

PHILOSOPHY 106: GOD AND SCIENCE

Version of 01.07.17

Time: TR 10:50-12:05 (Section 1) and 1:10-2:25 (Section 2)

Location: CNS E101

Instructor: Thomas Blanchard

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Office Hours: MF 9:15-10:45

TR 9:30-10:30

and by appointment

Office Hours Location: CLA Room 128

1. Course Description, Objectives, and What to Expect

The focus of this course is the question whether the sciences and religion stand in relations of *conflict* or *concord*. Do the sciences undermine the rationality of religious belief? Or is the scientific view of the world compatible with religious belief? Do the sciences and religion perhaps even support each other, so that the results of contemporary science make it *irrational* not to believe in God? We will look at these questions by studying what prominent scientists, theologians and philosophers have had to say on the topic. In particular, we will look at three scientific theories/domains that are of particular relevance to the questions above: evolutionary biology, contemporary cosmology and scientific accounts of the mind.

My goal is not only for you to learn what people who have thought long and hard about the relationships between science and religion have said on the topic. My main objective is to help you articulate, defend and refine *your own view* of the relations between science and religion.

This is a philosophy class. As you will see, philosophy is *hard*. It can also be unsettling: as you will see, reading, discussing and writing philosophical texts often forces us to reevaluate, refine and sometimes abandon some of our most cherished beliefs. It is important to remember that most of you are studying philosophy and writing philosophy papers for the first time. Like all new activities, it will take you some time to familiarize yourself with it. But I hope you will find it fun.

2. Prerequisites and General Requirements Met

There are no prerequisites for this class, and I won't assume any prior familiarity with philosophy, theology or any particular area of science. This course meets the IT requirement.

3. Book

We will use the following book:

- Dennett, Daniel & Plantinga, Alvin. (2011). **Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?** Oxford University Press.

It is available at the bookstore. Most of our readings will be drawn from other sources: these additional readings will be posted on Moodle. When the reading is posted on Moodle, it is essential that you come to class with a **physical copy** of the reading. If you do not have the text with you, this may negatively impact your participation grade.

4. Attendance Policy

The official attendance policy for this class is that **attendance is mandatory**. However, I will excuse three absences without penalty. More than three absences will negatively impact your course grade. A fourth absence will lower your grade by three percent, a fifth absence will lower your grade by six percent, a sixth absence will lower your grade by ten percent, and seven absences or more will likely result in a failing grade.

Please be in class on time. Being late for class with no legitimate excuse can be very disruptive. If you are late multiple classes I might count this as one absence.

5. Grade Breakdown

The grade breakdown for this class is as follows:

Preparation and Participation:	10% of the grade
Quizzes	7.5% of the grade
Tiny Assignments	7.5% of the grade
First Paper:	10% of the grade
Second Paper:	20% of the grade
Third Paper	20% of the grade
Final Exam:	25% of the grade

Explanation of grades (from IWU's Catalog):

A, A-:	Credit for work of superior quality.
B+, B, B-:	Credit for work of good to very good quality.
C+, C:	Credit for work of acceptable but not distinguished quality.
C-:	Credit for work of marginal quality.
D:	Credit for work of poor quality.
F:	Failure.

Grading scale: 94-100 = A; 90-93 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72 = C-; 60-69 = D; 0-59: F.

The remainder of this section is an explanation of each component of the grade.

a) Preparation and Participation

Active participation is especially important in philosophy, more so than in other domains. Philosophical problems are best understood by actively thinking about them. As a result philosophy is best learnt by practicing it, which involves actively participating to the class. Participation has two main components. First, it involves participating to discussions involving the class as a whole, i.e. raising and answering questions about the readings and the topic of discussion. Second, we will do various small-group activities during the class, and I will monitor your participation to these activities. (Note that if you come to my office hours to discuss readings or papers, this will also count toward your participation grade.)

To assess participation, I will adopt the following method. When you participate (by making a comment, contributing to discussion, raising a question, etc.), you will receive a poker chip. At the end of each session, you will 'cash out' the poker chips you receive, which will allow me to track participation. The maximum number of poker chips you can receive during a session is 4, although you are of course welcome to participate more than 4 times during a session – it's just that you won't receive any new poker chips after your 4 first interventions. N.B.: I am experimenting with this method for the first time and might slightly tweak it during the semester if this becomes necessary.

To be able to participate actively, you should come to class having read the assignments for the day. Some of the reading assignments will be short, but almost all of them will be very difficult and abstract. In order to understand them, you will need to read them slowly and multiple times. When reading a paper I strongly encourage you to write a list of questions about it (objections you may have, passages that you don't understand, etc.) This will help you come to class prepared to actively discuss the reading.

b) Quizzes

Over the course of the semester, there will be several unannounced short quizzes on the readings. More specifically, for every class session for which you have to do a reading, there is a 1/2 chance that there will be a quiz on the reading during the class. The quizzes are designed to test your basic understanding of the readings. They will take place at the beginning of class sessions. There will be no make-up for quizzes, so make sure not to be late for class. At the end of the semester I will drop the two lowest quiz scores from your grade.

c) Tiny Assignments

On certain occasions I will ask you to complete short in-class or homework assignments. For instance, during the first week of the class you will be asked to write a short personal statement about your religious views (theism, agnosticism or atheism) and what evidence supports them in your opinion. Many of these assignments will be graded on a 4 points scale.

d) Papers

You will write three papers during this class. We will discuss the process of writing a philosophy paper later on during the class.

The first paper will be very short (about 2 pp. double-spaced, 12 points font). The first paper will be due on **February 2**. The next two papers will be longer (4-5 pp. double-spaced, 12 points font). The second paper will be due on **March 2**, and the third paper on **April 13**.

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Late papers will be penalized as follows. For each day late, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade from your paper grade. So an A paper would for instance become an A- paper after one day late, starting after the beginning of class on the due date.

I will happily answer questions regarding the papers before they are due. If you are interested in having me comment on a draft of a paper, please make an appointment to ensure that you are able to meet with me.

To maximize objectivity in grading, I will grade papers (and other assignments) **anonymously**. You can help me streamline this process by remembering your **student ID**.

e) Final Exam

There will be a final exam (date announced later during the semester). The final will be closed-book, closed-notes. It will involve a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions.

6. Academic Integrity

I expect you to be familiar with IWU's Statement on Plagiarism, which can be found on the course webpage. It defines plagiarism as 'the intentional or inadvertent misrepresentation as one's own, the words, ideas, research data, formulae or artistic creations of another individual or collective body, without giving credit to the originator(s) of those words, ideas, data, formulae or artistic creations.' **Plagiarism is strictly prohibited.**

7. Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability, please come see me at the end of this class so that we can discuss accommodations.

8. Class Etiquette and Behavior

1) Please don't engage in non-class activities during class time, as those are disruptive to other students and to me. That means no crossword, newspaper reading, web surfing, Facebooking, texting, and so on.

2) Please **check your emails** frequently (outside of class!). Email will be my preferred mode of communication outside of class. You should check your IWU email account at least once a day, preferably every few hours during the day.

3) A note of warning: in this class we will discuss a variety of **controversial** topics. Opinions and positions may (and probably will) vary greatly between members of this class, and you are expected to listen to almost all points of view and respect others' rights to express those views. You should also be prepared to have your points of view respectfully challenged.

9. Class Content: Topics and Readings (Tentative)

Please keep in mind the following:

a) The schedule below is **tentative**. I may alter the schedule and readings depending upon how the class deals with a topic. We may spend more time on a topic if the class finds it hard or especially interesting.

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b) Because I wish to remain flexible, I have not included a day-by-day schedule for the readings. At the end of each class I will tell you the readings for next class, and I will also send you an email to remind you of what we're discussing next class.

WEEK 1: Introduction

No readings

WEEKS 2-3: Reasons for Religious Belief

During those two weeks will then look at the question whether religious beliefs need any sort of evidence at all to be rational, and what philosophers have had to say about possible kinds of evidence for religious belief.

Required readings:

- Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" (Moodle)
- Aquinas, "The Five Ways" (Moodle)
- Interview with Alvin Plantinga (Moodle)

WEEK 4: Galileo and the Church

We will look at the most famous historical episode seemingly involving a conflict between science and religion – the one involving Galileo and the Catholic Church in the 17th century. We will study what the conflict was really about, and how Galileo himself attempted to solve it. We will also examine issues relating to the interpretation of the Bible through the lens of this historical episode.

Required readings:

- Dixon, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction*. Ch. 2, "Galileo and the Philosophy of Science"
- Galileo, *Letter to the Grand Duchess* (Moodle)

WEEKS 5-9: Darwinism and Religion

In what sense, if any, does Darwinism undercut rational religious belief? As we will see philosophers and scientists have proposed many different answers to that question. Along the way we will evaluate the debate between Darwinism and Intelligent Design (ID), whether there is any positive evidence for ID, and whether it should be taught in schools.

Required readings:

- Paley, *Natural Theology*, excerpts (Moodle)
- Genesis, Chapters 1-2 (Moodle)
- Coyne, *Why Evolution is True*, ch. 1, "What is Evolution?" (Moodle)
- Dupre, *Darwin's Legacy*, ch. 4, "Human Origins and the Decline of Theism" (Moodle)
- Dennett and Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (selections)
- Sarkar, *Doubting Darwin*, ch. 6, "Complexity is Complicated" (Moodle)

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- Pennock, “Should We Teach Creationism in Public Schools?”, *Science and Education* 11, 2002 (Moodle)

WEEKS 10: Miracles

Here we will examine whether belief in miracles is compatible with a scientific outlook on the world. Along the way we will discuss a very influential argument to the effect that testimonies of miracles are never credible.

Required readings:

- Dennett and Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (selections)
- Hume, “Of Miracles” (Moodle)

WEEKS 11-12: Cosmology and Divine Creation

Here we will examine a venerable argument for the existence of God: the cosmological argument. We will consider whether recent theories from physical cosmology buttress or undermine the cosmological argument.

Required readings:

- Craig, “A Modern Formulation of the Cosmological Argument” (Moodle)
- Lightman and Brawer, “Introduction to Modern Cosmology” (Moodle)

WEEKS 13-16: Religion, Psychology and Neuroscience

In this section we will examine whether recent results in cognitive psychology and neuroscience have any relevance for the question whether religious belief is rational. In particular, we will look at neuroscientific accounts of religious experience, at materialist accounts of the mind and whether they conflict with the traditional religious view of human beings as endowed with a non-material soul, and at recent evolutionary accounts of belief in God.

Required readings:

- van Inwagen, “Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?” (Moodle)
- James, “Varieties of Religious Experience” (Moodle) + other readings on religious experience TBA
- Readings on evolutionary accounts of religious belief TBA