren, “Faith and Subjectivity,” from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript in Western Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by John Cottingham [PDF]

### **RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Excerpt from Ch. 3: “Pragmatic and Fideist Approaches to Religious Belief” (Secs. 3.3-3.4, pp. 65-76)
  - \*Excerpt from Ch. 10: “Faith, Reason, and the Ethics of Belief” (Secs. 10.1-10.2.1, pp. 212-223)

## **Wk.12 Apr. 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> The Psychological Origins of Religious Belief**

### **TOPICS:**

- God in Man’s Image
- Wish-fulfillments and Illusions

### **REQUIRED READINGS:**

- \*Feuerbach, Ludwig, “Religion as Illusion” from *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by John Hick [PDF]
- \*Freud, Sigmund, *The Future of an Illusion*

### **RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Excerpt from Ch. 6: “Moral Motivation” (Sec. 6.3, pp. 131-134)

*Apr. 4<sup>th</sup> Second Roundtable Discussion of Final Paper Topics*

*Apr. 7<sup>th</sup> Second Mid-term Essays Due Via Canvas*

## MODULE V: PROBLEMS, RESPONSES, AND REINTERPRETATIONS

### Wk.13 Apr. 9<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> The Problems of Religious Belief I

#### TOPICS:

- The Problem of Evil
- The Problem of Free Will
- The Problem of Scientific Explanation

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part V: “The Problem of Evil”
    - \*“Introduction” (pp. 569-580)
    - \*Ch. #53: J. L. Mackie, “Evil shows that there is no God” (pp. 581-591)
    - Ch. #54: Augustine of Hippo, “What is evil?” (pp. 592-598)
    - Ch. #55: Richard Swinburne, “Evil does not show that there is no God” (pp. 599-613)
    - Ch. #56: Herbert McCabe, “God, evil, and divine responsibility” (pp. 614-624)
    - Ch. #57: Th. Aquinas, “God and human freedom” (pp. 625-627)
- \*Dennett, Daniel C. and Plantinga, Alvin, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*
- \*Dostoevski, Feodor, “Rebellion” from *The Brothers Karamazov in God and Evil*, edited by Nelson Pike [PDF]
- \*Leibnitz, Gottfried, “The Problem of Evil,” from *Theodicy in Western Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by John Cottingham [PDF]

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - Ch. 5: “Fate, Freedom, and Foreknowledge” (pp. 100-121)
  - \*Ch. 7: “The Problem of Evil” (pp. 43-167)

**Apr. 14<sup>th</sup> Written Proposals for Final Paper Topics Due Via Canvas**

## Wk.14 Apr. 16<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> The Problems of Religious Belief II

### TOPICS:

- The Problem of Religious Language
- The Problem of Biblical Interpretation
- The Problems of Religious Diversity, Pluralism, and Exclusivism

### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part II: “The Problem of God Talk”
    - \*”Introduction” (pp. 129-140)
    - \*Ch. #7: Norman Malcolm, “The groundlessness of religious belief” (pp.115-122)
    - Ch. #8: Augustine of Hippo, “How believers find God-Talk puzzling” (pp. 141-142)
    - \*Ch. #9: A. J. Ayer, “God-Talk is evidently nonsense” (pp. 143-146)
    - \*Ch. #10: Richard Swinburne, “God-Talk is not evidently nonsense” (pp. 147-152)
    - \*Ch. #11: Anthony Flew, “Death by a thousand qualifications” (pp. 153-155)
    - \*Ch. #12: Thomas Aquinas, “One way of understanding God-Talk” (pp. 156-167)
- \*Dilthey, Wilhelm, “The Development of Hermeneutics” from *Dilthey: Selected Writings*, edited by H. P. Rickman [PDF]
- \*Wisdom, John, “The Meaning of Religious Language” from “Gods” in *Western Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by John Cottingham [PDF]
- \*Wittgenstein, Ludwig, “On Death and the Mystical” from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus in Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by John Hick [PDF]

### RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Quinn, Philip L. and Meeker, Kevin, eds., *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*:
  - \*Hick, John C., “Religious Pluralism and Salvation” [PDF]
  - \*Plantinga, Alvin, “Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism” [PDF]
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction*:
  - \*Ch. 9, Secs. 9.1-9.3: “The Problem of Religious Diversity” (pp. 190-203)

**Wks.15 & 16**

**Apr. 23rd, 25th, and 30th**

**Is God Dead?**

**Rational Responses and Reinterpretations  
of Religious Belief**

**TOPICS:**

- Agnosticism
- Atheism
- Secular Humanism
- Existentialism
- Postmodernism
- Fundamentalism

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

- Darwin, Charles, “Autobiography” from *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*, edited by Christopher Hitchens [PDF]
- Davies, Brian, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*:
  - Part I: “Philosophy and Religious Belief”
    - \* “Introduction” (pp. 17-24)
    - \*Ch. #3: Antony Flew, “The presumption of atheism” (pp. 36-41)
- \*Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*.
- Harriet A. Harris, “Fundamentalist Approaches to Religion” from *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Graham Oppy. [PDF]
- \*Nagel, Ernest, “A Defense of Atheism” from *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources*, edited by Paul Edwards and Arthur Pap [PDF]
- \*Nietzsche, Friedrich, “The Death of God and the Ascendency of the Will” from *Thus Spake Zarathustra in Western Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by John Cottingham [PDF]
- \*Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Existentialism is a Humanism” from *The Existentialist Tradition*, edited by Nina Langiulli [PDF]

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

- Marty, Martin, and Appleby, R. Scott, “An interim Report on a Hypothetical Family,” from *Fundamentalisms Observed*. [PDF]

**May 12<sup>th</sup> Final Papers Due Via Canvas**

**May 12<sup>th</sup> Post-Course Survey Available on Canvas [Due 5/31]**

# Course Requirements, Policies, and Resources

## 1. Readings and Class Participation

This course is a seminar, and as such, its success depends largely on the responsible preparation and active participation of all its members. *Familiarity with all assigned readings, and attendance and active participation in the twice-weekly seminar meetings are required. Students are expected to do all of the readings before class and come to class prepared with questions and comments on the material.*

Your grade for participation will reflect how often and substantively you contributed to both the online discussion forums and the in-class discussions, as well as the degree to which your contributions were constructive and generative of further response(s) from your fellow classmates. Failure to participate, or combative posturing, defamatory remarks, or statements that are off-topic may negatively impact your participation grade.

## 2. Final Grade Components

**20% - Seminar Participation and Engagement with the Course:** Keeping up with the assigned readings, posting discussion forum questions and comments, and active participation in the weekly seminar discussions.

**40% - Mid-term Essays (20% each):** Two short (*approximately* 5 pp. or 1250 words each) essays responding to a question selected from a list of topics distributed on Canvas.

**40% - Final Paper (including a written proposal and in-class roundtable presentations):** A final paper (*approximately* 12 pages or 3000 words) engaging the philosophic problem defined in the student's written proposal or subsequent revisions made in consultation with the instructor. *Topics must be approved by and developed in consultation with the instructor.*

## 3. Grading Standards

**A** = Outstanding, nearly flawless work; assignment(s) completed thoroughly; technically excellent in spelling, grammar, format, citations, etc.; excellent in writing style, presentation, organization, and clarity of philosophical analysis; evidence of real intellectual engagement with the course content; thorough grasp of the philosophical issues and connections among issues; and synthesis of individual elements into a broader narrative or analysis.

**B** = Good, generally satisfactory work; all aspects of assignment(s) completed thoroughly and competently; technically competent (though perhaps not perfect) in spelling, grammar, format, citations, etc.; adequate in writing style, organization, presentation and clarity of philosophical analysis; limited grasp of the philosophical issues and connections among issues.

*Continued on next page...*

**C** = Less than fully satisfactory work; assignment(s) not completed thoroughly or according to instructions; basic grasp of issues not always evident; more than occasional technical flaws in writing, presentation, organization, spelling, grammar, format, citations, etc.

**D** = Basic work of course (or assignment) not done; little effort evident.

**F** = Failure in all or virtually all of the above criteria.

#### **4. Weekly Discussion Questions**

**Each student is required to prepare and submit a question or comment for class discussion by noon on Wednesdays (starting with the second week of the class).** These questions should be posted to the weekly Canvas Discussion Forums and are intended to foster engagement with the course material and contribute to the student's participation grade.

#### **5. Major Written and Oral Assignments**

Satisfactory and on-time completion of several written assignments is required:

- **Two short mid-term essays (approximately 5 pp. or 1250 words):** These essays are intended to demonstrate familiarity with the readings and class discussions and to provide practice in philosophical analysis and argumentation.
  - **First Mid-term Essay (due via Canvas on Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>)** philosophically analyzing and critiquing one of the four classical arguments for the nature and existence of God (i.e., the Cosmological, Ontological, Teleological, and Moral arguments) covered during the first part of semester.
  - **Second Mid-term Essay (due via Canvas on Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup>)** on a topic focusing on Modules III (“The Varieties of Religious Experience”) and IV (“The Ethics of Religious Belief”) of the course, selected from a list of topics distributed in class.
- **A short, ungraded, written proposal of 1-2 pp. (due via Canvas on Sunday, April 14<sup>th</sup>)** defining a philosophic problem raised by the course content to be addressed in the student's final paper. Each proposal should include:
  - A brief explanation of the philosophical problem;
  - A brief statement of the paper's tentative thesis;
  - A brief sketch of the anticipated philosophical argument;
  - A preliminary list of major source materials; and
  - Identification of any anticipated problems or difficulties posed by the topic.

- **A final paper of approximately 12 pages (due via Canvas on Sunday, May 12<sup>th</sup>)** engaging the philosophic problem defined in the written proposal or subsequent revisions made in consultation with the instructor. The written proposal may be incorporated with revisions into the final paper. ***Students MUST obtain the instructor's approval of their proposed final paper topic.*** Students will be required to present and discuss their evolving paper topic during an in-class roundtable discussions on *March 14<sup>th</sup> and April 2<sup>nd</sup>* and update the class periodically during the remainder of the semester

## 6. Additional Oral and Written Assignments

- **Weekly submission of questions, comments, and reflections on each week's required readings:** These should be submitted by **noon on Wednesdays** on the weekly Canvas discussion forums.
- **Roundtable Discussion of Tentative Final Paper Topics** (tentatively, on *March 14<sup>th</sup> and April 4<sup>th</sup>*): Periodically during the latter half of the semester, students will be asked to discuss in class the topic of their final paper, their progress working on it, and any problems or difficulties they may be encountering.
- **Satisfactory and on-time completion** of other written or oral assignments, in-class presentations, and exercises that may be assigned on a week-to-week basis during the semester is required.

## 7. Submission of Written Assignments

- **IMPORTANT:** *Please include your name and your topic number (or title for final papers) on the first page of each essay and in the digital filename.*
- All assignment due dates and times are U.S./Canada Eastern Time.
- All written assignments should be submitted **via Canvas**.
- All written assignments should be submitted as **PDF** documents, double-spaced, with normal 1" margins and numbered pages. [Please do not submit documents in Google Docs or other formats.]
- *All direct and indirect quotations, paraphrases, and sources should be cited using the "Notes and Bibliography" system of the Chicago Manual of Style. See the quick reference guides at:*

- Chicago Style Introduction
- Chicago Manual of Style Citation Guide.
- Notes and Bibliography System – Sample Paper
- *All written assignments are subject to automated review for plagiarism and the use of generative artificial intelligence.* Students unfamiliar with academic writing, plagiarism, copyright, citation of sources, etc., should review the Code of Academic Integrity and seek additional assistance as needed from the Weingarten Learning Resource Center, the Marks Family Writing Center, or the Information Desk at Van Pelt Library.

## 8. Policy on Grading, Incompletes, and Extensions

- **IMPORTANT:** *All students in this course will receive a grade based on work submitted at the time assignments are due and should therefore submit even incomplete work by that time.*
- In fairness to your fellow students, yourselves, and the instructor, *no incompletes or extensions will be given in this course, except in truly extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of the student.*
- Students who have submitted work on time may, subject to the advance approval of the instructor and applicable University regulations, submit additional work relevant to the course, such as rewrites of the mid-terms or final papers, an additional paper, etc., for additional credit, which will be factored into their final grade along with all of their regular course work and grades.

## 9. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Your written work in this course should reflect your own understanding, synthesis, and analysis of the material. *Generative artificial intelligence (“generative-AI,” for short), including but not limited to tools such as ChatGPT, Bing, etc., may not be used to complete weekly discussion posts, mid-term essays, final papers or other assignments.* These tasks are designed to develop and evaluate *your own* understanding of and critical engagement with the course material and your ability to develop and articulate your own philosophical ideas and arguments. Hence, you may not submit any work produced by a generative AI program as your own. *Failure to disclose material generated by an AI program and identify the source (i.e., the AI tool) in your footnotes and bibliography will be considered a violation of the University’s Policy on Academic Integrity.*

## 10. Academic Integrity

- **IMPORTANT:** *All students in this course are required to familiarize themselves with and abide by the University's Code of Academic Integrity.*
- *All written assignments are subject to automated review for plagiarism and the use of generative artificial intelligence.*
- *All suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Center for Community Standards and Accountability (CSA) for adjudication.*
- *A confirmed violation of the Code of Academic Integrity will result in a grade of 'F' for the course.*

## 11. Writing Resources

- The Penn Marks Family Writing Center offers individual writing guidance and feedback, scheduled appointments, workshops, etc.
- The Weingarten Learning Resource Center is a valuable resource for students needing assistance with their research, writing, and preparation of papers.
- For brief guides to writing a philosophy paper, see:
  - "Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Paper," by Jim Pryor (NYU). [PDF]
  - "**Writing Philosophy Papers**," by John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Martin Fischer, from *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, 8th ed.* [PDF]
  - A sample student philosophy paper will also be available on Canvas. [PDF]
- Students needing additional guidance on reading philosophy or who want to improve their analytical, argumentative, and expository writing skills may find the following text helpful:
  - *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*, by Lewis Vaughn (Oxford, 2023, 3rd edition, pb.), ISBN #9780197751916.

- For a brief guide to developing, analyzing, and writing philosophical arguments, see:
  - *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Anthony Weston (Hackett, 2018, 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition, pb.), ISBN #9781624666544.

## 12. Getting Help

- **If you need help, ASK FOR IT!**  
There are many ways in which students in the this course can receive personal assistance, guidance, feedback on their work, etc., such as:
  - Email your instructor [sps@upenn.edu].
  - Participate in your instructor’s office hours [Tuesday drop-ins, after class, or make an appointment].
  - Submit weekly Canvas discussion forum questions and comments about the readings and lectures.
  - Participate actively in twice-weekly Seminar Meetings.
  - Follow up with your instructor regarding comments on mid-term essays and final paper proposals.
  - Submit the pre-/mid-/post-course Canvas surveys.
  - Contact one of the University Resources listed below or one of the Writing Resources listed above.

- **Course Action Notices:**

**Course Support Notices:**

Your instructor will use **Course Support Notices** – formerly Course Problem Notices -- to alert students who seem to be having trouble in the course. These notices also go to the student’s faculty advisor and school advising office. This is not intended to be a disciplinary or punitive measure; it is used to make sure that no one falls behind and that students get appropriate help and attention.

**Course Absence Notices**

You should use **Course Absence Notices** – formerly Course Absence Reports -- to inform your instructor when you will be absent from recitation because of medical issues, family emergencies, or other issues that necessitate missing class. Students can log in to the Course Action Notices system from **Path@Penn** and send a report to one or more instructors, indicating the number of days missed and the general reason for the absence. Students who submit Course Absence Notices are still responsible for following up with their instructor about any missed work. Course Absence Notices do not constitute “excuses.”

- **University Resources and Support Services**

There are a wide variety of University Resources designed to help and support students:

**Weingarten Learning Resources Center**

The Office of Learning Resources at the Weingarten Learning Resources Center (WLRC) offers individualized instruction and a variety of workshops to guide Penn students towards more efficient and effective academic study skills and strategies. Professional staff provide free and confidential instruction in areas such as time and project management, academic reading and writing, study strategies, exam preparation, and test-taking strategies. Online advising is available. To schedule an appointment with a Learning Instructor, call (215) 573-9235 or consult the WLRC website.

**Tutoring Center**

The Tutoring Center offers Penn undergraduates free, accessible, and convenient options to supplement their academic experience. Tutoring is available online, one-on-one, in groups, in workshops, and by appointment.

**Student Disabilities Services**

In compliance with Penn policy and equal access laws, your instructors are available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Except under unusual circumstances, requests for academic accommodations should be made during the first two weeks of the semester. Students must register with Student Disabilities Services (SDS) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

**Counseling & Psychological Services**

Students with concerns of a personal, emotional, social, or educational nature may visit or contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) for help and guidance free of charge.

**Wellness at Penn**

The Wellness at Penn initiative offers support, resources, and practical tools for students in the eight domains of wellness at Penn: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, environmental, financial, occupational, and spiritual.

**Technology Support for Students**

At Penn, every school, center, and University-affiliated organization has a dedicated IT Support Provider (also known as a Local Support Provider or LSP). Please follow [this link](#) for school-specific remote IT support guides and contact information. Students can also contact the [Tech Center](#), located on the ground floor of Van Pelt Library, for 24/7 desktop support [855-249-3243; [techcenter@upenn.edu](mailto:techcenter@upenn.edu)].

### **13. Electronic Devices**

Electronic devices may be used during class for personal note-taking or accessing digital texts, provided they are used in a manner that is not disruptive or distracting to other students or the instructor. No electronic devices, such as laptops, PDAs, cell phones, iPads, etc., may be used during class for other purposes, including, but not limited to, email, text messaging, social media, web browsing, Internet access, etc. ***Audio or video recording during class is not permitted under any circumstances without the explicit permission of the instructor.***

### **14. Food and Drink**

Where permitted by posted building regulations, students may bring food and drink into class, provided that it is handled and consumed in a manner that is not distracting to other students or the instructor.