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Format: We will meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30-10:30 in FL 301
Office Hours: Tuesday 1:45-2:45, Friday 10:30-11:30, or by appointment

General Objectives of the Course

At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate the course's success at meeting these objectives:

- Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories
- Developing skills in expressing oneself orally or in writing
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

Specific Objectives of the Course

The philosophy of religion is the philosophical study of concepts and arguments related to the divine. Our aim will be to understand these concepts and arguments as well as to reflect on whether or not we have good reasons for believing or disbelieving them. We will approach these issues through a careful reading of primary texts. Under consideration will be topics such as the nature and attributes of God, the existence of God, the problem of evil, the question of miracles, and the relationship between faith and reason / religion and science.

Our approach will be historical and focused on great books, but that should *not* lead the student to believe that these are questions that have been completely resolved or that these questions do not matter. On the contrary, these are live questions that call for considered reflection by all human persons blessed with the necessary capacity and leisure (which includes all of you).

This course has two main outcome goals. The first has to do with content. The task here is to understand the philosophical questions and to know what these philosophers have said and why they have said it, to evaluate whether or not they have good reasons for making their claims, and to ask about the significance of all of it for us.

The second main objective has to do with intellectual virtue ("critical thinking skills" in the shallow, contemporary parlance). The goal is to improve your ability to read and reason. This includes understanding a difficult reading, reflecting and thinking clearly and rigorously on its truth and significance, and the ability to communicate your understanding and thoughts to others clearly and concisely.

It is the hope of the instructor that students leave the class with an understanding of the philosophical issues as well as with an enlarged sense of wonder and curiosity with respect to those issues. But it is also a hope that students leave the class having cultivated intellectual virtues such as wonder, intelligence, "attunement" (an ability to enter other minds to see what they have to offer), studiousness, clarity, rigor, and reasonability.

Required Texts

- Course Packet available through the bookstore
- Supplemental readings will be made available on Canvas

Required Work

* Note: Failure to submit any assignment will constitute a sufficient though not necessary condition for failing the course *

- Reading Questions (20% of course grade): I expect that you will submit, via Canvas, answers to daily reading questions for each day they are assigned (see the course schedule). Reading Questions are due by the beginning of class; late submissions will not be accepted. These will be checked to see if a complete and adequate submission was turned in on time.
 - I will provide a detailed description of the assignment in another handout. In brief, each reading reflection should provide a substantive answer to the following four questions:
 - (1) What was the reading about as a whole?
 - (2) What was said in detail, and how?
 - (3) Is what was said true, in whole or in part?
 - (4) What of it?
 - These will be graded (adequate/inadequate on a 0 to 1 scale) and a Reading Question grade given based on your percentage of received/possible points. Since I know things come up, I have set the grade scale so that a student can miss up some number of these (assuming they complete the ones they do submit adequately) and still get an A. The grade scale for these is as follows:
 - 90% or more = A 87-89% = A-

- 83-86% = B+ 80-82% = B 77-79% = B-
- 73-76% = C+ 70-72% = C 67-69% = C-
- 63-66% = D 62 or lower = F

- Graded Reading Questions (60% of course grade): Some of your Reading Questions will be selected for more careful grading. I have indicated on the course schedule which Reading Questions will be graded.
- Final Paper (20% of course grade): This will be a mid-length paper asking you to demonstrate both an understanding of course material as well as sustained personal reflection on that material. Assignment information will be distributed on Canvas. See the course schedule for assignment distribution and submission dates
- Attendance and Participation: I expect that you will attend class every session, missing only very rarely if at all.
 - Students are allowed 3 absences for any reason. After that, your course grade will be lowered by $\frac{1}{3}$ letter grade for each additional absence up to one letter grade. Nonattendance for more than 3 weeks of class may result, at the discretion of the instructor, in the student failing the course.
 - I expect regular, informed, and thoughtful contributions to class discussion. This is a basic expectation of the course. Students who habitually fail to participate or whose contributions habitually demonstrate inadequate preparation may, at the discretion of the instructor, have their course grade reduced up to 1 letter grade.

Canvas

Canvas is a user friendly (even for people like me with limited digital competency) web-based course management program. I encourage you to thoroughly explore Canvas on your own so you are familiar with its features. Keep in mind - it is *your responsibility* to make sure you understand how to access course information and submit Canvas administered assignments. Go to canvas.usu.edu to see various tutorials as well as to log in using your A# and Banner password. Make sure you properly set up your notification preferences (see tutorials) so that you receive with regularity any class announcements or messages. If you have problems logging in or other technical difficulties, please do not contact me - I am a philosophy professor, not an IT guy. If technical problems persist, call the USU Help Desk (797-HELP).

Policies

1. Syllabus/Schedule changes: The syllabus and schedule are subject to change. I will notify the class of any and all changes. In the event of a discrepancy between this syllabus/schedule and Canvas (the Canvas syllabus or calendar), *the information on Canvas will take precedence.*
2. Unless otherwise indicated, my policy with late work is that it will be accepted only with a reasonable excuse (of which I am the judge). Expect the criteria for “reasonable” to be quite high (like a hospital-worthy illness).
3. If you have a disability or any circumstance that requires any sort of special consideration, please come and see me as soon as possible so you can be accommodated.
4. University regulations are enforced concerning any kind of dishonesty. Of note, the USU Academic Policies defines plagiarism as: “representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment” If I suspect plagiarism on an assignment, due to style or content, I will tell you so and challenge you. If you admit it, the assignment receives a zero and that is all. If you deny the charge and I can prove the charge is true, you get not only a zero for the assignment but will fail the course and will be reported to the Dean’s Office.
5. Though not all grammatical errors will be corrected, I do have a guiding policy on these: Any page of a paper that has two or more errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. will result in a loss of $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade. This effect will be cumulative, so three pages with two or more errors will result in a full letter grade penalty.
6. Technology policy: Students today have incredible access to information. But do they know what to do with all of that information, can they summarize it and then synthesize it into understanding? Can they communicate it clearly? Can they mentally juggle the various streams of content with any clarity? Many students think they can “multitask”, but studies suggest that multitasking just means doing multiple things poorly at the same time. I do

what I can to require you to be present in class. So no recording of lectures. No pictures or video. Keep your cell phone in your bag. I encourage but do not require you to put your laptops away and take notes the old fashioned way. If you wish to have your notes on the computer, the exercise of typing them in later will actually be helpful for your understanding of the material. If you insist on taking notes in class on a laptop, I require that you sit in one of the front two rows of class.

7. If I demonstrate a lack of attentiveness in class (I fall asleep, text message, play minesweeper, etc.) you may kick me out of class. I reserve the right to do the same to you.

Advice and some information on the “culture” of my courses

1. No one has a “right” to a “good” grade. No one gets extra credit for “effort,” which is invisible.

2. Please feel free to ask any question about anything at any time, in or out of class; that’s what philosophy is.

3. Expect to be challenged, to work, to find some of the course material “over your head” at first. If it isn’t, you can’t move up, only sideways.

4. I expect around 2 hours of out-of-class time for every hour of class time, though depending on your reading speed and focus that may be more or less. This is why taking 5 classes makes you a “full-time” student: (5 x 3 class hours) + (5 x 6 study hours) = 45 hours a week. This is actually a federal standard. The DOE federal guidelines define one credit hour as “one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work” (34 CFR-Part 600.2). Classes that ask less than this are not giving you your money’s worth. Don’t pine for easier classes; don’t envy your friends who are in less demanding courses. Rather, do yourself a favor and demand that your professors demand more of you.

5. Not a policy matter but of great importance for getting good grades: All studies show that the single most accurate predictor of grades is this: the more TV, the lower the grades; the less TV, the higher.

6. Another important good grade producer is scheduling, time management. Specifically, don’t cram, do work ahead of time. And work first, then play – you get in more of both that way.

7. Students today are incredibly distracted - text messages, cell phones, social media, game consoles, glowing screens everywhere. While many celebrate these new technologies and even perceive themselves to be dependent on them, studies show that these gadgets and glowing screens are making us dumber. One study found that students who are distracted by gadgets scored 20% lower on cognitive tests. Another study found that typical students can focus for less than 2 minutes before being distracted. Don’t become a slave to a tool. When you study: shut down your email, turn off your phone, shut down your computer or at least disable the internet. You will be a better student and a wiser person for it. Remember what most social media interactions amount to: the ability to express every idea you have except the ones that are well thought through.

8. I will assume everyone has done the reading BEFORE the class during which we go over it (otherwise half of what goes on in class passes you by). Also, bring your text to class.

9. Do not be afraid to argue with me. I do not raise your grade for agreeing with me and my favorite philosophers or lower it for disagreeing.

10. Logistical and educational point: Email has made for considerably easier communication between students and teachers. However, the medium can be abused. I prefer that you raise questions in class or come to my office hours when you have questions. It is beneficial for you too – the human contact allows for a more intimate and natural mode of discourse, and it is my belief that students learn more from dialogue than from monologue (which is the necessary form of email).

11. How we dress matters since our dress is a visible sign that we recognize the appropriate dignity and seriousness of whatever activity it is we are engaged in. Getting an education is a more dignified activity than lounging around with your friends, so your dress should suggest as much. So I encourage students to dress in a way that is proportionate to the dignity of a university education. In addition, there is something to that old saw

that you should “dress for success.” Though there is a well-established and timeless costume of the college student, I make no specific recommendations.

12. Many problems in philosophy are really problems in English communication. If you cannot communicate what you are thinking clearly, no one can know what you think. What to do about it? Read great books. Learn how to write by imitation.

13. A word about the philosophical temperament. Aquinas defines the virtue of studiousness as the “keen application of the mind to something”. Philosophers are among the most studious of people in this sense - they seek to clarify terms and propositions, and then follow the arguments wherever they go. This entails a great trust in reason, trusting that the *logos* will not steer you astray. Development of this studious capacity to keenly apply the mind to something is one mark of being an educated person. This capacity allows a person to engage people and ideas of all stripes, rather than being confined to one’s own thoughts. As Aristotle says, “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” This habit of mind is useful in all walks of life (business, family, etc). But this habit of mind also means you can expect me to push ideas and arguments to explore them and to challenge students, an exercise that may make some students feel uncomfortable.

Philosophy Department Grading Guidelines

A or A-: The essay is generally **excellent**. The writing is exceptionally clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The writer has accurately described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments (in ethics, or in history of philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics, etc.). The essay is creatively written, going beyond the class discussions, demonstrating excellent understanding of the material. The conclusion is thoughtful and insightful. The essay shows that the writer has studied and has generally understood the assigned readings. The writer has answered all questions in the essay assignment.

B+: The essay is generally **very good**. The writing is generally clear and concise, with very good sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The writer gives very good descriptions of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments, demonstrating very good understanding of the material. The conclusion is thoughtful and insightful. The essay shows that the writer has studied and has generally understood the assigned readings. The writer has answered all questions in the essay assignment.

B or B-: The essay is generally **good**. The writing is generally clear and concise, with good sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay demonstrates good understanding of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay shows that the writer has studied and has a good understanding of the assigned readings. The writer has answered all questions in the essay assignment.

C+ or C or C-: The essay is generally **satisfactory** or **adequate** in quality. The writing is generally clear and concise; sentence structure, grammar, and spelling are adequate. In places the writing may be somewhat awkward and confusing. The essay demonstrates adequate understanding of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay shows that the writer has studied and has an adequate understanding of the assigned readings. The writer has attempted to answer the important questions in the essay assignment.

D+ or D: The essay is **barely adequate** in quality. The writing is frequently awkward and confusing, with frequent repetition, poor sentence structure, poor grammar, and perhaps poor spelling. The essay demonstrates a minimally adequate understanding of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay shows that the writer has studied and has a minimally adequate understanding of the assigned readings. The writer may have failed to address important questions in the essay assignment.

F: The essay is **inadequate**. Throughout the essay the writing is awkward and confusing, with much repetition, very poor sentence structure, very poor grammar, and perhaps very poor spelling. The essay demonstrates inadequate understanding of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay shows that the writer has not understood and has perhaps not studied the assigned readings. The writer may have failed to address important questions in the essay assignment.