

Religious Studies 412

FAITH, DOUBT, AND GOD

Fall 2015: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:05 - 11:20 a.m.

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Most people, whether believers or atheists, seem content with assumptions. They are happy to sleepwalk their way through life, preferring the status quo of their mental habits to the rigors of genuine inquiry. This course is not for such people. It is for those instead who find themselves ill at ease with so unexamined a life and who are eager for the opportunity to peel away their habitual patterns of thinking so as to reach, finally, a truly satisfying conclusion as to whether God really exists.

It should be understood in advance that the instructor is by no means neutral with regard to this question. He himself knows that there is a God and that others may come to share in this absolute certainty. The entire course is a single, extended argument designed to lead those who are serious and sincere to the same conclusions. Arguments on both sides of the issue will be carefully examined and due weight given to a wide variety of informed opinions. But the instructor will be endeavoring to show all the while that the truly intelligent person, who is prepared to use his entire apparatus of knowing in the fullest possible way, will inevitably come to see that God exists.

It should also be understood, however, that the instructor has no wish to browbeat or argue anyone down. He intends to listen carefully and to do his very best to be open, honest, and patient in his approach to discussion, and he strongly encourages his students to be just as rigorous in their interrogation of him as he is of them. Atheists, agnostics, and the merely diffident are warmly invited to join in this dialectical exchange, as are religious believers of various degrees of conviction, whether Christian or otherwise.

Requirements

1. *Reading.* Reading and thoughtful reflection are essential. The assigned text, *A Question of God: Readings in Philosophical Theology*, which is available as a download from the course Blackboard site, includes a number of very difficult and demanding selections, and it will therefore require persistent study and not just skimming. Students are expected to read the daily assignments very closely and carefully before coming to class. Those who are serious about their grades should plan to spend at least two hours of preparation for each and every class.

2. *Attendance*, both prompt and regular. A sign-up sheet will be circulated at the start of each class to record daily attendance; two unexcused absences are permitted, but a penalty of one letter grade is imposed for each additional unexcused absence. When quizzes (see below) are given, they will be administered immediately at the start of class, so that tardiness can take a further toll on one's grade; it is in any case a discourtesy to one's fellow students to be late, so please come on time or do not come at all.

Please note! Absences are always excused—and “make-ups” for missed quizzes or examinations are always given—for medical or other essential reasons, *but only if you promptly present a written excuse from a doctor or other responsible authority as soon as you return to class*. Waiting until the end of the semester to get serious about attendance is suicidal.

3. *Participation*. Students should be active participants. During the first part of each class, the instructor will highlight certain points in the day's assigned readings and occasionally introduce additional material, but there will always be ample time for discussion. Although there is no grade as such for class participation, constructive contributions on a regular basis can help raise a student's final course grade by as much as a full letter. And this includes posts on the course “Discussion Board” on Blackboard.

4. *Quizzes and examinations*. There will be six unannounced quizzes, based on the daily readings in *The Question of God* (30% of the final course grade), and two essay examinations, the questions for which will be distributed a week before the exams: a midterm (30%) and a comprehensive final (40%).

Schedule

Numbers in the following schedule refer to chapters in *The Question of God*; letters refer to sections of the Appendix. Numbered readings are required; lettered readings (in parentheses) are recommended.

		Aug. 20	Introduction
Aug. 25	<i>Question</i> , 1, 2 (A)	Aug. 27	<i>Question</i> , 3, 4, 5, 6 (B)
Sep. 1	<i>Question</i> , 7, 8, 9	Sep. 3	<i>Question</i> , 10, 11, 12
Sep. 8	<i>Question</i> , 13, 14, 15 (C)	Sep. 10	Open Discussion

Sep. 15	<i>Question, 16, 17, 18</i>	Sep. 17	<i>Question, 19 (D)</i>
Sep. 22	<i>Question, 20, 21 (E)</i>	Sep. 24	Video
Sep. 29	<i>Question, 22, 23 (F)</i>	Oct. 1	<i>Question, 24, 25</i>
Oct. 6	<i>Question, 26, 27</i>	Oct. 8	Review for Midterm
Oct. 13	Midterm Examination	Oct. 15	<i>Question, 28, 29</i>
Oct. 20	<i>Question, 30, 31, 32 (G)</i>	Oct. 22	Fall Break
Oct. 27	<i>Question, 33, 34, 35 (H)</i>	Oct. 29	<i>Question, 36, 37 (I)</i>
Nov. 3	<i>Question, 38, 39, 40 (J)</i>	Nov. 5	<i>Question, 41</i>
Nov. 10	Open Discussion	Nov. 12	<i>Question, 42, 43 (K, L)</i>
Nov. 17	<i>Question, 44, 45, 46 (M)</i>	Nov. 19	<i>Question, 47, 48</i>
Nov. 24	AAR Annual Meeting	Nov. 26	Thanksgiving
Dec. 1	Open Discussion	Dec. 3	Conclusion

Final Examination: Thursday, December 10 at 9:00 a.m.

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.; or by appointment.

The Question of God

Topics

Arguments

1-6, A, B

Definitions of God; Reason and Faith;
Atheism, Agnosticism, Theism, Fideism

7-15, C

Cosmological Arguments

16-18

Teleological Arguments

19, 20, D, E

Evolution

21-25, F

Consciousness

26, 27

Miracles

28-32

Evil

33-35, G, H

Moral Arguments

36, 37, I

Religious Experience

38-41, J

Ontological Arguments

42-46, K-M

Spiritual Method

47-48

Conclusion

