

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Philosophy of Religion
Course Code	: PHI3280
Recommended Study Year	: 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th Years
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Lecture and Tutorial
Class Contact Hours	: 2 hours lecture per week; 1 hour tutorial per week
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective – Ethics and Practical Philosophy
Prerequisite(s)	: None
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course discusses those religious concepts and beliefs that intersect with classic and contemporary philosophical debates in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. We will examine the idea of God or deity, traditional and contemporary cosmological, ontological and teleological arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, divine command theories of ethics, the nature of religious language, the connection between faith and reason, the compatibility of miracles with a modern world view, and the relationship between our understanding of the human condition and various religious beliefs (life after death, predestination, human freedom). We will also consider naturalistic explanations of the emergence of religious beliefs and practices. The course does not presuppose a substantial knowledge of any religious doctrine and will only tangentially deal with the history and sociology of religion.

Aims

The course aims to:

- Introduce the students to basic arguments and objections in favour and against the existence and definition of God(s);
- Present contemporary theories on the possible conflict between science and religion, the epistemological features of faith, and naturalistic explanations of religious beliefs;
- Enable students to connect religious ideas with their consequences for our conceptions of what we are (philosophical anthropology) and what we are supposed to do (ethics);
- Provide students with the theoretical tools to develop their own views on the philosophical issues debated.

Intended Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- (LO1) Describe various arguments about the plausibility and foundation of certain religious beliefs in a rational and precise way.
- (LO2) Illustrate how classic and contemporary arguments about the existence of deities and their related epistemological consequences have been developed and their relevance for contemporary philosophical debates.
- (LO3) Relate controversial disputes in the foundation of ethics to beliefs in supernatural powers.
- (LO4) Propose and discuss their personal views on the issues examined throughout the course.

Indicative Content

- The Idea and Definition of God(s) in Various Religions

- The Cosmological Arguments
- The Ontological Arguments
- The Teleological Arguments
- Faith, Reason, and the Rationality of Disagreement
- The Problems of Evil
- Miracles, Prayers, and the Modern World View
- Life After Death, Immortality, and Rebirth
- Predestination, Divine Foreknowledge, and Human Freedom
- Religious Pluralism and The Variety of Religious Experience
- The Language of Religion
- Religion and Morality
- Naturalistic Explanations of the Emergence of Religious Beliefs

Teaching Method

Lectures and tutorials.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Students will take:

- A midterm exam, in which they will have to answer short questions about topics in the first part of the course. These questions will be very specific so as to hone the analytic skills of the students. This exam will be used to assess LO1 and LO4;
- A final exam, in which they will have to answer short questions on the debates discussed in the second part of the course. The students will have to provide a precise description of the theories or arguments at issue and assess them critically. The final exam will be used to assess LO2, LO3, and LO4.

In addition, the students will have:

- To work on a personal project, which may be a paper or a presentation. In their project, the students will have to explore a specific topic of their choice among those debated in the course (to assess LO4);
- To answer short questions (on the weekly lectures) during the tutorial sessions. These questions will be posted on the Moodle webpage of the course before the tutorials (to assess LO1-2-3-4).

Assessment

10% Tutorials; 20% Presentation or Personal Project; 30% Midterm exam; 40% Final exam.

Required Readings

Selections from Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Selections from William Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion. Fourth Edition* (Thomson Wadsworth, 2007).

Selections from Chad Meister and Paul Copan (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Selections from Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon (eds.) *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

Other required readings will be posted on Moodle.

Supplementary Readings

Robert Merrihew Adams, 'A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness', in Charles Tagliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion. An Anthology*

- (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 462-76.
- Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
- Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).
- Paul Edwards (ed.) *Immortality* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997).
- Evan Fales, 'Mystical Experience as Evidence', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 40 (1996), pp. 19-46.
- Nicholas Everitt, *The Non-existence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- Paul J. Griffith, 'Religion', in Charles Tagliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion. An Anthology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 31-43.
- John Hick, 'Religious Pluralism', in Charles Tagliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion. An Anthology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 517-22.
- David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, edited by Henry Aitken (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948).
- David Hume, 'Of Miracles', in Charles Tagliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion. An Anthology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 565-81.
- William James, 'The Varieties of Religious Experience', in Charles Tagliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion. An Anthology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 141-5.
- Robin LePoidevin, *Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- John Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).
- T. J. Mawson, *Belief in God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. M. Clark and A. Swensen (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998).
- Anthony O'Hear, *Experience, Explanation, and Faith: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Routledge and K. Paul, 1984).
- Blaise Pascal, 'Pascal's Wager', in Charles Tagliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion. An Anthology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 544-45.
- Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings. 4th Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- William Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, 4 (1979), pp. 335-41.
- Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2007).
- Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- Linda Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion. An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>