



School of Humanities and Social Sciences

PHI 301-AIX 1

The Problem of God

202425 Fall

Course Details

Credit Hours: 3

Days: Tu/Th

Time: 16h00 - 17h25

Prerequisites: This course is suitable for an undergraduate student who has successfully completed at least 3 semesters of College-level course work. Successful completion of ENG 101 or equivalent, and 6 credit hours in history, humanities, political science or international relations; or instructor permission.

Instructor Information

Erik Freeman

Email: Erik.Freeman@iau.edu

Course Description

This course offers a critical assessment of the contemporary relevance and plausibility of belief in God, against the background of an historical review of attempts to propose its philosophical basis and justification. Students will be invited to critically reflect on such perennial questions as: What is evil? Does God exist? What is the good life? Why do we have religion? What is the relationship between religion and science? Particular attention will be paid to situating the human spiritual experience within the philosophical discourse of modernity, assessing religious faith within the context of major political, social, and intellectual upheavals of our time.

This course is centered around, but not exclusively bound to, the project of natural theology, that is, the use of our human cognitive faculties to investigate religious and theological matters, particularly those oriented to the conceptualization and proof of a divine omnipotent being, God. As such, it draws primarily on the modes of thought and argument proper to the Western philosophical tradition, while making use of multidisciplinary insights from theology (the study of God organized around religious faith as opposed to natural theology's focus on reason), social science, literature and film. The course also aims to demonstrate the historical and social nature of human reflection concerning God. Finally, the course presents the problem of God as a problem. It does not try to convince students of God's existence nor does it deny this existence. Rather, the aim is to furnish students with the tools necessary to solve the problem in their own way, and thus to arrive at their own understanding of their existential position in the universe. The course does not presuppose any prior study of philosophy or theology.

Course Objectives

- To develop a critical understanding of the issues surrounding what is known as "The Problem of God"
- To achieve a technical grasp of the main philosophical arguments for the existence of God
- To situate these arguments within the wider context of philosophical thought from Ancient Greece to the present
- To appreciate the force of arguments against the existence of God, particularly with reference to the problem of evil
- To connect questions about God to questions about the authority of science and the development of social and political institutions
- To analyze select works of literature and cinema as expressions of philosophical views about God and God's place in the world
- To demonstrate how reflecting on the problem of God contributes to the depth and purposefulness of our everyday lives

Learning Outcomes

Students will learn how to

Deploy and creatively manipulate philosophical concepts and philosophical reasoning to understand and evaluate humankind's conceptual attempts to define and determine the existence of a Supreme Being.

Converse and write coherently and fluently about theology, philosophy, and religious studies as they pertain to the problem of God.

Identify and appreciate the profound links that tie modern social and political traditions to reflection about God.

Interpret literary and cinematic works in theological and philosophical terms.

Apply theological and philosophical conclusions to their understanding and conduct of their own lives.

Better understand the fundamental convictions of people and groups engaged in religious conflict.

Instructional Methods and Activities

Each meeting will be a mixture of lecture and debate (split roughly 60/40). Student presentations will occupy a week at the end of the semester. We will also have a review session for the final paper/final exam.

Primary/Required Textbooks and Materials



The Experience of God

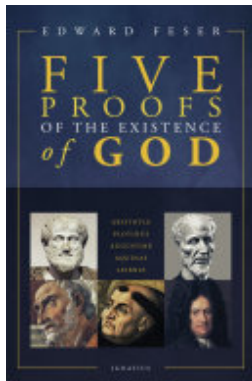
ISBN: 9780300209358

Authors: David Bentley Hart

Publication Date: 2013-01-01



Recommended/Optional Materials



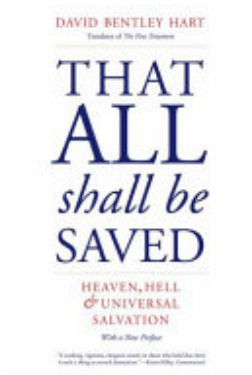
Five Proofs for the Existence of God

ISBN: 9781621641339

Authors: Edward Feser

Publisher: Ignatius Press

Publication Date: 2017-08-18



That All Shall Be Saved

ISBN: 9780300258486

Authors: David Bentley Hart

Publication Date: 2021-01-01

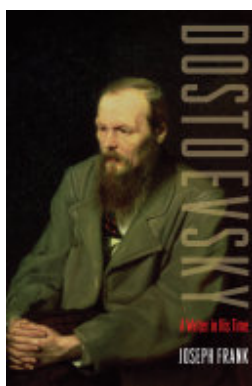


The Rigor of Things

ISBN: 9780823275755

Authors: Jean-Luc Marion

Publication Date: 2017-01-01



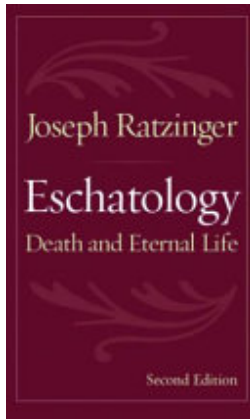
Dostoevsky

ISBN: 9780691155999

Authors: Joseph Frank

Publisher: Princeton University Press

Publication Date: 2012-08-26



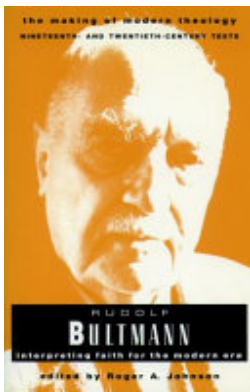
Eschatology

ISBN: 9780813215167

Authors: Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger

Publisher: CUA Press

Publication Date: 2007-10-01



Rudolf Bultmann

ISBN: 9780800634025

Authors: Rudolf Bultmann, Roger A. Johnson

Publisher: Making of Modern Theology

Publication Date: 1991-01-01

Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading

You are required to do three things for this course:

1. Do all the reading. You are expected to have done the reading for each class before the class in question. We will also watch two films during the semester. These will be treated in the same way as the readings.

Coming to class prepared is essential, which means it's essential to do the reading. In this course, I ensure this happens in two ways. Some of the readings are tied to short quizzes, marked with a **Q** (see below). Links to the quizzes are on Teams, and are due before the beginning of the class in question. Once you click on the link you will have ten minutes to complete the quiz, which is open book.

For the readings that are not tied to quizzes, some will involve no evaluation. However, roughly five (give or take) will be tied to unannounced in-class exercises, where you will have ten minutes to summarize the contents of the reading for that day. These summaries will be graded. I'll go over the expectations for all of this in more detail on the first day of class.

Both summaries and quizzes are intended as easy grades provided you've done the reading. In both cases the focus is thematic, not analytical, and as such should require very little extra work on your part, beyond the work you put in doing the reading.

2. Write a research paper. The final paper should be between 2500-3000 words, on a topic of your choosing and organized around your own interests. Though you can choose, you also need to demonstrate a direct connection to the material covered in the syllabus. I need to sign off on your topic before you start, and you will need to hand in notes/an outline later in the semester. Since this is a research paper, it needs to employ a citation system and include a bibliography (at least four academic sources, in addition to what you may take from the syllabus). Lack of one or the other will take 10% off your grade, lack of both 20%.

3. Take a midterm and final exam. These exams are not cumulative. This means that the final exam will not cover material already covered in the midterm.

ASSESSMENT

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Quizzes and summaries on the readings: 30%

Midterm exam: 25%

Final exam: 25%

Research paper: 20%

Grading System/Grade Distribution

Grading System/Grade
Distribution

U.S	ACM	French Equivalent
95-100%	A	17-20
90-94%	A -	16
88-89%	B+	15
84-87%	B	14
80-83%	B-	13
78-79%	C+	12
74-77%	C	11
70-73%	C-	10

U.S	ACM	French Equivalent
68-69%	D+	9
64-67%	D	8
60-63%	D-	7
0-59%	F	0-6

Attendance

One of the primary requirements this semester is that you attend class. This is not a lecture class; it's essential that you come to class on time, be prepared for the lesson, and be ready to participate in discussions and activities. Attendance will be part of your final grade. Any absences can harm your final grade. It will be up to the student to manage and communicate with professors about their absences. For every absence, your final grade may be lowered by one half-letter grade (B+ to become a B, B to become B-, and so on). ACM-IAU professors are empowered to impose academic sanctions (including a lowered grade or even failure) upon students for unexcused absences, frequent tardiness, work submitted late, or any other actions or behaviors that violate ACM's academic standards and policies.

In order to promote an environment conducive to learning and participation, no electronic devices (cell phones/tablets/laptops) may be used in class. In addition, while I do allow drinks in class within reason (water, juice, coffee, etc.), eating in class is not permitted.

You are not permitted to leave the lecture for any reason save emergencies. Arriving late/leaving early/or leaving during class will be noted. If this occurs three or more times, it will be counted as the equivalent of one absence. **All absences beyond two, for whatever reason except scheduled excursions, will lower your final grade by half a letter grade.**

Academic Policies

All students are responsible for reading, knowing, and understanding the information pertinent to their areas of study available in the ACM Catalog. The catalog contains requirements for all degree programs, course descriptions, academic policies, and regulations that govern ACM. All parts of the catalog are subject to annual changes as university rules, policies, and curricula change. It is your responsibility to keep informed of such changes; failure to do so will not exempt you from whatever penalties you may incur. Catalogs are published from August through July.

Review the latest catalog at: <https://www.acmfrance.org/academics/catalog>

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

1. Organizational Meeting **Sep. 3**

I. Reading David Bentley Hart's The Experience of God

2. Hart, chapter 1 **Sep. 5 QUIZ**

3. Hart, chapter 2 **Sep. 10**

4. Hart, chapter 3 **Sep. 12 Q**

5. Hart, chapter 3 continued **Sep. 17**

6. Hart, chapter 4 **Sep. 19**

7. Hart, chapter 4 continued **Sep. 24**

8. Hart, chapter 5 **Sep. 26**

9. Hart, chapter 6 **Oct. 1 Q**

II. The Suffering God in Literature and Film

10. Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment: Nihilism and Redemption in a Fallen World **Oct. 3**

[Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time, chapter 34](#)

[Michael R. Katz, "Three Scenes from Crime and Punishment," New England Review \(1990\)](#)

[Edward Wasiolek, "On the Structure of Crime and Punishment," PMLA \(1959\)](#)

11. Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment: Nihilism and Redemption in a Fallen World (continued) **Oct. 8**

12. Everything is Grace: Hope in the Absent God **Oct. 10 Q**

Film: [Robert Bresson, Diary of a Country Priest / Journal d'un curé de campagne \(1951\)](#)

III. Proving God

13. The Aristotelian Proof of the Existence of God Oct. 15

Edward Feser, Five Proofs of the Existence of God, chapter 1

14. The Aristotelian Proof of the Existence of God (continued) Oct. 17

15. Midterm Exam review Oct. 22

MIDTERM EXAM, THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER

FALL BREAK

16. The Neo-Platonic Proof of the Existence of God Nov. 5

Edward Feser, Five Proofs of the Existence of God, chapter 2

17. The Augustinian Proof of the Existence of God Nov. 7 Q

Edward Feser, Five Proofs of the Existence of God, chapter 3

FINAL PAPER TOPICS DUE, FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER

IV. Evil, Atheism, and Disillusionment

18. The Problem of Evil Nov. 12

[William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," American Philosophical Quarterly \(1979\).](#)

19. Should We Want God to Exist? Nov. 14 Q

[Guy Kahane, "Should We Want God to Exist?" Philosophy and Phenomenological Research \(2011\).](#)

20. Bultmann, Modernity, and Demythologization Nov. 19

[Rudolf Bultmann, "What Sense Is There to Speak of God?" Christian Scholar \(1960\).](#)

[Rudolf Bultmann, "On the Problem of Demythologizing," Journal of Religion \(1962\)](#)

21. Hope in a Fallen World Nov. 21 Q

[Film: Paul Schrader, First Reformed \(2017\)](#)

V. The Existence and Population of Hell

22. Hell: The Universalist View Nov. 26

David Bentley Hart, "An Interim Report on That All Shall Be Saved," Public Orthodoxy <https://publicorthodoxy.org/> (Parts [One](#), [Two](#), and [Three](#))

23. The Standard View of Last Things Nov. 28

[Joseph Ratzinger, "Hell, Purgatory, Heaven," in Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life, CUA Press, 1988](#)

VII. Conclusion

24. New Ways of Thinking About God: Love, Gift, Icon Dec. 3 Q

Jean-Luc Marion, The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib, chapter 4

25. Final Paper/Final Exam Review Dec. 5

FINAL EXAM (date TBD)

FINAL PAPER DUE (date TBD)

Submitting Work, Late Policy, and Additional Expectations

Please submit your work in Word format through Teams (not via email). You must include references according to one of the standard systems (Chicago Style, MLA, etc.). I am not particular about this, so long as it's intelligible and consistent.

All work turned in late will receive a penalty. You will also be penalized if you have not gotten your final paper topic approved or handed in your notes by the deadlines set below. The standard penalty is 10 points of the total grade per 24-hour period late. That said, (reasonable) requests for extensions will always be considered if they are made before the deadline for any particular assignment. Requests for extensions made after the deadline will not be granted. I will accept rewrites only in exceptional circumstances (generally only if for some definite reason I am unable to grade the assignment as it stands).

Please be aware that failure to turn in multiple assignments can lead to failing the course, even if you are taking it Pass/Fail. You will not be granted an opportunity to make up large chunks of work later in the semester.

Please note that you are required to use Teams, and are also required to use your iau.edu email address. You are responsible for all messages sent to this address, and for all information posted on Teams. Once the add/drop period is over, I will not write to nor respond to messages sent from your personal or home university email addresses.