

Philosophy of Religion
Prof. Patrick Frierson

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Office Hours: T 11-12, W 1-3, and by appointment
Olin Hall East 124

Purpose: The primary purpose of this course is to help you develop your own thinking about religion and religious belief. In particular, we focus on proofs for and against the existence of God and various critiques and defenses of religious belief in general. This course should familiarize you with these arguments and teach you to think critically about them. In addition, you will develop your skills at reading philosophical texts and expressing your thoughts in papers and orally.

Assignments:

Class Participation: Active engagement in class discussion is a crucial part of this class. You should come to every class having read the material closely *more than once* and thought about it carefully. Participation will not count for any specific percentage of your grade, but I will adjust final grades based on participation.

5 short papers (400 word minimum)

On the syllabus, I have printed eight questions based on the readings. You must write short papers answering five of these. Because the papers will be discussed in class on the day in which they are due, there are **NO EXTENSIONS**. I will be glad to read papers turned in late, but they will receive an F. If you write more than five papers, I will only count the best five. Each short paper will count for 15% of your overall grade.

Procedure for turning in papers: Papers are due at 10 AM on the day for which they are listed. Papers must be emailed to me at frierspr@whitman.edu by this time. If you have trouble with your email, you may turn in a hard copy of your paper in class, but you must still email me a copy by the end of the day on the day on which the paper is due.

Papers must be emailed to me in .DOC (Word) format. If you have a Mac, be sure to save your paper in a PC friendly format. When you send you paper to me, you should save the paper with the following title format: [FirstName LastName PaperNumber]. For example, when I turn in the third paper on the syllabus, I will entitle the document "Patrick Frierson Paper 3.doc". Papers turned in with any other name will be considered late.

Final Paper (at least 1500 words)

For your final paper, you should develop and defend a standard for deciding questions of religious significance and use that standard to argue for or against belief in God, taking into account the strongest and most relevant objections to both your standard and your use of it. Your final paper must draw on at least two of the last four figures we discuss (Freud, Darwin/Dawkins/Dennett, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard), either as supports for your argument or challenges to it. You are also strongly encouraged to draw on material from earlier in the semester. This paper is **due** on the last day of class, **May 10**. The final paper is worth 25% of your overall grade.

Books:

David Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion Including Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Natural History of Religion*, trans. J. C. A. Gaskin.

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. Peter Gay.

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*.

Timeline and Paper Topics

Jan.	18	Introduction: Discussion of the relationship between faith and reason.
	19	Read Anselm's <i>Proslogion</i> , Preface and Chapters I-V. http://www.ccel.org/a/anselm/basic_works/hlm/TOC.htm (Choose the "Read Online" option and print out only the passages you need to read. YOU SHOULD BRING THESE PRINTOUTS TO CLASS.)

Mini-Paper #0 due (200-300 words): Carefully explain Anselm's argument (usually called the Ontological Argument) for the existence of God. Raise at least one specific objection to his argument. (I will read these papers, give comments, and tell you what grade you would have gotten, but these papers will not count towards your final grade, and do not count as one of your five papers.)

- 20 Read [Gaunilo's "In Behalf of the Fool" and Anselm's Apologetic](#). Also read at least two responses from [Criticisms of Anselm's Ontological Argument](#)" (I recommend Leibniz, Kant, Locke, or Spinoza. Choose the "Read Online" option and print out only the passages you need to read.) (If you want, you may also look at Aquinas's criticism at <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/gc.htm>, Book I, Chapters 10-11.)

Paper #1 due (400-600 words). Explain Gaunilo's argument against Anselm. (This will require briefly laying out Anselm's argument.) What is Anselm's response? Is there a way to salvage Anselm's argument? THIS PAPER IS REQUIRED.

- 25 Read [Gaunilo's "In Behalf of the Fool" and Anselm's Apologetic](#). Also read at least two responses from [Criticisms of Anselm's Ontological Argument](#)" (I recommend Leibniz, Kant, Locke, or Spinoza. Choose the "Read Online" option and print out only the passages you need to read.) (If you want, you may also look at Aquinas's criticism at <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/gc.htm>, Book I, Chapters 10-11.)

- 26 Hume's *Dialogues*, Introduction and chapter 1. For an online (and thus searchable) version of the dialogues, see

<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/dnr.htm>

Is Philo right that we should be skeptics? If not, why not? If so, is this a good basis for religion?

- 27 Hume's *Dialogues*, chapters 2-3.

Paper #2 due (400-600 words): What is Cleanthes's argument in chapter 2? (What conclusion is he trying to establish, what premises does he depend on, and how does he argue for the conclusion?) Does the argument work? Why or why not?

(In your paper, you should consider the objections of Philo and Demea. Which of these work the best? How might Cleanthes respond?)

- 1 Hume's *Dialogues*, chapters 4-5.

How would you answer Philo's question in chapter 4: if we stop and go no farther, why go so far?

- Feb. 2 Hume's *Dialogues*, chapters 5-8. Does Cleanthes's argument support Philo's alternative theories about the origin of the universe? Which theory is the most plausible? Why?

- 3 Hume's *Dialogues*, chapter 9. Is Demea's argument stronger than Cleanthes's? If so, why? If not, why not?

- 8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, First Part, Question 2, articles 1-3. Focus on Aquinas's second and third arguments for the existence of God. (The Aquinas can be found at:

<http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/FP/FP002.html#FPQ2A1THEP1>)

(For some tips on reading Aquinas, click [here](#). The only thing I would add, especially with respect to this reading, is that it is important to peruse the objections to Aquinas's positions and to read closely those that seem especially important.)

Paper #3 Due (400-600 words): Compare Cleanthes's argument, Demea's argument (in chapter nine), and one of Aquinas's five arguments for the existence of God. Of these, which is the strongest argument?

(Be sure to explain briefly how the argument that you choose as best relates to the others, and give specific objections to the arguments you reject, showing why the strongest argument is not susceptible to these objections, or not to the same degree.)

- 9 Hume, *Dialogues*, chapters 10-12.

(Also review Aquinas Q2, Article 3, Objection #1 and Reply.)

- 10 Debate between Cleanthes, Philo, Demea, Aquinas, and Anselm.

Paper # 4 due (400-600 words): What implications about God can we draw from the presence of evil in the universe? What is the best theist explanation of evil? (You should submit a draft of this by 10 am today, but you can submit a revised version by midnight

tomorrow.)

15 Hume, "Of Miracles." **Paper #5 due (400-600 words): Describe a miracle that would provide the best possible proof-by-miracle of God's existence. Would this miracle be sufficient to show that God exists? Why or why not? (A draft of this paper is due today, but you may submit a revised version by midnight tomorrow.)**

16 Hume, "Of Miracles."

17 [Kant's Critique of Practical Reason](#), pp. 92-100 (focus on pp. 92-93).

Think about what the highest good is for Kant and why it is a necessary object of the faculty of desire."

22 Kant's *Critique*, pp. 103-111, 115-116 (focus on 103-105).

Paper #6 due (400-600 words): What is Kant's argument for the existence of God? (If you want, you might also discuss how Kant establishes the attributes of God.) Raise at least one objection to Kant's argument. How might he respond? (You should submit a draft of this paper to me by 10 AM today, but you may submit a revised version by midnight tomorrow.)

23 Other arguments for the existence of God. We have looked at several important arguments for the existence of God. Are there any that we missed? Check out Peter Kreeft's 20 arguments for the existence of God at http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/20_arguments-gods-existence.htm#18. Which of the arguments here that we didn't discuss is most worthy of consideration?

24 Bertrand Russell, "Why I am not a Christian."

(http://www.luminary.us/russell/not_christian.html)

Mar. 1 Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief." (<http://ajburger.homestead.com/files/book.htm#ethics>)
(Also review Aquinas Q2, Article 3, Objection #2 and Reply.)

Paper #7 due (400-600 words): Write a dialogue about religious belief between Clifford, Demea, and at least one other philosopher we have studied this semester.

2 William James, "The Will to Believe." (<http://ajburger.homestead.com/files/book.htm#will>)

3 Pascal's Wager (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pascal/pensees.iv.html>, focus on §233)

8 Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" available at
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2215239> (print from .pdf).

You might also check out Plantinga's article, "Intellectual Sophistication and Basic Belief in God," at <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/3truth03.html>.)

9 Review/Preview.

Paper #8 due (500-1000 words): What reasons do Pascal, James, and Plantinga give to believe in God? Which of these provides a more effective argument for faith in the light of Clifford's objections? What objections can be articulated against the best of these three philosophers?

10 Review/Preview.

Spring Break

29 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, pp. 5-25.

30 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, pp. 25-50

April 31 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, pp. 51-71

5 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 100-103, 137-189. Also review Aquinas's proofs for (and against) the existence of God:

<http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/FP/FP002.html#FPQ2A1THEP1>

6 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 190-240 (Chapter 5). **Also read this article from the NYTimes:**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/04/magazine/04evolution.t.html?ei=5090&en=43cfb46824423cea&ex=1330664400>

7 Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 241, 245-54, 259-267, 298-99, 308-309, 315-336. (This selection includes much of chapters six and eight and a little from chapter seven.)

12 **Undergraduate Conference (no class)**

13 TBA

- 14 TBA
- 19 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part Three (“What is Religious?”)
<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/beyondgoodandevil3.htm>
Focus on what Nietzsche’s view of the theists we have read this semester would be, and of other theists. Come to class with a 2-3 sentence Nietzschean description of one of the theists we have read, or of some other specific theist.
- 20 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part Three (“What is Religious?”)
<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/beyondgoodandevil3.htm>
Focus on what Nietzsche’s view would be of Freud and the neo-Darwinians. Come to class with a 2-3 sentence Nietzschean description of Freud.
- 21 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part Five, sections 186-7, 198-203
<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/beyondgoodandevil5.htm>
 Optional: *On the Genealogy of Morals*. (The whole book is an expansion of Part Five of *BGE*, but you might particularly check out Book Two, sections 16-25, for something more religious).
<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/genealogytofc.htm>).
- 26 Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Preface and Chapter One.
- 27 Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Chapter Two.
- May 28 Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Chapters Two-Three
- 3 Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Chapter Three and Appendix, And “The Moral.”
- 4 Kierkegaard catch-up and review.
- 5 Course catch-up and review/Paper workshop.
- 10 **Debate: Should you believe in God? (Final Papers Due in class.)**