



National Taiwan University of Science and Technology

2021 Winter Program

RELG 101 Introduction to Religion

Course Outline

Course Code: RELG 101

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Office Hours: TBA

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Credit: 4

Course description

This is an online class. This course is about the philosophical analysis of religious ideas and arguments. In general, our approach to religious questions would be analytical and based on arguments. Importantly, while we will discuss the relevance of religious diversity to whether one should be a religious skeptic, this would NOT be a course in comparative religion. We will instead focus on the literature in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition that is called “philosophy of religion” and which deals mostly with the Abrahamic theistic traditions. This course presupposes that one can be reasonable while being a believer, a religious skeptic, and somewhere in between. Thus, the course is open to atheists, skeptics, and theists.

Prerequisites

The course is designed for students who have little or no knowledge/background in logic, philosophy, or ethics. Accordingly, the course will begin by introducing students to basic moral concepts and to the basic principles of reasoning that are used to distinguish between good and bad reasoning. Students will acquire the ability to express their ideas clearly and concisely, enlarge their capacity to understand the relationship between premises and conclusions, and increase their skill in determining when arguments succeed or fail to establish their conclusions.



Classin course site

There is a course site set up for this class. Anyone enrolled in the class should automatically have access to this site. On this site you will find the course syllabus, video lectures, assignments, discussion forums, and slides from class lectures. Please check this site regularly as I will regularly post announcements regarding the class such as: class, section, or office hours cancellations; changes in the readings or lecture schedule; reminders about upcoming exams; clarification of issues that arose in lectures, etc.

Classin orientation

If you have any questions regarding Classin, please check Classin support . You will find it extremely useful:

<https://www.classin.com/en/support.html?kind=function&aid=1327>

Class format

- a) 7 hours of recorded video lectures per week
- b) 8 instructor office hours **online (TTr 8:00-9:00)**

Average amount of learning time outside the classroom per week

Students are expected to devote about 4 hours of learning time per day distributed as follows:

- a) 3 hours reading the assigned reading for the day
- b) 1/2 hour doing homework assignments
- c) 1/2 hour participating on the discussion board

Course textbook

Many of the readings will be online and/or provided by the instructor.

There is **NO** required textbook, but the following one is **strongly** recommended:

Allen Stairs and Christopher Bernard, *A Thinker's Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1st edition

https://www.amazon.com/Thinkers-Guide-Philosophy-Religion-Wrestling-ebook-dp-B079MGSBDF/dp/B079MGSBDF/ref=mt_kindle?_encoding=UTF8&me=&qid=

Learning objectives and outcomes

- a) Students will acquire the ability to critically analyze arguments;



- b) Students will become persuasive reasoners capable of developing their own arguments;
- c) Students will be able to present and critically analyse the main arguments for the existence of God: the design, cosmological, and ontological arguments;
- d) Students will be able to present and critically analyse the main arguments against the existence of God: the argument from evil, the argument from religious diversity, and the argument from lack of sufficient evidence; and
- e) Students will be able to write a well thought-out, college level philosophy paper that presents and critically analyzes a position and contains an original and well-reasoned argument about the position.

Email

- a) Students are responsible for checking emails frequently. Students are responsible for making sure that the email address is their primary one;
- b) Put “RELG101” in the subject line of any email you send (e.g., “Subject: RELG101 question about the ontological argument”);
- c) Please make sure that your full name appears somewhere in each message (preferably at the end of the message);
- d) You will be fully responsible for the results of failure to follow these simple instructions.

Grading:

- a) Your total course grade will be determined based on the following:

Participation 10%
Mid-term exam 20%
HW assignments 20%
Final paper 25%
Final exam 25%

- b) Grade scale:

I'll be using the “standard” grading scale:

A+:4.3——95-100

A :4.0——87-94

A -:3.7——82-86

B+:3.3——78-81

B :3.0——75-77

B -:2.7——71-74

C+:2.3——68-70



C :2.0——65-67

C -:1.7——61-64

D :1.0——55-60

E :0.0——49-54

X :0.0——0

Participation:

- a) Participation is 10% of your overall grade
- b) I expect that each class a student makes makes at least two contributions and responses to other students' contributions. To get 100% for your participation grade you need 40 contributions + responses
- c) Discussion during lecture and on the course website will help you and your classmates to understand the material better and relate it with issues not covered in class. It will also train a skill that you will be learning this semester--to present and critically analyze arguments.
- d) Students who have anxiety of speaking during class should contact the instructor in the first 2 days of the course. They will be offered to write a paper in lieu of class participation. The instructor will provide the paper assignment. If the students do not contact the instructor within the first 2 days, then they are responsible for their participation grade as measured *via* class participation.
- e) Students with 40 or above contributions and responses may be bumped up, if their course grade is borderline
- f) A "substantial contribution" includes:
 - i) Asking an original question;
 - ii) Presenting an argument of your own, relevant to that day's material;
 - iii) Developing a criticism of an argument that has been described in the lecture;
 - iv) Drawing an interesting and relevant analogy to something else in the course or in popular culture;
 - v) Clarifying an issue that was raised in the lecture, readings, or discussion that you think might be unclear and important; and
 - vi) Any other contributions the instructor agrees are relevant.
 - vii) Warning: you will get credit based on the insight, relevance, and frequency of your participation.
- g) You can receive a maximum of two participation points per meeting with me during office hours

Midterm exam:

- a) The midterm exam is 20% of your overall grade



- b) The midterm exam will test your comprehension of material presented in the readings, lectures, and HW assignments
- c) The midterm exam will contain about 20 true/false and multiple choice questions and about 3 short answer questions. The quantity of questions is subject to change.

Final exam:

- a) The final exam is 25% of your overall grade
- b) The final exam will be partially cumulative: it will test your comprehension of the logic part of this course together with material presented after the midterm exam
- d) The final exam will test your comprehension of material presented in the readings, lectures, and HW assignments
- e) The final exam will contain about 30 true/false and multiple choice questions and about 4 short answer questions. The quantity of questions is subject to change.

Homework assignments:

- a) The HW assignments are 20% of your overall grade.
- b) There will be 10 HW assignments (see course schedule) and will consist of multiple choice questions and occasionally a short answer question
- c) The HW assignments will test your comprehension of material presented in the readings and lectures
- d) If you wish to succeed in this course, you must keep up with the readings and lectures, and do the HW assignments. The course material is cumulative and will get more difficult as we go along. To help you keep up, you will be expected to hand in completed homework assignments.

Final paper:

- a) The final paper is 25% of your overall grade
- b) The paper must be around 1500 words.
- c) You will be tasked with:
 - i) Picking a position on one of the topics discussed and stating it as your thesis;
 - ii) Presenting an argument for your thesis (could be one that has been discussed in class) (between 250-500 words);
 - iii) Presenting a considered objection to your argument (could be one that has been discussed in class) (between 250-500 words);
 - iv) Presenting a response to the considered objection (could be one that has been discussed in class) (between 250-500 words); and
 - v) Having an original contribution in your your paper. An original contribution consists of giving an argument, objection, and/or rebuttal that you have come up with on your own
 - vi) Your paper will be evaluated on the basis of clarity, how strong the argument, objections, and responses are, and the quality of your original contribution. When the paper shows



excellent clarity, structure, and understanding of the material, but poor original contribution, then the student would get at most a B. Outside research is not required. If you do outside research, it is strongly suggested that you check with me on your understanding of the relevant material. It is strongly suggested that you make a paper outline and come and discuss it with me. I will accept paper outlines until Week 4, Friday, #####.

Class policies:

- a) Assignment completion: You are expected to read all the lectures and the reading materials, complete and submit all the assignments on time, and participate in the class discussions. You will not be able to pass the course if you have failed to complete one of the assignments for the course.
- b) Preparation: I expect you to come to class prepared, meaning that you have read the assigned reading material and given lots of thought about it. Reading philosophy is a very challenging task. You will often have to read the material more than once to understand the presented argument. And this cannot be done overnight.
- c) Attendance: I will take attendance, since if you are not attending, you cannot participate in class discussions. Note that attendance will be taken to determine who can get credit for participating on the course website
- d) Late work: there will be a penalty of 1/3 letter grade (e.g. from A to an A-) for each *calendar* day late. The penalty will be waived in the case of religious holidays (students should notify the instructor during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance) and documented medical or family emergencies.
- e) Make-up exams: Make-up exams are permitted in the case of religious holidays (requires notification *at least* a week in advance) and documented medical or family emergencies.
- f) Extra credit: There will be no opportunities for extra credit.
- g) Timeliness: It is your responsibility to submit your work on time. If you are finishing a homework assignment at the last minute, and something goes wrong—the internet connection doesn't work, your printer suddenly stopped printing, you run out of the printer toner, or whatever—that's one way an assignment can end up being late. "My internet didn't work," "something went wrong with my printer," etc., will not count. Please plan ahead and submit your work on time.
- h) Needing a grade: Also, the fact that you "need" a certain grade is not a reason for giving it to you. I will give you an 'A' only if you earn an 'A'; if you earn a 'C' and "need" a 'B', it is not my concern. The integrity of the grading process, the course and, indeed, the UMD depends on instructors and students understanding this distinction. If you need help, let me know. I'll do what I can within reason, and dealing with problems early can help a lot.
- i) Unsubmitted assignments: Failure to complete an assignment will result in your receiving no points (a zero) for that assignment. You cannot pass the class without submitting all the required assignments.
- j) Contesting a grade: If you wish to contest your grade on an exam, you must do so within *one week* of that assignment's being graded and made available to you.



- k) Evaluation: You will be evaluated based on the *quality* of your work and not on the effort exerted. Some assignments will test comprehension; others will test your ability to present ideas clearly, or critically analyze an argument and demonstrate reflection. Some students may need to work much harder than other students to get the same grade. Nevertheless, I grade the work and not the student.
- l) Decorum: It should go without saying that the proper level of decorum is expected in class. Attention should be paid to whoever is speaking. Listening to music, reading newspapers, and using your phones and/or computers for anything but note-taking during lectures do not create a good impression of you and may hurt your chances of getting a boost of your grade if it is on a borderline. Cynicisms and inappropriate comments will not be tolerated.
- m) Incompletes: An incomplete will only be awarded if the following three conditions are met:
- i) The student asks for it;
 - ii) The student has completed 85% of the assigned work, which is to include the mid-term exam; and
 - iii) The student has encountered documented family or medical emergency that the instructor agrees will prevent the student from finishing the course
- n) Writing: Writing is an essential tool for thinking and communicating in virtually every profession. Therefore, in this course I expect you to produce writing that is not only thoughtful and accurate, but also organized, clear, and consistent with the rules of Standard English. If your writing does not meet these standards, I may deduct points or ask you to revise.
- o) Academic integrity:
- i) There are four types of academic dishonesty: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes dishonesty of these four types. Please consult ##### or speak to the instructor if you would like any clarification (e.g., regarding what constitutes plagiarism);
 - ii) I take incidents of academic dishonesty very seriously. I will forward to ##### any cases of it that come to my attention.

Schedule

(Readings might be altered as the course progresses. If there are any changes, they will be announced in class.)

	0. Introduction		
W1, Mon,	0.1. Introduction to course	Assigned reading/viewing: Course syllabus; Lecture on deductive	Activities: 1. Read the syllabus 2. Begin reading the lecture on deductive arguments



		arguments Video lecture on deductive arguments	3. Begin viewing the recordings on deductive arguments
	1. Arguments and Concepts of God		
W1, Mon,	1.1. Deductive and Inductive Arguments	Assigned reading/viewing: Lectures on deductive and inductive arguments Video lectures on deductive and inductive arguments	Activities: 1. Finish reading the lectures on deductive and inductive arguments 2. Finish viewing the recordings on deductive and inductive arguments 3. Do HW1 on deductive arguments
W1, Tue,	1.2. Abductive arguments and Concepts of God	Assigned reading/viewing: Lectures on abductive arguments and concepts of God Video lectures on abductive arguments and concepts of God; PR, Chapter	Activities: 1. Do HW2 on inductive arguments 2. Finish reading the lectures on abductive arguments and concepts of God 3. Finish viewing the recordings on abductive arguments and concepts of God
W1, Wed,	Discussion section		Activities: 1. Do HW3 on abductive arguments
	2. The Design Argument		
W1, Tr,	2.1. The Design argument	Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on the design	Activities: 1. Read the lectures on the design argument 2. View the recordings on the design argument



		<p>argument and/or PR, Chapter 2;</p> <p>Video lectures on the design argument and/or PR, Chapter 2; Paley’s “Natural Theology”</p> <p>(https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/paley1802.pdf Sections 1 and 2)</p>	<p>3. Read: PR, Chapter 2; Paley’s “Natural Theology”</p>
	3. The Cosmological argument		
W1, Fri,	Discussion section		
W2, Mon,	3.1. The Cosmological argument	<p>Assigned reading/viewing:</p> <p>Lecture on the cosmological argument and/or PR, Chapter 3; Video lectures on the cosmological argument and/or PR, Chapter 3; Aquinas’ “The Existence of God”</p> <p>(http://www.faculty.umb.edu/adam_beresf</p>	<p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do HW4 on the Design argument 2. Finish reading the lectures on the cosmological argument and/or PR, Chapter 3 3. Finish viewing the recordings on the cosmological argument and/or PR, Chapter 3



		ord/courses/phil_100 _11/reading_five_ways.pdf)	
	4. The Ontological argument		
W2, Tue,	4.1. The Ontological argument	Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on the ontological argument and/or PR, Chapter 4; Video lecture on the ontological argument and/or PR, Chapter 4; Anselm's "Ontological Argument" (https://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/articles/anselm-a.pdf)	Activities: 1. Do HW5 on the Cosmological argument 2. Read the lectures on the ontological argument and/or PR, Chapter 4 3. View the recordings on the ontological argument and/or PR, Chapter 4 4. Read: PR, Chapter 4; Anselm's "Ontological Argument"
W2, Wed,	4.2. Reformed Epistemology	Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on reformed epistemology and/or PR, Chapter 7; Video lecture on reformed epistemology and/or PR, Chapter 7	Activities: 1. Do HW6 on the Ontological argument 2. Read the lectures on reformed epistemology and/or PR, Chapter 7 3. View the recordings on reformed epistemology and/or PR, Chapter 7
W2, Tr,	Review	Assigned reading:	Activities:



		Review sheet for the Midterm exam	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do HW7 on reformed epistemology 2. Read the review sheet for the Midterm exam and look over the lectures and HWs 3. Prepare questions about the review sheet and ask them in class
W2, Fri,	Discussion section		
W3, Mon,	Midterm exam		<p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take the Midterm exam
W3, Tue,	Final paper class	<p>Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on the final paper assignment; Recording on the final paper assignment</p>	<p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the lecture on the final paper assignment 2. View the recording on the final paper assignment
	5. The Problem of Evil		
W3, Wed,	5.1. The Problem of Evil	<p>Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9; Recording on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9; Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</p>	<p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the lectures on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9 2. View the recordings on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9 3. Read: Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (Parts 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)



		(https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hume1779.pdf Parts 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)	
W3, Tr,	5.2. The Problem of Evil	Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9; Recording on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9; Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hume1779.pdf Parts 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)	Activities: 1. Read the lectures on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9 2. View the recordings on the problem of evil and/or PR, Chapter 9 3. Read: Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (Parts 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)
W3, Fri,	Discussion section		
	6. Pascal's wager		
W4, Mon,	6.1. Pascal's wager	Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on Pascal's wager and/or PR, Chapter 8; Recording on Pascal's wager	Activities: 1. Do HW8 on the problem of evil 2. Read the lectures on Pascal's wager and/or PR, Chapter 8 3. View the recordings on Pascal's wager and/or PR, Chapter 8.



		and/or PR, Chapter 8; Pascal's "The Wager" (https://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/articles/pascal-a.pdf)	4. Read: Pascal's "The Wager" (on course website)
	7. God and Language		
W4, Tue,	7.1. God and Language	Assigned reading/viewing: Lecture on God and language and/or PR, Chapter 12; Recording on God and language and/or PR, Chapter 12;	Activities: 1. Do HW9 on Pascal's wager 2. Read the lectures on God and Language and/or PR, Chapter 12 3. View the recordings on God and Language and/or PR, Chapter 12
W4, Wed,	7.2. God and Language		Activities: 1. Read the lectures on God and Language and/or PR, Chapter 12 2. View the recordings on God and Language and/or PR, Chapter 12
W4, Tr,	Review	Assigned reading: Review sheet for the Final exam	Activities: 1. Do HW10 on God and Language 2. Read the review sheet for the Final exam and look over the lectures and HWs 2. Prepare questions about the review sheet and ask them in class
W4, Fri,	Final exam		Activities: 1. Take the Final exam