

PHIL 3367 - 01 | Philosophy of Religion

Fall 2016

Dr. Harris B. Bechtol

Class Time: MWF 11:00-11:50 AM College of Humanities and Social Sciences 220

Office Hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 PM

Office Location: College of Humanities and Social Sciences 360

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy Of Religion. 3 Hours.

An examination of the nature and meaning of religion and religious expression. Philosophical and scientific critiques of religious faith and experience are considered. The nature of faith and reason, the question of the existence and nature of God, and the relation of religion and value are typical course topics.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is an upper-level introduction to the growing field of continental philosophy of religion. This field has become one in which arguments for the existence of God, solving the problem of evil through a theodicy, talking about the existence and nature of the soul, and wading through the murky waters of the freedom and divine foreknowledge debate have dropped out of focus in favor of attempts to describe—perhaps even to defend—the experience of the divine and the impact this experience has on people for the way they make their way in the world. The main goal of philosophers of religion from the continental tradition is to think about God and religious experience outside of the confines that have traditionally been placed on them by Western metaphysical thinking. The themes that we will explore include, but are not limited to, the nature of religion, the nature of God, the religious structure of temporality, the nature and scope of human responsibility, and impetuses of ethical life. The aim of the course is to introduce students not only to this way of thinking about religion, religious experience, and the divine from out of the three continental philosophers who have come to shape this field of philosophy but also to explore where this field is headed today. So we will begin with an engagement with Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida in order to establish an understanding of what is at stake in continental philosophy of religion. Then, we will explore the philosophies of four contemporary philosophers who have each left their mark on continental philosophy of religion in distinctive ways.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* trans. David Wills Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). ISBN-13: 978-0226142777

Schedule, topics, and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.

Emanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* eds. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996). ISBN-13: 978-0253210791
Readings on Blackboard

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Introduce students to the scope of this growing field in philosophy.
2. Challenge students to think about God and their experience of the divine in new ways.
3. Challenge students to think critically about their religious beliefs and practices.

COURSE WORK

The basis for your grade is as follows:

(1) Reading Quizzes	10 points (1 point each)
(2) Journal	30 points (5 points each)
(3) Exams or Essays	60 points (30 points each)
Total Possible Points	100 points

1. Reading Quizzes: Considering that we are reading philosophy, coming to class for lectures and discussion is paramount because often times the reading is difficult to understand. Often only through participation in class (i.e. listening, taking notes, asking questions, and talking during discussion) do the texts begin to make sense. **As an incentive to help you remember to come to class, we will have unannounced reading quizzes periodically throughout the semester. We will have more than 10 quizzes throughout the semester, but I will only count 10 of the quizzes that we have.** If you miss class, it is your responsibility to acquire any information and notes that you may have missed. Get these from your peers. Once you have acquired notes from class, I would be happy to discuss any questions that you may have about the information covered on that day.
2. Assignments: This is a “W” course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. For this course, 90 points out of the 100 points in the course will come from writing. Some writing activities, namely exam answers or research essays, can be submitted early in draft form so that you can revise your work. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool that I will use to assess your level of learning. All assignments are due at the beginning of class when they are due. I will accept them early if it is conducive for you. For the journal entries, exams/essay papers, make-up work or extensions must be pre-approved. Extensions are only granted for *extenuating* circumstances. **Late assignments will not be accepted except with university excused absences or in rare cases at the instructor’s discretion.** All work, unless otherwise stated, must be typed with 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced and 1-inch margins all around. Give yourself enough

time to proofread and edit your papers. Format should conform to Chicago style guidelines. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

- a. Journal: After each philosopher that we cover, you must submit to me a journal entry that answers all three of the following questions. You may write as much as you like on these, which means there is no limit to how much you can write, but each entry **must be at least one page** double spaced with 1-inch margins all around and 12-point Times New Roman font.
 - (1) What does this philosopher say that you agree with and why?
 - (2) What does this philosopher say that you disagree with and why?
 - (3) How has this philosopher changed the way you think about God and your experience of God now?
- b. Exams/Essays:
 - i. Option 1: Two take-home essay tests. Your answers should be typed and formatted as delineated above. Each exam will consist of four questions, and you will need to answer three of the questions. The questions will concern major themes and ideas from the philosophers that we will be reading and discussing. Each question should be answered in 2-3 double spaced pages and formatted as delineated above. So your exam will be anywhere from 6-9 pages. You will have approximately one week to prepare your answers for each exam. See the course schedule below for due dates.
 - ii. Option 2: Two research papers with the following guidelines. **NB: You must speak to me ahead of time about your paper topic if you choose this option.**
 - (1) Essay #1: A conference length, research paper of about 8-10 pages that focuses on a theme, topic, or figure from the first half of the course. This can be on a topic of your choosing that focuses on either one of the philosophers in the first half of the course, or it can be on two of the philosophers in the first half of the course. You can even write about one other figure not covered in the course as long as this external figure does not draw your paper too far afield of the major topic of the course. See the course schedule below for the due date.
 - (2) Essay #2: A conference length, research paper of about 8-10 pages that focuses on a theme, topic, or figure from the second half of the course. You can include any of the figures in the course, but the main focus of the paper needs to be on at least one of the figures from the second half of the course. Again, you can write about one other figure not covered in the course as long as this external figure does not draw your paper too far afield of the major topic of the course. See the course schedule below for the due date.

GRADING

Your final grade will be determined based on the above requirements. Late assignments will not be accepted unless I tell you otherwise. Grade equivalents are as follows:

A 89.5-100 B 79.5-89 C 69.5-79 D 59.5-69 F 59.4-0

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Weeks			Readings	Due Dates
Weeks 1-2	W	8/23	Class Introduction Intro to Course Roots and Provocations Handout	
Weeks 3-5	M	9/4	LABOR DAY - NO CLASS Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Theology" (Blackboard) Heidegger, "The Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics" (Blackboard)	
Weeks 6-7	M	9/25	Levinas, <i>Basic Philosophical Writings</i> , "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Levinas, <i>Basic Philosophical Writings</i> , "Enigma and Phenomenon"	Journal on Heidegger
Weeks 8-10	M	10/9	Derrida, <i>The Gift of Death</i> , pp. vii-ix, 30, and 48-50 Derrida, <i>The Gift of Death</i> , Chapter 3 Derrida, <i>The Gift of Death</i> , Chapter 4	Journal on Levinas Journal on Derrida MIDTERM GIVEN
Week 11	M	10/30	Marion, "Double Idolatry" (Blackboard)	MIDTERM/ESSAY #1 DUE
Week 12	M	11/6	Kearney, <i>The God Who May Be</i> , "Introduction" (Blackboard) Kearney, <i>The God Who May Be</i> , "I Am Who May Be" (Blackboard)	Journal on Marion

Schedule, topics, and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.

Weeks 13-14	M	11/13	Julia Kristeva, "This Incredible Need to Believe" (Blackboard)	Journal on Kearney
			THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	
Week 15	M	11/27	Catherine Keller, "Enfolding and Unfolding God" (Blackboard)	Journal on Kristeva
				FINAL GIVEN
Week 16	W	12/6	FINAL EXAM/ESSAY #2 DUE BY 2 PM	

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

A college philosophy class is a serious undertaking. Each one of you deserves a classroom environment that is most conducive for your learning. Cell phones must be turned off or turned to silent. The use of computers for taking notes is allowed, but only for the purpose of taking notes. **Use of the computer for any other purpose will result in having to put the computer away for the remainder of the semester.** You may drink an appropriate beverage in class, and if you need to eat something in class, choose something that is not disruptive. Do not begin preparing to leave class before the end of the class session. I will be keeping my eye on the clock.

ADA POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

