

Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy 296 – Spring 2023
Denison University

Basic course information

Instructor: Dr. Justin Mooney
Email: mooneyj@denison.edu
Office: Knapp 205K
Office hours: TBD

Course dates: Jan 17 – May 9
Days: Tuesdays and Thursdays
Time: 10:00am – 11:20am
Room: Barney-Davis 212

The best way to communicate with me outside of class is via the email address listed above. I will do my best to answer emails within 48 hours.

Course description and objectives

Is there a God, and if there is, what is God like? Could all religions be true, or are they contradictory? What happens when we die? Do we go to heaven? Are we reincarnated? Have any miracles occurred in history, and if so, are they evidence for any particular religion? This class will explore arguments for and against widely held religious beliefs in both Eastern and Western religions.

As we think through topics such as these, we will be working to develop and hone philosophical skills such as analyzing concepts, constructing and critiquing arguments, and evaluating philosophical theories.

The objectives for this course are the following:

1. Learn some of the arguments and views that philosophers have defended on various subjects in the philosophy of religion.
2. Practice the skill of evaluating an argument for validity and soundness.
3. Write and revise a philosophical paper arguing for or against a philosophical thesis on a topic in the philosophy of religion.

Relevant resources

Accessibility: Students with a documented disability should complete a Semester Request for Accommodations through their Accommodate MyAccommodations app on MyDenison. It is the student's responsibility to contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss specific needs and make logistic arrangements well in advance of an evaluation. I rely on the Academic Resource Center (ARC) located in 020 Higley Hall, to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on the documentation on file in that office. Reasonable accommodations cannot be applied retroactively and therefore ideally should be enacted early in the semester as they are not automatically carried forward from a previous term and must be requested every semester.

Writing center: Students are encouraged to seek assistance from the Writing Center while working on the assignments for this course. The writing center is located in the library. More information can be found here: <https://denison.edu/academics/support/the-writing-center>

Readings: All of the required readings for this course will be articles and extracts provided on Canvas. You do not need to purchase any textbooks.

Assignments

Reading Responses: You will be asked to write five reading responses. Each reading response will be a two-page (double-spaced) written response to one of the course readings. It will consist of approximately one page of summary and one page of critique. Some reading responses will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis, and some will be graded based on their quality. More details will be provided in class.

Research Paper (and proposal): You will be asked to write an eight-page final paper in which you defend a position on a topic in the philosophy of religion. Before writing the paper, you will write and submit a one-page research paper proposal for me to approve. More details about the final paper and the proposal will be provided in class.

Participation: this is a discussion-based class, and participation will be important to your learning experience. In this class, participation has three main components:

- (i) Attending class regularly. Poor attendance may negatively impact your grade. (See below for my attendance policy.)
- (ii) Completing the assigned readings on time. In the course schedule below, each reading is listed next to the date that we will discuss it in class, and should be completed by the start of class on that date.
- (iii) Speaking up regularly during small group discussions and class discussions. Most class sessions will include both a small group discussion time and a full class discussion time. To ensure that you get full points for participation, you should always contribute to small-group discussions, and you should aim to say something during full-class discussions about once a week or more.

Grades

Your final grade in this class breaks down as follows. The reading response journal is worth 50% of your final grade (10% each); the research paper proposal is worth 5% of the final grade; the final paper is worth 30% of your final grade; and the remaining 15% will be based on class participation, which includes attendance and contribution to class discussion.

This class will use a standard grading scale:

A	93-100%	C	73-76%
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	65-66%
B-	80-82	D-	60-65%
C+	77-79%	F	0-59%

Policies¹

Attendance: Regular attendance is expected. However, students are permitted three unexcused absences with no penalty. More than three unexcused absences may result in a deduction of points from the student's final grade.

Extensions: Extensions may be granted in special circumstances. Requests for extensions should be made prior to the due date of the assignment. Otherwise, assignments will be deducted by 1/3 letter grade for each day they are late (e.g. a B+ paper drops to a B paper if it is one day late; it drops to a B- if it is two days late; etc.). Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted.

Class Discussion: There will be many opportunities for in-class discussion during this course. Students are expected to be respectful of others. To help ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute during class discussions, we will use "the finger system", which I will explain on the first day of class.

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity. Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must

¹ The statements on academic honesty and accessibility below are the standard ones provided for use on syllabi by Denison University.

clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student’s responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly. For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity, see: <http://denison.edu/academics/curriculum/integrity>.

Class Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change.

Unit 1: Could All Religions be True?

- Jan 17 NO CLASS (I will be out of town)
- Jan 19 Hick, “Is Christianity the Only True Religion?”
- Jan 24 Zhao, “A Buddhist Reconfiguration of John Hick’s Pluralist Hypothesis”
- Jan 26 Harrison, “Internal Realism and the Problem of Religious Diversity”

Unit 2: Is There a God?

- Jan 31 Rasmussen, “The Argument from Contingency”
- Feb 2 Collins, “God, Design, and Fine-Tuning”
Reading response 1 due
- Feb 7 Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
- Feb 9 Stump, “The Problem of Evil”
- Feb 14 Gupta and Barua, “The Alchemy of Suffering”
- Feb 16 Sen, “The Vedic-Upanisadic Concept of Brahman”
Reading response 2 due

Unit 3: Do Miracles Happen?

- Feb 21 Goldschmidt, "A Proof of Exodus"
- Feb 23 NO CLASS (I will be at a conference)
- Feb 28 Craig, "The Resurrection of Jesus"
- Mar 2 Ali, "An Evidential Argument for Islamic Theism"
Reading response 3 due

Unit 4: Is There an Afterlife?

- Mar 7 Hales, "Evidence and the Afterlife"
- Mar 9 Baker, "Death and the Afterlife"
- (Spring Break!)*
- Mar 21 Lewis, "Divine Evil"
- Mar 23 Pelsner, "Heavenly Sadness"
Reading response 4 due
- Mar 28 Stoeber, "Personal Identity and Rebirth"
- Mar 30 Chakrabarti, "Is Liberation (Moksa) Pleasant?"

Unit 5: Is Nature All that Exists?

- Apr 4 Antony, "What is Naturalism?"

Apr 6 Harrison, "Naturalism and the Success of Science"
Reading response 5 due

Apr 11 De Cruz, "The Naturalness of Religious Belief"

Apr 13 Thompson, "The Myth of Buddhist Exceptionalism"
Proposal due by start of class

Unit 6: Is Faith Rational?

Apr 18 Jackson, "Belief, Credence, and Faith"

Apr 20 Buchak, "Faith and Traditions"

Apr 25 Meeting with Dr. Liang's class

Apr 27 Wrap-up

Research Paper due on... (TBD)