

Debates about God

Religious Studies 200
cross-listed as
Catholic Studies 244
Tuesdays/Thursdays 10:10-11:40
990 W. Fullerton #2404
Spring 2002
DePaul University

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This course counts for Religious Dimensions/Patterns and Problems credit in the Liberal Studies Program.

A. DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

Does God exist or is "God" an illusion? Throughout history, has the world been a better or worse place because people have believed in God? How about today? Does religion do more good than harm or is it the other way around? Has the modern emergence of a more secular worldview been an improvement or a diminishment? Can we know or experience who or what "ultimate reality" is, or is "it" really beyond us? Is suffering and meaninglessness so pervasive that no traditional concept of a loving and powerful God can be affirmed credibly? What kinds of provocative and perhaps enduring answers have people given to these questions in the past? Has something changed as we've moved from ancient to modern times in terms of our own worldviews, so that the ways people used to think about God must be radically revised if not abandoned entirely? Or are there ways for modern women and men to become or remain religious without ceasing to be modern?

These are some of the compelling questions we will study in this course. While many of our questions are profound, our approach is very straightforward. *This course is about each of us making the commitment to read books and articles outside of class, to think and write about them intensively, and then to come to class and discuss their deepest ideas with each other.* Our course has been designed with the expectation and requirement that you will spend **at least six hours per week outside of class** preparing readings and assignments. Being in college is hard work, but hopefully it is work you enjoy doing, and take pride in doing well. You owe it to yourself, to others in the class, and to the integrity of the learning process to approach your academic work with sufficient seriousness. If you cannot make this commitment, you will not do very well and you should not remain in this class.

When you complete this course successfully:

1. You will have an enhanced working knowledge of some significant elements of religion, especially symbol, doctrine, experience, and systems of cosmic, social and individual order, as they are manifested in Christianity and Judaism, with some attention as well to Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.
2. You will have an enhanced capacity to make critical comparisons among religious traditions across time.
3. You will develop your capacity to analyze and reflect on the meaning of religious beliefs and practices.
4. You will develop your capacity to read and critically interpret religious and scholarly texts.
5. You will enhance your understanding of theology/religious reflection as a distinctive and valuable methodological approach to religious studies.
6. You will develop your written and verbal communication skills.

As part of the Liberal Studies (general education) Program, the course fosters **reflectiveness and value consciousness** by enabling students to encounter and come to understand significant reflections about what are arguably the most profound of human questions. By considering the theories and arguments of others in a variety of theistic traditions, students will discover lively "conversation partners" for developing their own value-based frameworks of meaning. The course fosters **critical and creative thinking**, encouraging students to construct plausible comparisons between the various sources considered, and to integrate areas of their knowledge and experience as they detect and describe patterns and analogies between the materials and figures considered, and the ethical, philosophical, religious and historical worldviews with which they are already familiar. The course develops a **multicultural perspective** by exploring and striving to achieve a critical understanding and appreciation of multiple and diverse theistic traditions in a variety of times and places.

B. STUDENT REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Reader's Notebook.** Purchase a notebook, which you will use only for this class. In it you will record summaries of key aspects of the readings and class discussions, questions and comments of your own, as well as responses to specific in-class and outside-of-class assignments I will make throughout the quarter. For example, at the end of a class session I might ask you write in your Reader's Notebook the single most important idea you remember from that session, or the single question you would most like to see answered. I might ask you, in preparation for the next class session, to select 3-6 of the most important excerpts from that next session's assigned reading, and record the page numbers of the excerpts and summaries of them, followed by commentary in your Reader's Notebook. I might ask you to sum up an entire reading with one word and then provide a rationale for choosing that word. I might ask you to take a stand on a particular issue, to pretend you are interviewing one of our authors, to pretend you are one of

our authors, to imagine a debate between two of our authors, etc. These and other strategies will be employed so that together we can delve deeply into the readings and engage in sustained and penetrating conversations about them. These short assignments will be given in class (so you must be in class to get the assignments) and all of your responses are to be written in the Reader's Notebook. You will be asked during class to share with the rest of us particular entries from your Reader's Notebook as a way of stimulating conversation. When we take **quizzes** during class, you will be allowed to use your own handwritten Reader's Notebook, but nothing else such as books or photocopied materials. Your Reader's Notebook, if well done, will also be very useful when you write your **papers**.

2. **Quizzes.** Written quizzes will be given on **Tuesdays** throughout the quarter. These will be designed to allow you to demonstrate competence in any/all of the six specific learning goals listed in part A of this Syllabus. **Missed quizzes cannot be made up, but I will delete your lowest quiz score in calculating your final grade.**
3. **Discussions in class.** Asking questions, raising concerns and offering your own ideas in discussions are crucial components of the learning process. The overall degree of intellectual engagement you demonstrate in the course will be assessed, focusing on the extent to which you are an active, informed, stimulating participant in class discussions.
4. **Papers.** You will be required to complete three papers, each no less than four but no more than six pages in length, double-spaced with one-inch margins and 12-point type. These will be designed to allow you to demonstrate competence in any/all of the six specific learning goals listed in part A of this Syllabus. Specific instructions for each paper will be distributed later in the quarter:

First paper assigned:	April 18	First paper due:	April 25
Second paper assigned:	May 16	Second paper due:	May 23
Third paper assigned:	June 6	Third paper due:	June 13

C. GRADING:

The total points possible for all regular work in the course (excluding extra credit) is 1000.

- Discussion in class will be worth a total of 160 possible points. *Students who arrive late for class, miss class or come to class without completing the readings will receive a lower score in this area.*
- Quizzes will be worth a total of 240 possible points, with the lowest quiz score deleted.
- Each of the three papers will be worth 200 possible points.

The final course grade will be determined according to the following chart:

<u>Total points accumulated</u>	<u>Final course grade</u>
930-1000	A
900-929	A-

870-899	B+
830-869	B
800-829	B-
770-799	C+
730-769	C
700-729	C-
670-699	D+
600-669	D
Under 600	F

D. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Please read the Academic Integrity Policy in the current *Student Handbook*. It describes violations of academic integrity, including plagiarism and cheating, noting that students who commit such violations are subject to sanctions such as (but not limited to) lowering a grade or failing the course. The policy states that students "must abstain from any violations of academic integrity and set examples for each other by assuming full responsibility for their academic and personal development..."

E. REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1989 [originally published 1927].
2. John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*. Polebridge Press, 1994 [originally published 1975].
3. Elie Wiesel, *Night*. Bantam Books, 1982 [originally published 1960].
4. John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*. Oneworld Publications, 1999.

These texts are available for purchase at DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus Bookstore. Also, they may be checked out for two hours at a time from the Richardson Library Reserve Desk.

5. Photocopied materials to be distributed in class.

F. SCHEDULE:

Tuesday April 2

Introduction and Syllabus.

Thursday April 4

St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book I pages 3-23 (photocopied material).

Tuesday April 9

St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book VII pages 111-132 (photocopied material).

Thursday April 11

St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book VIII pages 133-154 (photocopied material).

Tuesday April 16

Wiesel, *Night* pages 1-43.

Option for extra credit: An optional extra component of the first paper (worth up to 25 extra points) will be based on your attendance at Elie Wiesel's lecture, "Religion and Violence in the Context of Judaism," on **Wednesday, April 17 at 7:00 p.m.**, University of Chicago, Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, 5850 S. Woodlawn, Chicago. Attend the lecture, take careful notes in your Reader's Notebook, and be prepared to integrate this into your first paper.

Thursday April 18

Wiesel, *Night* pages 45-109.

FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED.

Tuesday April 23

Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust" (excerpts, photocopied material).

Thursday April 25

Discussion.

FIRST PAPER DUE.

Tuesday April 30

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* pages ix-25.

Thursday May 2

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* pages 26-42.

Tuesday May 7

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* pages 43-71.

Thursday May 9

Karl Marx, *On Religion* (photocopied material).

Tuesday May 14

Crossan, *The Dark Interval* pages 1-30.

Thursday May 16

Crossan, *The Dark Interval* pages 31-69.

SECOND PAPER ASSIGNED.

Tuesday May 21

Crossan, *The Dark Interval* pages 71-105.

Thursday May 23

Discussion.

SECOND PAPER DUE.

Tuesday May 28

Hick, *The Fifth Dimension* pages 1-38.

Thursday May 30

Hick, *The Fifth Dimension* pages 39-73.

Tuesday June 4

Hick, *The Fifth Dimension* pages 77-96, 110-128.

Thursday June 6

Hick, *The Fifth Dimension* pages 136-170.

THIRD PAPER ASSIGNED.

Thursday June 13

THIRD PAPER DUE in my office (990 W. Fullerton #4200) by noon.