

Syllabus
PHIL 3011 (3 Cr.)
Philosophy of Religion
Fall 2019

Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips
Office: 108F General Classrooms
Office Hours: MWF: 11:00a-Noon, T: 1:00p-3:00p & also by appointment

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Class Meets:
MWF 1:00p-1:50p in GC 305

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Well-mannered folks regularly refrain from discussing religion over dinner. The reason is plain: on one hand we may disagree vehemently about the topic. On the other hand, we consider religion of the utmost importance. Given these facts, discussions about religion can raise our blood pressure which is bad for digestion. Yet, given the importance of religion, the subject demands our attention. We must think about it carefully and determine whether we have good reason to believe that God exists. In this class we will examine arguments for and against the existence of God. In doing so we will also explore questions such as: what is the nature of God? Are divine foreknowledge and omnipotence consistent with human freedom? How do we evaluate testimony regarding religious matters? Do reason and logic apply in the domain of religious belief? My goal is not to establish any particular answer to any of these questions. While I might have opinions about any or all of these topics, I certainly don't take myself to *know* the answers to these questions. Instead of attempting to provide definite answers to these (or any surrounding) questions, we explore the arguments and see where they take us. We should think carefully about religion; my goal is to provide you the skills necessary to do so.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking:** The successful student will begin to be able to differentiate between good and bad reasons for holding philosophical beliefs and will be able to seek out and identify the assumptions that lie at the basis of philosophical positions.
- **Inquiry and Analysis:** The successful student will begin to be able to break complex philosophical problems into their components, and will be able to identify the consequences and implications of philosophical positions.
- **Writing:** The successful student will be able to express some abstract and complex philosophical ideas in clear, precise, and logical prose.

Evaluation of these learning outcomes will be done through exams, papers, and in-class discussions.

TEXT: *Exploring Philosophy of Religion: an Introductory Anthology* 2nd Ed. (ISBN: 978-0-19-046138-6) edited by Steven Cahn, Oxford University press (2016).

The Problem of Evil (ISBN: 978-0199543977) by Peter van Inwagen, Oxford university Press (2006).

Both can be found at the College Bookstore, and are *required*.

Materials not available in the required texts will be provided on Canvas.

SOME GENERAL ADVICE: This course presupposes a willingness to work hard and think critically about some very difficult problems. Philosophy is hard, you'll see. Students who read reflectively and attend class regularly are more likely to remain interested in (and even enjoy) the material, benefit from the class discussions, and develop the philosophical skills and level of comprehension required to do well on the exams and papers. Some notes will be provided every week, but these, the lectures, and class discussion will very likely be hard to follow if you don't do the readings or if you miss previous classes.

Everyone will get the grade they earn. If you're worried about getting an A, work hard and come to office hours if you are having problems understanding the material. You might still get a B or C because not everybody is excellent at philosophy, but your future does not depend on you getting straight A's nearly as much as you think it does.

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ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION, POLICY:

Two Exams (60%; 30% for each exam) The exams will be take-home, and will consist of 4 short-answer questions and one essay. While you may work together to discuss the material, I expect everyone to do their own writing.

Ten Weekly Discussion Board Posts (15%) I expect you to keep up on the reading, and it *will* be challenging. To facilitate discussion and keep you on track, I expect you to complete at least 10 weekly discussion board posts. You may respond to a thread already going, or you may begin a discussion of your own. I expect these to be thoughtful, reflective, substantive posts. A question with no follow-up is not sufficient for your contribution. I would like to see careful engagement with the course material, but I'd also like to see you go *beyond* the class discussion. These may be critical or clarificatory, but must not be a mere summary of what you've read (though you will likely have to offer some interpretation as set-up for your post).

Ideally you will engage with your classmates in addition to sharing your own insights into the material.

You must make your post by **11:59p on Sunday** otherwise the post will count toward the following week.

Term Paper (25%) You will be expected to complete a term paper on any topic relevant to the philosophy of religion. You are not limited to topics that we discuss explicitly in class, and you are welcome (and encouraged) to do research beyond the textbook. Your paper should be between 2000-3000 words. Your final paper will be due at the close of week 14.

NOTE: I can and will feel free to utilize turnitin.com to ensure the originality of your work. As such, I will require at least an electronic copy of your paper, and probably a hard copy as well.

Late Work: I will accept late exams, but for each 24-hour period that the paper is late, the grade will be reduced by 4%. I will not accept late weekly posts.

Grade Disputes: If you feel that your work has been unfairly assessed, you may ask that I reconsider. I am, after all, a human who makes mistakes on occasion. I will do so **only if** you submit to me, on paper, a one-paragraph typewritten explanation of why you believe that your work has been unfairly evaluated. You must indicate the grade you believe yourself to deserve and explain clearly why it is that you deserve that grade. Your dispute must be submitted within **one week** of receiving your grade.

Classroom Conduct: The classroom constitutes a community of which we are each an important part. The very foundation of philosophy as a discipline is the ability to charitably listen, understand and represent the views of ourselves and others. As such, respect for your fellow student, your instructor, and the course is of critical importance. We can, should, and will disagree with one another often, but this *MUST* be conducted with respect. As such threatening behavior, offensive language (including "hate speech") will not be tolerated.

Attendance: Excessive absences (6 or more) will hurt you 1 letter grade (as in A- to B-). Philosophy is hard even if you come to class. Skip at your own risk. You are responsible for information that I offer in lecture that is not in the readings.

Extra Credit and Final Grades: I will *not*, under any circumstances, offer extra credit. If you are concerned about your grade, come to my office hours. Please do so before the end of the semester. With regard to final grades, you will get the grade you have earned. Asking me to bump, round up, or otherwise adjust your final grade will guarantee that I will NOT adjust your final grade. Please do not ask.

Plagiarism or academic fraud of any sort will result in an F for the course. Academic dishonesty is a serious matter. Please familiarize yourself with Southern Utah University's *Student Handbook*, which you can find online at <https://www.suu.edu/pub/policies/pdf/PP633Academic.pdf>. I will follow the regulations described in this

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document for dealing with cheating, plagiarism, etc. If you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism or academic fraud after reading through the student handbook, please do not hesitate to ask me for further clarification.

Disabilities: I warmly welcome any of you who have disabilities. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Office for Students with Disabilities. The Office for Students with Disabilities determines eligibility for and authorizes the provision of these services and aids. Reasonable and effective accommodations and services will be provided to students if requests are made in a timely manner, with appropriate documentation, in accordance with federal, state, and University guidelines. For Southern Utah University's full policy, see: <http://suu.edu/pub/policies/pdf/PP119Disability.pdf>.

SUU Care and Support Team: The SUU Care and Support Team (CAST) is comprised of trained faculty and staff who are committed to creating an environment at SUU that supports students who may be struggling with emotional distress and mental health issues. As a member of CAST, please know that I am here to help. I am not a professional counselor, but I do care, know how and where to find help if you need it, and want to see you succeed. Please do not be afraid to visit me if you're struggling. <http://www.suu.edu/cast/>

SUU Pride Alliance: SUU Pride Alliance is a network comprised of students, staff, and faculty dedicated to creating safe spaces for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer individuals and Allies (LGBTQA) on the campus of Southern Utah University (SUU). As a member, please know that I am committed to seeing that everyone is afforded the dignity and respect they deserve regardless of their identity. <http://www.suu.edu/allies/>

Link: SUU faculty and staff care about the success of our students. In addition to your professor, numerous services are available to assist you with the achievement of your educational goals. I may use SUU's Link system to notify you and/or your advisors of my concern for your progress and provide references to campus services as appropriate.

Emergency Management: In case of emergency, the University's Emergency Notification System (ENS) will be activated. Students are encouraged to maintain updated contact information using the link on the homepage of the mySUU portal. In addition, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Emergency Response Protocols posted in each classroom. Detailed information about the University's emergency management plan can be found at <http://suu.edu/emergency>.

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