

SYLLABUS-IN-PROGRESS

Religious Studies 3MM3 (Fall 2007)

Skepticism, Atheism, and Religious Faith

This syllabus is posted at <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/danahol/3mm3> and is also accessible by way of my home page (see below) and the Dept. of Religious Studies website. It will be updated periodically, and students in the class are asked to consult it regularly during the semester.

updated November 25, 2007

CLASS MEETINGS: Mondays, 8:15-10 p.m., Building T13, Room 125 | [campus map](#)

TUTORIAL MEETINGS:
Laura Lee Nimilowich's group: Mondays, 7-8 p.m., Building T13, Room 123.

Dana Hollander's group: Mondays, 7-8 p.m., Building T13, Room 125

INSTRUCTOR:
Dana Hollander, [Department of Religious Studies](#), University Hall 109. ☎ (905) 525-9140, ext. 24759* ✉ danahol@mcmaster.ca*
🏠 <http://univmail.cis.mcmaster.ca/~danahol/>

*in your phone and e-mail messages, please let me know how I can reach you by phone

Office Hours: Thursdays, 5-6 p.m., or by appointment

TEACHING ASSISTANT:
Laura Lee Nimilowich, [Department of Religious Studies](#), University Hall B117. ✉ nimiloll@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: Mondays, 5:30-6:30 p.m.



"I will suppose," Descartes wrote, that "some malicious demon . . . has employed all his energies in order to deceive me."

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by [Joost Swarte](#), from the *New Yorker* (Nov. 20, 2006), used with permission

[Course Description](#) / [Course Readings](#) / [Course Requirements](#) | SCHEDULE: [September](#) / [October](#) / [November](#) / [December](#)

Course Description and Objectives

In this course, we will read some key works in modern Western philosophy and religious thought that propose different ways of conceiving God and approaching religion. We will begin with Descartes, whose philosophy helped establish a tradition in which the task of thinking about God is directly related to questions concerning the nature of knowledge and to confronting the challenge of skepticism. We will then

look at some decisive challenges to that tradition: Immanuel Kant identifies God not as something to be known theoretically, but links the idea of God to the question of morality or practical knowledge, whereas Rudolf Otto, Martin Buber, and Abraham Joshua Heschel, each in his own way, determine religion as an experience wholly unlike knowledge: Otto sees it as an experience of something "non-rational"; Heschel* conceives of God as a "question" posed to us; and Buber sees it as a "relation" or "dialogue" between an "I" and a "Thou."

*A highlight of the course will be attendance of McMaster's annual Goldblatt Lecture in Jewish Studies on October 22. In honor of the centenary of Abraham Joshua Heschel's birth, [Susannah Heschel](#), a professor of Jewish Studies and Religion from Dartmouth College, will be speaking about her father's work and legacy.

A core objective of this class is to develop skills of close reading, textual analysis, and strong writing. Our in-class work on the texts we are reading and the writing assignments are designed for you to use and improve those skills; the midterm and final exams consist of open-book essay questions that require you to apply those skills. The course is structured in a way that encourages students to approach their education as a process that both requires and rewards active engagement. Because the course presupposes that successful education requires the active, informed participation of students, the course requires participants to complete assigned readings prior to the course meeting at which they will be discussed, to attend all sessions, and to participate actively in course and tutorial meetings. **Preparation for, attendance at, and participation in course and tutorial meetings are required and will count toward the final grade.**



Course Readings

You can generally obtain these in a number of ways - see details for each title on the syllabus.

- **Books** for this course have been ordered with [Titles](#) (visit the "Tank": TSH B203). In addition to the books that contain course readings, I am asking you to purchase two writing reference books:
 - Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 4th ed. (2004) (required) | [companion website](#)
 - Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources. A Student Guide* (1998) (recommended)
- All the readings and reference works are also on **reserve** at Mills Library. Look up the [Mills Library reserve lists](#) under "Hollander" in MORRIS.
- A **coursepack** containing some of the readings for October 15 and after is available from Custom CourseWare at [Titles](#). However, since it is much cheaper to make personal copies of readings from the books on reserve than to buy the coursepack (this would cost you about \$3.20 as opposed to the coursepack price of \$18.95, which includes a hefty copyright fee that the bookstore is obliged to pay), I encourage you to do the former. Only a limited number of coursepacks have been ordered in advance; if they are no longer in stock, you can order one on a "raincheck" basis, which will be ready in 2 days' time - please plan ahead to ensure you can prepare the texts in time for our in-class work on them.

At times you may be asked to consult or make your own copy from a book on reserve.

You *must* have your own copy of all the texts to be discussed--with the same pagination as the edition selected for the class--whether in book or xeroxed form, so that you can mark them as you read and be prepared to refer to specific passages in class and tutorial, and when you write the exams.



Course Requirements

- One **Text Summary** of a selection from the reading (2-3 pages)
- One **Text Preparation** (2-3 pages) on the assigned readings for Oct. 15, ~~Oct. 22~~, Nov. 5, Nov. 12, Nov. 19, or Nov. 26, to be handed in at the end of the class session on the day we are discussing the selection they are on (specific assignments will be posted).

The purpose of the Text Summaries and the Text Preparation is (1) to encourage you to read carefully and reflect on issues that come up in the reading, so that you are in a position to participate knowledgeably and actively in class and tutorial; and (2) to give you feedback on your writing and on working with primary texts, in preparation for writing the exam essays for this class.

In preparing these and other written assignments, you are encouraged to use the resources of the [Writing Clinic at the Center for Student Development](#), and to consult the writing guides by Hacker and Harvey.

- **Attendance** is mandatory, since participating in in-class work is crucial to successful completion of this course. If you need to be absent from a class session, please notify one of us, preferably by e-mail, and be sure to ask a classmate to fill you in on what you missed.
- **Participation** includes: reading the material carefully ahead of time and raising points and questions about it in class and tutorial, taking part in in-class group assignments, communicating with the instructor and TA outside of class, etc.
- **Midterm Exam** and **Final Exam** will consist of essay questions involving textual analysis and will be open-book.

Depending on class size and on whether one or two Text Preparations will be assigned, **grades** will be based on Written Summary (10%), Text Preparation (15%), Attendance/Participation (20%), Midterm Exam (25%), Final Exam (30%). Failure to write any of the assignments or examinations, or 4 unexcused absences from class, constitute sufficient grounds for earning an "F" in the class.

McMaster University has a strict policy concerning **Academic Integrity**: "Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1. Plagiarism, e.g., the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. 2. Improper collaboration in group work. 3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations."

Please let me know if you have any questions on how this policy applies to your work for this course.

Privacy of Information. Some of the communications among the instructor, the TA(s), and the students in this course will be over e-mail and on the course website. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names and e-mail addresses may become apparent to all other students in the same course. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

You are advised to **retain copies** of any written work you submit for this class, and all your research notes, until you have received an official grade.



SCHEDULE

At certain points in the course it may make good sense to modify the schedule outlined below. The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course and will notify students accordingly (in class, by e-mail to participants, and by updating this online syllabus).

September 10

INTRODUCTION

September 17

DESCARTES: Skepticism and the Existence of God

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637) parts 1-4; *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) 1-2 [book available for purchase/on reserve]

[Text Summary 1](#) due from students with last names beginning in A-I



September 24

Meditations 2 and 3

[Text Summary 2](#) due from students with last names beginning in J-R



October 1

Meditations 3 and 5

Supplementary: Bernard Williams, chap. 5 ("God") of *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (1978) [book on reserve]

[Text Summary 3](#) due from students who did not prepare Text Summary 1 or 2



October 15

RUDOLF OTTO: Religion as Experience of the "Non-Rational"

The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational (1917), trans. John W. Harvey, chaps. 1-5 (pp. 1-30), 8 (pp. 50-59) [coursepack / book on reserve / book available for purchase]

[Text Preparation 1](#) due from students in Group 1



October 22

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL: Religion as a "Question from God"

Between God and Man, chaps. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 21, 23, and 40 (selections date from 1951 to 1958) [coursepack / book on reserve / book available for purchase]

"Holy Deeds" [CBC Radio Documentary, 2007; approx. 30 min.] -

<http://audio.mcmaster.ca:8888/relst3mm3/> (click on "holydeeds"; user name and password to be

Lillian and Marvin Goldblatt Lecture in Jewish Studies

[Susannah Heschel](#) (Dartmouth College)

"Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Reflections on the Life and Thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel"

McMaster Student Centre, 3rd Floor, CIBC Hall, 8 p.m.

See [poster](#) here. Public Reception to follow.

~~Text Preparation 2 due from students in Group 2.~~ **ASSIGNMENT CANCELLED.**

 [Midterm Exam Preparation Sheet](#) (link removed)



Friday, October 26, 12:00-1:00 p.m. (or 1:30 p.m., depending on student interest)

Optional Drop-In Review Session in preparation for midterm exam

Chester New Hall 207



October 29

MIDTERM EXAM, 7-9 p.m.



November 5

finish discussion of Heschel

KANT: Religion and Morality

Immanuel Kant, selection from *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), trans. Mary Gregor [included in coursepack; or copy from *Practical Philosophy* on reserve: pp. 236-55]: Read closely Part III ("On the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason") and Part IV ("The Immortality of the Soul as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason"); begin reading Part V ("The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason").

[Text Preparation 3](#) due from students in Group 3.

Supplementary:

Emil Fackenheim, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion" (1985) in *The God Within* [book on reserve].

[German edition](#) of *Critique of Practical Reason*.



November 12

finish Kant: read closely Part V.

BUBER: Religion and Dialogue

Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923) [book available for purchase/on reserve]: First Part: all (but skim 67-73); Second Part, pp. 100-110

[Text Preparation 4](#) due from students in Group 4.

Supplementary: Tamra Wright, "Buber, Martin." Article in [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (1998) [online and in the Reference Section of Mills Library]



November 19

No tutorial today - class meeting takes place at 7-9 p.m. in Building T13, Room 125

I and Thou, Third Part: all (but skim 131-43)

[Text Preparation 5](#) due from students in Group 5.



November 26

Martin Buber, "Religion and Philosophy" from *Eclipse of God* (1952) [essay in coursepack / book on reserve]

see also my list of [Errata](#) for this translation

NEW [Text Preparation 6](#) due from anyone who has not yet submitted a Text Preparation.

NEW [Final Exam Preparation Sheet](#) posted and distributed in class.



December 3

TBA



NEW **FINAL EXAM - Wednesday, December 5, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Ivor Wynne Centre, Main Gymnasium (6)**

