

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (6AANB025 / 7AAN6028)

SPRING 2024

Instructor:	Dr Zita Toth	Office:	Philosophy building, 709
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Course Description. In this course, we will look at the most important classical problems in the Philosophy of Religion, from both a historical and a contemporary perspective. We will consider how thinkers thought about religious belief in general; about whether we can meaningfully talk about God; about whether God exists, and if so, what characteristics God may have. We will also look at the problem of evil and the connection (if any) between religion and morality.

Expectations and Assignments.

Attendance and in-class participation: Conversation is essential to philosophy. Everyone will be expected to come to class having done the assigned mandatory readings, *and* having written down at least two questions concerning those readings. These questions may be clarificatory, or put forward objections, or engage with any part of the reading in an incisive manner.

Formative assessment: A written response paper to one of the first few readings for the class. Details will follow. **Due: 26 February, 16:00.**

Summative assessment: A research paper on either a pre-assigned topic or a topic of your choice, details will follow. Max. 3000 words (3500 for MA). **Due: 24 April, 16:00.**

Electronic devices: While you may use your computer to take notes and have the readings at hand, you should be aware that according to plenty of research, electronic note-taking and reading on screen adversely affects deep understanding. Thus, students are strongly encouraged to use analog means instead.

Plagiarism: If you use or copy a source without properly citing it, whether this act is intentional or not, you commit plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of stealing. It is very easy to detect, and will result in your automatic failure of the course.

Lateness: Late assignments will not be considered unless for very serious reasons. If you have such reasons, please let me know as soon as you can.

Special Accommodations: Students with special needs requiring accommodations should please get in touch with Student Services Disability Support (disability@kcl.ac.uk) as soon as possible.

Tentative Schedule of Readings. The schedule is tentative, but we will make every reasonable effort to stick to it unless major reasons dictate otherwise. All the readings will be made accessible to students once enrolled. For a good general introduction to the subject, see, e.g., Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

Week 1, 15/01: Introduction; How to talk about God

- Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, chs. 52–58
- Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, ch. 2

Week 2, 22/01: Religious Belief

- Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”
- William James, “The Will to Believe”

Week 3, 29/01: Arguments for God’s existence 1: The ontological argument

- Anselm, *Proslogion*, chs. 1–5
- Gaunilo’s reply to Anselm’s argument

Week 4, 05/02: Arguments for God’s existence 2: The cosmological argument

- Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.2.3
- Rowe, “The Cosmological Argument”

Week 5, 12/02: No Arguments? Wager!

- Pascal, *Pensées*, §233
- Martin, “Pascal’s Wager as an Argument for Not Believing in God”

19/02: Reading week (no class)

Week 6, 26/02: Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom

- Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, book V
- Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action”

Week 7, 04/03: Creation, East & West

- Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I.45.1–2.
- Sim, “The Question of Being, Non-Being and ‘Creation ex Nihilo’ in Chinese Philosophy”

Week 8, 11/03: God and Evil

- Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
- Stump, “The Problem of Evil: Analytic Philosophy and Narrative”

Week 9, 18/03: Religious Practice and Mysticism

- Marguerite of Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, §131–138.
- Van Dyke, *Hidden Wisdom*, ch. 1.

Week 10, 25/03: Religion and Morality

- Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* V–VIII
- Nielsen, “Ethics without Religion”