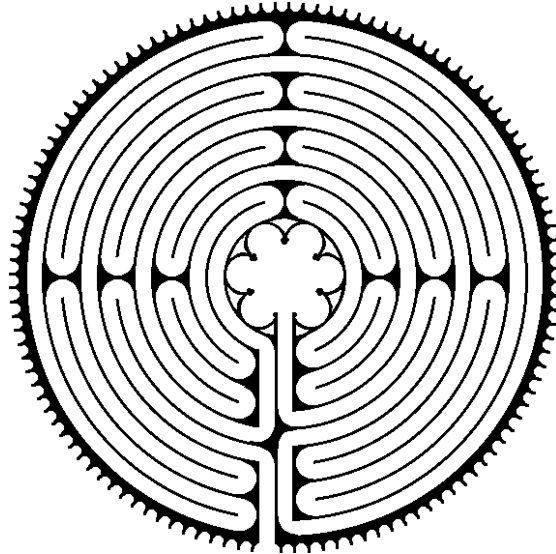


# PROBLEMS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

RELI 3302/PHIL 3302

Southern Methodist University

Fall 2018



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## OBJECTIVES

This course is designed for students with little or no background in the academic study of religion or philosophy, though it is an intermediate course with a commensurate workload. It has three primary objectives:

First, the course seeks to provide you with an introduction to the principal questions and modes of argument that have shaped the Philosophy of Religion as an academic discipline and to provide you with an opportunity to explore this mode of inquiry as a resource for reflection concerning the nature of religion. Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate a familiarity with the questions philosophers have posed about religious practices and beliefs and modes of argument that those philosophers have employed through exams, papers, presentations and class discussions. Demonstrating these skills fulfills the religious studies department's objective and the SMU UC requirement

that students will exhibit basic facility with the methods of inquiry about religious beliefs and practices. In addition, we will work to identify ethical issues within a particular domain, and to explain and evaluate responses to those issues in terms of both their factual and ethical presuppositions.

Second, this course is designed to build your skills in the analysis of complex argumentation and your abilities to discuss matters critically, curiously, and civically. We will work to develop your proficiency in the analysis of texts, and your skills in speaking, writing and engaged listening, especially in dialogical formats. Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate the ability to understand and analyze written arguments through exams and papers, and to engage those arguments with others through dialogue. Exhibiting these skills fulfills the religious studies department's objective that students will demonstrate strong writing and analytical skills.

Third, the course will question the suppositions of traditional Philosophy of Religion, especially in regard to what texts/materials are considered "philosophical." We will explore what purposes philosophy might serve, and also what role it might play in popular culture such as films, television and other forms of mass media. Using these sources, we will work together to explore new ways of formulating traditional questions within this field of thought and to expand the traditional canon of texts considered as "philosophy." Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate an ability to analyze popular culture using philosophical concepts through exams, papers and discussions.

Finally, students who successfully complete the course will:

- demonstrate strong writing and analytical skills through written assignments.
- demonstrate basic facility with philosophy as a method of inquiry about religious beliefs and practices through papers and exams.
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- develop a basic familiarity with important topics in the history of philosophy including a familiarity with the major positions and their supporting arguments.
- develop techniques of formal reasoning.

## **PROCEDURE**

The course is scheduled to meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 - 1:50 in Hyer 107. The course will combine presentations from Dr. DeTemple with class discussions and student presentations.

In addition, Dr. DeTemple will be available for conference and consultations outside of class. Dr. DeTemple will hold office/discussion hours on Wednesdays from 1:30 - 2:30 at the Starbucks in Fondren, and is also available by appointment.

## **GRADING**

**Class Participation.** Attendance, participation in class discussions, daily reading and critical reflection are essential components of this course, and will count for 30% of your final grade. All of the assigned readings are to be completed on schedule. Because of the nature of the readings, each day's reading assignment is relatively brief, but it is absolutely essential that you come to class with the reading complete and prepared to engage actively in class discussion (9% of your final grade).

As a component of the classroom participation requirement for this course, all students are required to submit to the weekly discussion section on Canvas. An assignment sheet explaining this requirement is attached to the syllabus (9% of your final grade).

All students will also complete the Open Mind Viewpoint Diversity app available to them on Canvas before September 4 (2% of your final grade).

In addition, all students will choose two days on which they will be responsible for a "2-minute movie" made in response to a particular author or authors. Students will be designated discussion leaders on these days, presenting their movie to the class and answering questions. More on this at the end of the syllabus (10% of your final grade).

**Field Papers.** Everyone will write three field papers. These papers, 2-3 pages in length, will require you to apply philosophical concepts and arguments to "real world" situations. These are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus and will comprise a total of 30% (3X10%) of your final grade.

**Exams.** The remaining 40% of the grade for the course will be based on two in-class examinations, a mid-term and final of equal length, each of which will be worth 20% of the final grade.

**Please keep in mind that you as a student, and I as your instructor, are bound by the SMU Honor Code. Always cite your sources in papers (even drafts!), and be sure that work on quizzes, exams and presentations is your own, without unauthorized assistance. If I suspect that you have plagiarized or received unauthorized**

assistance on a paper or project, I must give you the choice of appearing before SMU's Judicial Board, or accepting a Faculty Disposition, usually failure in the class.

PLEASE talk to me if you have any questions about citations or the limits of acceptable assistance. I would much rather talk with you than enter into a judicial process.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

There is one required text available for purchase at the SMU Bookstore:

Michael Peterson, et al. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

**Additional readings** will be available on Canvas <https://www.smu.edu/OIT/Services/Canvas>  
Your user ID is your SMU ID number and your password is your usual SMU password. If you can't get in to Canvas, let Dr. DeTemple know immediately.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Unit 1: Introductions: thinking about religion and religious experience

- \*What can we know about the nature of the divine?
- \*What aspects of an experience might make us consider it "religious"?
- \*How can religious experiences be authoritative, and for whom? Can they be considered a kind of "proof" for the existence of God?
- \*Are religious experiences fundamentally private, or can we better understand them as social or communal in some respects?
- \*What is the relationship between religion, experience and culture?

### **Readings**

**August 21 - Introductions**

**August 23** - Peterson, et al. 5-32

**August 28** - Peterson, et al. 35-58

**August 30** - Peterson, et al. 59-78, 86-89

Maya Angelou *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* [excerpt] (Canvas)

## Unit 2: Divine Questions: arguments concerning the attributes and existence of God

- \*What are the traditional philosophical "proofs" for the existence of God?
- \*Are these arguments helpful, or even desirable, for a life of faith?
- \*What characteristics or attributes must something have in order to be considered "divine"?
- \*What alternative conceptions of the divine are possible?
- \*How do concepts of the divine function in society? What effect do they have in the world?

### Readings:

**September 4-** Peterson, et al. 229 - 243

*Open Mind app due*

**September 6-** Peterson, et al. 244 -267

*Dialogue in Class - Rationality and Religion*

**September 11-** Peterson, et al. 127 - 147

**September 13** - Peterson, et al. 148- 176

**Field Paper #1 assigned in class**

**September 18-** Peterson et al 177-196

**September 20-** Peterson, et al. 203- 227

"Simpsons" in class

**Field Paper #1 due in class**

## Unit 3: The Soul and Life After Death

- \*What do we mean by the word "soul?" How is the soul related to other aspects of human identity, especially the body?
- \*Are notions of life after death coherent? How do they relate to notions of the divine?
- \*What alternatives can we imagine?

### Readings:

**September 27-** Peterson, et al. 485 - 512

**September 29-** Peterson et al 513 - 522; Charles Taliaferro "Why We Need Immortality"; Robin Le Poidevein "Should the Atheist Fear Death?" (Canvas)

"Simpsons" in class

## October 2 - MIDTERM EXAM

### Unit 4: Divine Action in the World: Providence, Miracles and the Problem of Evil

- \*How does the idea of an omniscient and omnipotent God affect ideas about human freedom?
- \*How is the divine involved in human history?
- \*What do we mean by the word "miracle"? Can we ever have "proof" of a miracle?
- \* What would the existence of miracles show us about the nature of God?
- \*How can we understand the nature of evil and suffering in the world?
- \*Does the existence of evil constitute an argument against the existence of a loving God?

#### Readings:

**October 4-** Peterson, et.al., 269 - 306  
**Fall Break**

**October 11-** Peterson, et al. 451 - 483

**October 16-** Peterson, et al. 309 - 337, Peterson, et al. 338 - 356

**October 18-** Peterson, et al. 357 - 373

**October 23 -** Peterson, et al. 374-389

***Dialogue in Class - Capital Punishment***

**October 25 -** Film (in class) *Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero*

**Field Paper #2 assigned in class**

### Unit 5: Religion, Science, Philosophy, Ethics and Diversity in the "Modern" World

- \*What do we mean by the word "truth"? The word "science"?
- \*What different types of knowledge -and methods of knowing- do we find in science and religion?

- \*Do the insights of religion and science compete? Can they be harmonized? Are they culturally relative? How do they relate to ethics?
- \*How can we make sense of the existence of so many competing systems of religious truth?
- \*Do we need religion in order to be ethical?
- \*What does philosophy of religion as a discipline contribute to the "modern" world? What, if anything, does it prevent or enable?

## Readings

**October 30** -Peterson, et al. 393 - 413

**November 1** - Peterson, et al. 414 - 449

**Field Paper #2 Due**

**November 6** - Peterson, et al. 91 - 124; Film, in class, Bill Moyer's *Faith and Reason*

**November 8** - Peterson, et al. 531 - 564, Nancy Murphey "Theology and Scientific Methodology" (Canvas)

**November 13** - Peterson, et al. 565 - 587; Daniel Dennett "Science and Religion." (Canvas) "

"Simpsons" in class

**November 15** - Peterson, et al. 591 - 621

**Field Paper #3 assigned in class**

*Dialogue in Class — Human Cloning*

**November 20** - No class, AAR

Watch video *Beyond Sacred* (Canvas); Interview your partner for closing exercise

**November 27** Peterson, et al. 623 - 651; Sallie King "Religion and a Global Ethic" (Canvas)

**November 29** - Last things/Closing Exercise

**Field Paper #3 Due**

**Final Exam: Monday December 10, 12:30 - 2:00 Hyer 107**

# CANVAS POST GUIDELINES

## Problems in the Philosophy of Religion

Fall 2018

As a component of the classroom participation requirement for *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, all students are required to submit a weekly entry on the Discussion Board portion of our Canvas site. While I expect you to post weekly (between the end of class Friday and the beginning of class the following Friday) I will drop the lowest two grades, and do not expect you to post until the end of the first week of class (beginning after class Thursday, August 23rd).

Each entry should be about 300-500 words in length, and should deal directly with issues raised by the course, either in the readings or classroom discussions. Your writing should be well organized, have a clear topic, and use evidence from the reading or discussion to support your opinions about the topic you choose. Rather than simply summarizing the readings or discussions, good entries will engage the materials, asking new questions or making connections between readings and/or ideas (this is the heart of critical reflection as a practice). Your writing will be available for your peers in the class to see, and you are welcome and encouraged to comment on what they say.

All discussion entries will be graded as superior (4 points), entirely satisfactory (3 points), adequate (1 or 2 points) or unsatisfactory (no credit). You can see your grade in the online grade book section of the Canvas site.

This is not meant to torture you, but is designed to give you a forum for working out your own thoughts on the materials as you come into contact with them. It is also intended to give you a place to practice thinking and writing about the issues the course raises before coming to class discussions or writing exams.



## **Guidelines for the Two-Minute Movie Exercise**

### **Problems in the Philosophy of Religion**

#### **Fall 2018**

Throughout the semester, every student will choose two reading assignments for which he or she will be especially responsible. Students will prepare movies, not to exceed two minutes, on the readings they have been assigned and show these movies to the class. They will then serve as well-informed discussion leaders for the remainder of the class session.

To prepare your movie, go to Nawmal (see below for instructions on using the class subscription), or any other website that allows you to make original movies, or create a movie on your own with friends. Once you have completed your movie (regardless of format), you will need to send the link to Dr. DeTemple so she may show it in class. The style of your movie may vary, and I encourage you to be creative. Good movies, however, will invariably show an in-depth reflection on the text to which you are responding, and also a critical analysis of that text. If responding to Hick's proposition of "replicas" in our exploration of life after death, for example, you will need to acknowledge his theory, and then explain why you believe it solves the problem at hand, and/or where it fails. Good movies will also voice questions that the readings raise. In the case of Hick's "replicas," this may be a problem of continuity or optimal physical states, etc.

In other words, I am asking you to do what any good director/writer does: become intimately familiar with an issue, take a stand either in favor or opposed to it (or firmly on the middle ground), and be able to express your opinion concisely and intelligently through the characters you choose. You will be graded on the accuracy, clarity, and intellectual depth of your movie and presentation of it to the class.

#### **To use Nawmal:**

- 1) Go to <https://license-service.nawmal.io/api/v2/inbound/step/trl-59SiidPq6mP3idi1h4su>
- 2) Download the Nawmal software. Your user name is smu18 Password is thing-brush-kitchen
- 3) Once into the program, pick your setting and your characters, type in your script, and animate!
- 4) Be sure to send Dr. DeTemple a link to the movie at least an hour before class.

#### **Some hints to help you get started:**

1) "Yes, but..." is a useful phrase in any intellectual or academic debate. You can use it to prove proficiency in and knowledge of an argument, and then to raise thoughtful objections to that argument.

2) Find a concrete example. Can you think of a situation in which the author's proposition will not work? One in which it is particularly strong or useful? Putting things into context is often very persuasive.

3) Follow the proposition through. If taken to its logical conclusion(s), where might the author's proposition(s) lead? Are there any consequences he or she does not note or intend?

Finally, don't be afraid to have a little fun with this. "Sin boldly," as Martin Luther would say.

## How to Read Theory/Philosophy

(based in part on information from <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~jklumpp/comm652>)

### The Theory on Reading Theory:

#### 1. Read theory in 2 different modes

**Read theoretical systems.** Theories assume a perspective and elaborate that perspective. Try to understand that perspective comprehensively. Think of it as a system that allows you to see things a certain way once you understand it enough to use it as a kind of intellectual platform. Try to see and describe the world the way the theoretical system does.

**Read lines of inquiry.** Theoretical work proceeds one problem at a time. Theorists consider problems they see in the theory and work to address those problems. Learn to follow this work. Learn to see the reason why the problem is significant to the theory, and to understand what happens when the problem is successfully addressed.

#### 2. Techniques when reading theory

##### Get beneath the reading to see:

**the mind that generates it.** Theory is written by an author. Try to understand the strategies that the author is using to construct the theory.

**the action performed with it.** Theories allow us to do things. Try to understand what the power of a theory is. Also try to see the limits of that power, the things we cannot do with a theory.

### **Read abstractly and concretely simultaneously**

**You must read abstractly.** Theory involves concepts that must be related to each other. You must be able to work with concepts as abstract.

**But make your reading empirical, too.** Keep working your abstract understanding against the events of the world around you.

### **3. Make notes of the building blocks of theory**

- **Vocabulary.** What are the key terms? the key concepts?
- **How are the concepts related to each other?** How does the theory construct accounts?
- **To what does the theory attend?** All theories construct accounts which emphasize some things and ignore other things judged important by other theories. What are those choices?
- **What does the theory do?** All theories have problems they seek to solve or powers that they permit us to exercise. What are these?
- **What are the key strategies the author uses to bring the theory to life?** How does he or she perceive the world in terms of the theory? How does she or he write about the world using the theory?

Other Practical Advice:

#### **Orient yourself:**

Read the introductory paragraph, the section headings, and then the last four sentences. This should give you an overview of the argument, or at least some key words the author uses to make his or her argument. If you know what's important, you know what to look for later.

#### **Go back and fill in the blanks:**

Figure out what problem each section addresses (probably related to the section heading) and how this relates to the conclusion.

#### **Don't let the big words get you down.**

Theorists love to use gigantic words to convey their thoughts. Sometimes, you can read around them. Other times, you'll need to look them up. Often you can correctly guess the meaning of the word from its context.

## University Policies of which You Should Be Aware

\* Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or [www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp](http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

I am happy to work with you if you have a disability, but you need to let me know so we can find the best way for you to succeed in this class. Please do not suffer in silence!

\* Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class **should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.** (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

\* Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. **It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.** (University Undergraduate Catalogue)