

## Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Winter 2021

Monday/Wednesday 1:50-3:10pm, via Zoom

### Benjamin Callard, Instructor

Email: bcallard@uchicago.edu

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:30-4:30pm, via Zoom (please email to schedule an appointment)

### Michael Morgan and Ryan Simonelli, Course Assistants

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This course explores the Western philosophical tradition of reasoned reflection on religious belief. Our questions will include: what are the most important arguments for, and against, belief in God? How does religious belief relate to the deliverances of the sciences, in particular to evolutionary theory? How can we reconcile religious belief with the existence of evil? What is the relationship between religion and morality? In attempting to answer these questions we will read work in the analytic tradition, as well as classic texts by Plato, Anselm, Leibniz, Kant, Freud, and others.

### Course requirements

1. Attend and participate in the class meetings.
2. Attend and participate in the discussion sections.
3. Write two papers (5-7 pages each).

### Texts

All texts will be made available on the course website—there is no need to buy any books or readers.

### Schedule of classes and readings

**Monday, January 11.** Introduction. No reading.

**Wednesday, January 13.** Argument against God's existence: the verification argument.

Readings: A.J. Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology" (1936); Anthony Flew, "The Presumption of Atheism" (1972).

**Monday, January 18.** No class (MLK Day).

**Wednesday, January 20.** Argument for God's existence: the ontological argument.

Readings: Anselm, selection from *Proslogion* (A.D. 1078); Kant, selection from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); Frege, selection from *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884).

Optional readings: Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Argument" (1960); Kurt Godel, "Ontological Proof" (1970).

**Monday, January 25.** Argument against God's existence: naturalism.

No reading.

**Wednesday, January 27.** Argument for God's existence: the argument from design and the fine-tuning argument. First paper assigned.

Readings: William Paley, "The Watchmaker Argument" (1802); Elliot Sober: "The Design Argument" (2004); Derek Parfit, "Why Anything? Why This?" (1998).

**Monday, February 1.** Argument against God's existence: the problem of evil.

Readings: J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (1955); William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" (1979); Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God" (1989).

Optional reading: Alvin Plantinga, "The Problem of Evil" (1974)

**Wednesday, February 3.** Argument for God's existence: the cosmological argument.

Readings: Leibniz, selection from "The Ultimate Origin of Things" (1697); selection from Bertrand Russell, "Why I am Not a Christian" (1927).

**Monday, February 8.** Science, Education, and Religion.

Readings: Steven Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria" (1997); Thomas Nagel, "Public Education and Intelligent Design" (2008).

**Wednesday, February 10.** Argument against God's existence: the argument from free will.

William L. Rowe, "Predestination, Divine Knowledge, and Human Freedom" (1993).

**Monday, February 15.** God and morality.

Readings: Plato, selection from *Euthyphro* (circa 399 B.C.); Leibniz, "Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorf (1706); James Rachels, "God and Moral Autonomy" (1997).

Optional viewing: debate between William Lane Craig and Shelly Kagan at Columbia University: "Is God Necessary for Morality?" (2009).

**Wednesday, February 17.** First paper due, final paper assigned. Genealogical arguments against theism.

Readings: Hume, selection from *The Natural History of Religion* (1757); Nietzsche, selection from *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887); Freud, selection from *The Future of an Illusion* (1927).

**Monday, February 22.** Argument for God's existence: the argument from the self-defeatingness of naturalism.

C.S. Lewis, "The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism" (1947, revised 1960); Thomas Nagel, "Evolutionary Naturalism and the Fear of Religion" (1997); Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value" (2006).

Optional readings: Alvin Plantinga, "Is Naturalism Irrational?" (1993); Brandon Fitelson and Elliot Sober, "Plantinga's Probability Arguments Against Evolutionary Naturalism" (1997).

**Wednesday, February 24.** Student questions.

No new readings.

**Monday, March 1.** Reason and Faith.

Readings: Lara Buchak, "Can it be Rational to Have Faith?" (2012); Norman Malcolm, "The Groundlessness of Belief" (1975).

Optional readings: Readings: Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God" (1983).

**Wednesday, March 3.** The Afterlife. Conversation with Michael Morgan.

Readings: Bertrand Russell, "Do We Survive Death?" (1936); Peter Geach, "What Must Be True of Me If I Survive My Death?" (1969)

**Monday, March 8.** God and Epistemology.

William Alston, "The Experience of God: A Perceptual Model" (1991)

**Wednesday, March 10.** Last day of class. Final paper due. Student questions.  
No new readings.