

RELIGION 202-E01 Introduction to Reason and Faith

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Class Description: This class is a critical study of the intellectual strands leading to Western disconnections between reason and faith; the search for the balance between belief and reason with emphasis on contemporary developments.

The Nature of the Course

One of the most important and persistent problems of philosophy and theology is the problem of faith and reason. In fact, the problem of reason and faith lies at the heart of all theology. No approach to understanding God can come without some kind of resolution regarding reason and faith. The problem becomes one of assessing the significance and relation of the rational and non-rational contributions to how we understand and perceive the realities of life.

In this class we shall consider evidence for or against God and things related to God, trying to understand the multidimensional problem that lies at the heart of Western thought and experience—the problem of believing in God or not! Primarily reading material (the text) will concentrate on and come from the Christian tradition, although other traditions will be explored.

Some questions and topics to be discussed in the class:

What is the nature and contribution of divine revelation?

What is the nature of evil?

How can evil be reconciled to God?

What is God, anyway?

Is belief in God a properly held belief?

What is the relation of myth and symbolism to cognition?

What is the relevance of sense-experience for knowledge of God?

Can there be “blind” faith?

Is reason an arbiter among religious claims?

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- Recognize and define important terms and concepts within the disciplines of theology and philosophy of religion.

- Articulate with increased understanding what it means to think about or believe in God, what is the nature of religion, what does religious experience mean, and can reason and faith be related?
- Engage meaningfully with others in society on important issues of morality and ethics.
- Develop a foundation for arriving at perspectives on important questions asked by religions throughout the world—why is there evil? Is there life after death? How are revelation and scripture connected? Are religion and science compatible?
- Demonstrate thought and learning by writing an effective essay on a topic of choice.

Required Text

Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach, and Basinger, Reason & Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, 5th edition (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Course Requirements and Attendance Policy

Students are expected to read the daily assignments very closely and carefully. Some of the reading selections will be difficult and demanding, so persistent study and thoughtful reflection on the material is essential. Regular class attendance is necessary for obtaining the maximum benefit from this class. Class discussions are intended to help clarify significant and complex questions raised, and enhance evaluation of the possible answers proposed in the reading material. More than three absences, whether excused or unexcused, may result in a grade penalty.

There will be two exams (non-cumulative and study guide provided); and one assigned essay (topic of choice up to 5 pages) that will be submitted in written form and presented orally during class.

Determination of Grade

The course grade will be based on the following percentages:

First Exam	25%
Second Exam	25%
Essay and class presentation	40%
Class participation	10%

Schedule and Assignments

- Week 1A Introduction to class and discuss syllabus
- Week 1B Thinking about God: the search for the divine (Read R&RB chapter 1)
Topics: Humans as religious animals, speculations on the origins of religion, attempts at definition of religion
- Week 2A Continue previous discussion
- Week 2B What is the nature of religion? (Read R&RB chapter 2)
- Week 3A What is the religious experience? (Read R&RB chapter 3)
- Week 3B Faith and Reason: how are they related? (Read R&RB chapter 4)
- Week 4A Continue previous discussion
- Week 4B Theism: what is it and what are arguments for it? (Read R&RB chapter 5)
Topics: Ontology, Cosmology, Teleology, other arguments for verification of God
- Week 5A Continue previous discussion
- Week 5B Continue previous discussion
- Week 6A Does knowing God need arguments for proof? Are there other bases to make the claim? (Read R&RB chapter 6)
- Week 6B The Divine attributes: what is God like? (Read R&RB chapter 7)
- Week 7A Divine Action: How does God relate to the world? (Read R&RB chapter 8)
- Week 7B Exam I
- Week 8 Fall Break

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Week 9A The problem of evil (Read R&RB chapter 9)

Topics: Theodicy, the devil

Week 9B Miracles (Read R&RB chapter 10)

Week 10A Life after Death (Read R&RB chapter 11)

Week 10B Religious Language: How do we speak about God? (Read R&RB chapter 12)

Week 11A Techniques of Theology (salvation, revelation, myth)

Week 11B Religion and Science (Read R&RB chapter 13)

Week 12A Continue previous discussion

Week 12B Atheism

Week 13A Religious Diversity (Read R&RB chapter 14)

Week 13B Religious Ethics and Morality (Read R&RB chapter 15)

Week 14A The Continuing Quest (Read R&RB chapter 16)

Week 14B Class essays/presentations

Week 15A Class essays/presentations

Week 15B Class summation and review for final exam

Dec. 5 Reading Day

Final Exam

(for the essay and class presentation, students will select a topic to be approved by the instructor, who will assist in bibliography and subject matter.)