

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

FALL 2013

PHI 3700 Sections 01D4, 01EF, 01E0

REL 3938 Sections 05F8, 05FH, 05HF

It is your responsibility to read and be aware of all the policies and expectations set out in this syllabus. Be sure you read it in its entirety within the first week of class.

Instructor Dr. Gene Witmer
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Office hours Wednesdays 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM
And by appointment*
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Online material This course is supplemented by a site on Sakai. You will need to use it for submitting work, contributing to discussion boards, and keeping current on any announcements relevant to the class.

*Regular office hours are not held during holidays, spring break, or after the last day of classes (during reading days and exam week). Appointments might still be made during those times. If a class is cancelled the office hours on that day are cancelled as well.

Meeting times

	Day	Period	Room
LECTURE (all sections)	Mondays and Wednesdays	6 (12:50-1:40)	Matherly 18
Sections 01D4 & 05FH	Fridays	3 (9:35-10:25)	Matherly 151
Sections 01EF & 05F8	Fridays	4 (10:40-11:30)	Matherly 151
Sections 01E0 & 05HF	Fridays	5 (11:45-12:35)	Matherly 151

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E-Learning. This course makes use of the Sakai system. Go to lss.at.ufl.edu and login at "e-Learning login" using your Gatorlink; then navigate to the page for this course. See below for details on how Sakai will be used.

Course description

The philosophy of religion can encompass a wide range of issues from different philosophical areas, especially issues in epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. Instead of a broad survey, however, in this course we will focus on what is arguably the most fundamental question in this area, namely, whether or not there exists something deserving of the title "God." The notion of God here presumed is, roughly, the traditional Western conception of God as an unlimited, all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing creator of the universe, something deserving of worship or religious devotion. The course is structured around a fictional dialogue between a theist, an atheist, and an agnostic as well as a coursepack with supplementary papers corresponding to parts of the dialogue. Topics covered include the relationship between God, value and morality; arguments from design (teleological arguments), including both classical biological and more contemporary "fine-tuning" arguments; cosmological or "first cause" arguments; the infamous ontological argument (which aims to show just from the definition of God that he must exist); the significance of religious experience and claims about miracles; the problem of evil as a reason to be an atheist; the idea that we might "bet" on God's existence as per Pascal's Wager; and the nature of faith. Nearly each of these topics is one to which we might devote an entire course, and our time is limited. Nonetheless, the goal is to provide you with a substantial, serious understanding of the most important lines of argument in this area.

Learning objectives

This course provides General Education credit for Humanities; as such, it aims to give you the ability to: Identify, describe, and explain the terminology, concepts, methodologies and theories used within the humanities; communicate knowledge, ideas, and reasoning clearly and effectively in written or oral forms appropriate to the humanities; and analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems using methods appropriate to the humanities.

This course also provides credit towards the philosophy major; as such, it aims to give students the ability to: Discern the structure of arguments, to represent them fairly and clearly and to evaluate them for cogency; formulate original arguments, anticipating objections and responding in a conscientious fashion; read and discuss complex philosophical texts from both historical sources and contemporary works; and to speak and write clearly and persuasively about abstract and conceptually elusive matters.

This course specifically aims to give you

(i) a substantial understanding of the major arguments for and against theistic belief; (ii) an appreciation of the options available for responding to these arguments; (iii) the ability to pursue such debates beyond the first level of argument and response; and (iv) the ability to evaluate critically an extended interplay of arguments and responses as well as formulate your own evaluation in clear and cogent prose.

Required texts

Torin Alter and Robert J. Howell, *The God Dialogues*. Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-539559-4. Available at the UF bookstore.

COURSEPACK. Available via *University Readers*. Visit their website at www.universityreaders.com and order directly through them. Once you place an order, they make available to you via downloadable pdf files the first few readings to have on hand while waiting for the full coursepack to arrive.

Subjects and readings

Below is the list of readings I plan for us to go over. "CP" indicates that the reading is in the coursepack, and "A&H" indicates a chapter of the book by Alter and Howell, *The God Dialogues*.

Preliminaries: Reasoning and God

CP-1. Nicholas Everitt, "Reasoning about God."
CP-2. Peter Van Inwagen, "The Idea of God."

God, morality, value

A&H-1. *Outside Boston: God, Value, and Meaning*
CP-3. Louise Antony, "Atheism as Perfect Piety."
CP-4. Linda Zagzebski, "Does Ethics need God?"

Teleological arguments

A&H-2. *Niagara, New York: Design and Evolution*
A&H-3. *From Niagara To Chicago: Life and Fine-Tuning*

Cosmological arguments

A&H-4. *Chicago, Illinois, outside the Adler Planetarium: The Cosmological Argument*
CP-5. Richard Taylor, selection from Chapter 11 of his *Metaphysics*.
CP-6. William Lane Craig, "Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to *Creatio Ex Nihilo*."

Ontological arguments

A&H-5. Chicago, Illinois, in the Hotel: The Ontological Argument
 CP-8. Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments."

Experience and miracles

A&H-6. Somewhere in Iowa: Religious Experience, Testimony, and Miracles
 CP-9. David Hume, "Of Miracles."
 CP-10. Caroline Franks Davis, "Arguments from Religious Experience."

The problem of evil

A&H-7. Holcomb, Kansas: The Problem of Evil

Wagers, reason, and faith

A&H-8. Las Vegas, Nevada: Pascal's Wager
 A&H-9. California: Faith and the Rationality of Belief in God
 CP-11. C. S. Lewis, "On Obstinacy in Belief."

Requirements and grade determination

Category	Comments	Effect on grade
Short Writing Assignments (SWAs) Range of 500-1000 words	Mandatory writings which are mostly not graded.	Potential negative effect of failing to do the SWAs: 0-1: no penalty 2-3: Third of a letter off final course grade 4-5: course grade ceiling of C
SWA Evaluation Tests (SWAETs)	Four tests that require you to evaluate some anonymous SWAs	25%
One selected SWA to be graded	You select one of your SWAs to be graded	25%
Notes for final paper	Systematic notes as per template for preparing final paper	15%
Final argumentative paper Range of 2000-2500 words	Rigorously graded work; your capstone achievement	35%
Attendance	Mandatory and recorded for all breakout sessions.	Potential negative effect of unexcused absences from breakout sessions. 0-2: no penalty 3-4: Third of a letter off final course grade 5+: course grade ceiling of C

Details on these aspects of the work for the course are found below under "Policies and Details."

Schedule

Below is the planned schedule for readings and assignments. Please note that I reserve the right to adjust this schedule as needed. It is your responsibility to stay up to date with information regarding current reading assignments, writing assignments, and any other aspect of the course during the semester. I will maintain on the Sakai site the most recently updated versions of the schedule in the format used below.

Week	Assignments due Monday at noon	Mon Lecture	Readings	Wed Lecture	Readings	Friday Breakout Session	Breakout activities & other
1		--		8/21	None	8/23	
2		8/26	CP-1 Everitt	8/28	CP-2 Van Inwagen	8/30	
3		9/2	HOLIDAY-- LABOR DAY	9/4	A&H-1 (Value)	9/6	
4	SWA-1	9/9	A&H-1 (Value)	9/11	CP-3 Antony	9/13	SWAET-1 (Practice)
5		9/16	CP-4 Zagzebski	9/18	A&H-2 (Design & Evolution)	9/20	
6	SWA-2	9/23	A&H-3 (Fine-Tuning)	9/25	A&H-3 (Fine-Tuning)	9/27	SWAET-2
7		9/30	A&H-4 (Cosmological)	10/2	A&H-4 (Cosmological)	10/4	
8	SWA-3	10/7	CP-5 Taylor	10/9	CP-6 Craig	10/11	SWAET-3
9		10/14	A&H-5 (Ontological)	10/16	CP-7 Malcolm	10/18	
10	SWA-4	10/21	A&H-6 (Experience & Miracles)	10/23	A&H-6 (Experience & Miracles)	10/25	SWAET-4
11		10/28	CP-8 Davis	10/30	CP-8 Davis	11/1	
12	SWA-5	11/4	CP-9 Hume	11/6	CP-9 Hume	11/8	HOLIDAY-- HOMECOMING
13		11/11	HOLIDAY-- VETERANS DAY	11/13	A&H-7 (Problem of Evil)	11/15	SWAET-5
14		11/18	A&H-7 (Problem of Evil)	11/20	A&H-7 (Problem of Evil)	11/22	
15	Notes for Final Paper	11/25	A&H-8 (Pascal's Wager) A&H-9 (Faith & Rationality)	11/27	HOLIDAY-- THANKSGIVING	11/29	HOLIDAY THANKSGIVING
16		12/2	CP-10 Lewis	12/4	Last Class	--	
Exam week	Final paper	12/9		12/11		12/13	Papers returned with comments by 12/13

Policies and details

In the remainder of this syllabus, you can find detailed information on:

1. Grading scale and policies
2. Attendance policy
3. Short Writing Assignments and SWA Evaluation Tests
4. Final paper and notes for final paper
5. Academic honesty
6. Miscellaneous policies
7. Additional resources

1. Grading scale and policies

There are two different grading scales I use depending on the kind of work being graded. First, there is the traditional alphabetic scale with numerical equivalents on the 4-point scale: A (4), A- (3.67), B+ (3.33), B (3), B- (2.67), C+ (2.33), C (2), C- (1.67), D+ (1.33), D (1), D- (.67), E (0). Second, there is what I call a "check scale". This is a more coarse-grained scale with five categories as follows with the indicated numerical equivalents: ☆ (4), ✓+ (3.5), ✓ (2.5), ✓- (1.5), and Ø (0). See below for which assignments are assigned using which scale and why.

The final course grade is determined by factoring in each of those elements according to the percentages specified and then applying any penalties. Each factor is initially marked on a 4-point scale, and the result of the calculation is again a numerical score on the 4-point scale. For the final course grade, divisions between letter grades are marked at the midway points. This means that, for example, to get a B for the course the final numeric grade needs to be at least as high as the midpoint between a B and a B-. The result is that final course grades are determined by the following scale:

3.83 – 4.00	A	2.50 – 2.82	B-	1.17 – 1.49	D+
3.50 – 3.82	A-	2.17 – 2.49	C+	0.83 – 1.16	D
3.17 – 3.49	B+	1.83 – 2.16	C	0.50 – 0.82	D-
2.83 – 3.16	B	1.50 – 1.82	C-	0.00 – 0.49	E

A general comment on grading is in order. As I see the purpose of an assigned grade, the point is to provide a record that carries information about the extent to which the student has gained the knowledge, understanding and skills that the course aims to foster. A grade is not intended to be a reward for effort or a punishment for lack of effort. Of course, students are motivated by the desire for good grades, and I design the structure of the course so as to make use of that motivation. But I want to stress that grades are intended to provide a measure of your actual mastery of the relevant knowledge and skills as demonstrated in your work throughout the semester; other factors—how hard you work, or how much you improve over your former self—are not relevant.

Note that a grade of C- for the course is not a qualifying grade for major, minor, General Education or College Basic Distribution requirements. For further information on UF's Grading Policy, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

2. Attendance policy

I expect you to attend every lecture session and every breakout session. If you miss a class and ask, "Did I miss anything important?" the answer is Yes. I don't plan on holding a class during which nothing important happens.

Attendance is, thus, mandatory and you are responsible for material covered in all sessions. Attendance will be recorded at breakout sessions, though not at lectures. Unexcused absences from those sessions will result in severe penalties after a small number of grace absences. More precisely, if you miss 0-2 breakout sessions without excuse, there is no penalty; if you miss 3-4 classes without excuse, your final course grade will be reduced by a third of a letter grade (that is, .33 on the 4-point scale); and if you miss 5 or more classes, I impose a ceiling on your final course grade: no matter how well you do, your best possible grade for the course is then a C. And, of course, you still need to earn at least a C. Someone who misses that often is not likely to be doing too well in the first place.

In summary:

0-2 unexcused absences	No penalty
3-4 unexcused absences	Final course grade reduced by .33
5 or more unexcused absences	Course grade ceiling of a C

If you miss a class, excused or not, you need to take responsibility for finding out what you have missed. You are advised to get to know some of your fellow classmates so that you can consult them for help in such cases. If you need to, you can contact the TA or myself about what was missed, but we cannot reproduce lectures or the details of class discussion for you; we can only indicate what sort of material was covered and convey information about scheduling, assignments, or the like.

If you do have a good excuse for an absence or a missed assignment, you need to get in contact with me in a reasonable amount of time and make any relevant arrangements. Of course, if you are seriously ill, do not worry about that and seek medical attention immediately, letting me know later when it is feasible to do so.

If you miss one of the SWA Evaluation Tests without a good excuse, your grade is a zero. If you miss one with a good excuse, we will make arrangements for an evaluation of a different set of SWAs so as not to duplicate what students already did in class. Extensions for work done outside of class (the SWAs, the Notes for the Final Paper, and the Final Paper itself) are granted only for serious disruptions and normally only if you ask for the extension ahead of time. If something serious comes up at the last minute and you haven't had a chance to make such a request, you should hand in your work as it is and let me know you'd like to ask for more time; if I can see the work done up to that point, that will help, since, of course, you should not be doing the work at the last minute anyway.

UF's general policy on attendance, including an official statement of what counts as an acceptable reason for missing class, can be found here: catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx. In general, I aim to give students the benefit of the doubt about these matters, but I may demand documentation on a case-by-case basis. Your previous attendance and history of participation makes a difference to your credibility.

3. Short Writing Assignments and SWA Evaluation Tests

The "Short Writing Assignments" are mandatory writing assignments that are not individually graded. They are meant to force you to practice writing about the issues in the class, to motivate you to make a good effort, but to make the work less stressful than it would be if each thing you handed in were graded.

The SWAs are paired with tests of a special kind: SWA Evaluation Tests. The SWAETs work as follows. From the batch of SWAs earlier handed in, a number are selected for use in the test. There will typically be three such SWAs, each presented anonymously. Your job in taking the test is to answer questions about how well-done those SWAs are—which is the best in terms of clarity, for instance, or which is the worst in terms of accuracy of understanding. In this way, you will learn what to work towards in your own SWAs.

There will be five SWAs assigned. All five are mandatory. The first test, however, is for practice and will not count towards your SWAET grade. The four remaining SWAETs will all be graded and count towards that grade. After the SWAETs are assessed, I will provide a discussion of the answers on the Sakai site.

After the last SWAET is assessed, you will be asked to pick one of the SWAs you wrote to hand in for a grade. If one of yours was used in one of the SWAETs, then you already know something about how good or bad that one was and may use that information accordingly.

All SWAs are to be handed in electronically through the Sakai site as Word files. Each one must be between 500 and 1000 words in length. There will be a specific set of directions for each one.

SWAs are to be written in the same style as if you were writing a substantial paper for a grade. You should ensure that they are formally in order (no grammatical disasters, please) and have a clear structure. These are meant to be, in effect, practice runs at writing the full-length paper at the end, though they are considerably shorter, of course.

You have an obvious incentive to do as well as you can on each SWA, though if you do not do well, it cannot hurt you. One thing that can hurt you, however, is not bothering to take them seriously. You must do them all and you must make a serious effort at each. If you hand in an SWA that seems not to show serious effort, I might not count it for credit; if it is borderline, you will get a warning.

Failure to hand in the five SWAs can hurt your grade significantly. You can miss one, but after that the penalties kick in. The penalties are similar to those for unexcused absences. In summary:

0-1 missing SWA	No penalty
2-3 missing SWAs	Final course grade reduced by .33
4 or more missing SWAs	Course grade ceiling of a C

I understand that technological problems may occasionally intervene and you may have trouble gaining access to Sakai; in such cases, you should attach your SWA to an email and send it directly to me at gwitmer@ufl.edu by the time it is due in to Sakai. In the worst-case scenario you can bring a hard copy to the next class session to hand in.

The SWAETs are graded on the check scale and the one SWA you select to be graded will be graded on the alphabetical scale.

4. Final paper and notes for final paper

In any advanced philosophy class, the upshot should include your being able to understand the issues and material sufficiently well so that you can take part in the ongoing debates on your own. A substantial philosophical paper is the standard vehicle for doing so in a sustained, serious way. Ideally, the papers you write ought to constitute your most satisfying achievement in a philosophy class.

For this class there is only standard paper of a substantial size—in the range of 2000 to 2500 words. Given all the practice you will have had evaluating and writing shorter papers, the expectations for this final paper are high. In addition to the final paper itself, you are to hand in as a separate, graded assignment *Notes for the Final Paper*. I will provide specific instructions on these; they are to constitute a systematic set of notes in preparation for the last paper following a template I give you. These are graded on the alphabetic scale and returned with comments designed to help you make the final paper as effective as possible.

The final paper assignment will come with a list of topics. You need to understand the topics as suggested *lines of inquiry* you might pursue. They are intended to stimulate thought; they are not intended to provide exact blueprints for what you should write. You should be sure to structure your paper *around your thesis*

and the argument you offer for it. If you wish to pursue a topic of your own which does not fit comfortably in the range of the suggested topics, check with me first for approval.

The paper assignment gives a word count range of 2000 to 2500 words. This is, however, a target range: it is not a hard and fast requirement. The word count target is meant to give you a sense of how extensive the paper's contents should be. Think of it this way: if you haven't written at least that much, you *very likely* haven't done enough work; if you've written much, much more than the target range, then you *very likely* need to work on being more concise. Under no circumstances should you simply "pad" the paper with filler material to make it reach the target word count range. Excessive "filler" will actually result in a lower paper grade. A shorter paper full of good content is preferable to a longer one burdened with pointless filler.

Papers are to be handed in electronically as Microsoft Word files if possible. If that is not possible, please contact me about other arrangements. You may want to give your paper a title, though I won't require it. When grading them, I will provide both marginal and overall general comments on the electronic version and return those to you along with the grade.

5. Academic honesty

Please note that all UF students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. You can read the full honor code here: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>.

I have a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. *CLEAR EVIDENCE OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY MEANS AN AUTOMATIC FAILING GRADE FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE.* This includes not just plagiarism but any conduct constituting academic dishonesty as defined in the honor code, including prohibited collaboration, prohibited use of resources, and so on.

Any act of academic dishonesty is *reported to the Dean of Students' Office*, no matter how minor it may seem. If you have any questions as to whether or not a certain use of outside sources counts as plagiarism be sure to see me about it. If you have any question about what constitutes dishonesty, feel free to ask me, or, failing that, *err on the side of caution*. It is always preferable to seek extra help from the professor, hand in a late paper, or even just get a zero for that assignment—that is, do something honest—than it is to cheat. If you are caught cheating, you receive a failing grade—period. There are no exceptions.

6. Miscellaneous policies

Class participation. The best way to learn in philosophy is by taking an active role in thinking, discussing, and writing about the readings and arguments presented. It is, I believe, essential to appreciating that material in a thorough fashion that you make the effort to work your own way through it, doing your best to decide what you think about it, confronting those thoughts with objections you come up with and those you encounter in class discussion, and so on. Re-reading the assigned texts, making your own notes on them, doing the exercises—these all help, but participating in discussion is also crucial. Please note that I will feel free to call on people even if they don't volunteer; this is done to help ensure that you get past any reluctance to articulate your thoughts in a challenging environment—which requires courage of exactly the sort one needs in philosophy.

Classroom courtesy. I expect you to be polite and respectful to myself and to your classmates. This means that you should not talk out of turn, insult other people in a personal way, or speak without being called on. I also expect you to be paying attention in class. This means that I do not want to see you reading a newspaper in class, surfing the web, texting on a cell phone, talking on a cell phone, doing work for other classes, listening to music on an iPod, sleeping, or doing anything else that takes your attention away from what is going on in class. On a related note, you should be sure to silence your cell phone before class starts.

A note on laptops. Some students prefer to take notes in class by using a laptop; I can understand the convenience of this. Unfortunately, I also understand how tempting it is to use a laptop for other things while in class. The use of laptops in my class is acceptable in a provisional way. *If I catch anyone* using a laptop for surfing the web or doing anything other than taking notes or doing something relevant to what we're doing in class, then *all laptops will be banned from my class for the rest of the semester.*

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. Contact the Disability Resources Center (www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) for information about available resources for students with disabilities.

Just In Case. You should be aware that UF provides counseling and other kinds of help for students in distress. You can call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center at 352-392-1575 and see their website at www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/.

Course Evaluations. Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>. When the time comes, I encourage you to submit such evaluations.

7. Additional resources

I have made available online two documents that may prove helpful. One is a document entitled simply "Key Philosophical Tools" which includes both a basic primer on argumentation and an explanation of a variety of philosophical terms that are likely to come up in my classes. A second is entitled "Paper Writing Advice" and offers just what it says: advice on writing philosophy papers. I suggest reading over both early in the semester.

You may want to visit the *UF Philosophy Department Home Page*: <http://www.phil.ufl.edu/>. You can find there announcements of upcoming events of philosophical interest (including visiting speakers), as well as a link to the *Undergraduate Philosophy Society*. This group meets weekly, sometimes with invited speakers, and sometimes with specific topics; I recommend participating in it.

There are many resources online for philosophers, but I want to caution you against leaning on them, for at least two reasons. First, the variety of material out there is of very inconsistent quality; philosophy is, unfortunately, one of those areas where many people who are quite naive think they can master it quickly and give other people instruction on it. Second, depending on your background, you may find yourself more bewildered than enlightened by seeking out additional material that you've not had any help comprehending. I can tell you, for instance, that anything you find in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is going to be good—but it also tends to be very advanced and can be quite daunting. Third—and most important—when you seek outside material, especially online material, it becomes very tempting to exploit it by simply regurgitating that outside material. I'm not talking about plagiarism here; I'm talking about citing it and *leaning* on it as opposed to working your own way through the issues, which, as I mentioned above, I think is crucial to appreciating the issues.