



REASON, FAITH, AND GOD: PHILOSOPHY OF WESTERN RELIGION

PHIL/RELI 134/126.001 SPRING 2024
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



COURSE INFORMATION

Credit Hours: 3

Pre or Co-Requisites: None

Target Audience: Philosophy majors/minors and all undergraduates interested in the topic.

Meeting Pattern: TR 9:30–10:45am

Instructional Format: In-person

Classroom or Location: Caldwell Hall 105

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Jackson LeViness (he/him/his)

UNC Email Address: jdlev@unc.edu

Office Location: Caldwell Hall 107B

Office Hours: TW 11:00am–12:30pm (in-person) and by appointment (in-person or Zoom)



COURSE CONTENT

Course Description

A philosophical inquiry into the problems of religious experience and belief, as expressed in philosophic, religious, and literary documents from traditional and contemporary sources. Honors version available.

We will focus primarily on the following questions:

- What reasons are there for believing/disbelieving in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent god?
- Is religious belief rational? If so, is it because we have evidence or proof for the religious claims that we believe? Or might religious beliefs be rendered rational in some other way?
- What is the relationship between science and religion? Is it one of conflict or concord? Are they independent disciplines or might they inform one another in some way?



Course Texts & Materials

There are no required texts for this course. Assigned readings and materials will be made available on Canvas.

Course Goals & Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

All our philosophy courses aim at the acquisition and nurturing of basic philosophic skills. One of the main goals of our philosophy curriculum is to instill and enable the development of skills that are distinct to philosophy, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge.

These basic philosophical skills involve being able to:

- Think critically;
- Deploy philosophical concepts and terminology correctly, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Represent clearly and accurately the views or argument of particular philosophers, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Identify the premises and conclusion(s) of a philosophical argument and assess both its validity and soundness;
- Apply a philosophical theory or argument to a new topic, and being able to draw and defend reasonable conclusions about that topic;
- Develop an argument for a particular solution to a philosophical problem in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Write clearly, precisely, and persuasively in defense of a philosophical thesis;
- Participate in respectful, critical, and reflexive dialogues about difficult philosophical positions;
- Read, interpret, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical texts and the philosophical positions presented them.

IDEAs in Action General Education Curriculum

PHIL 134/RELI 126 satisfies either the FC-KNOWING or the FC-VALUES focus capacity, described below.

FC-KNOWING

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Recognize and use one or more approaches(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.
2. Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.
3. Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.
4. Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.
5. Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Questions for Students:

1. What norms and expectation do I take for granted?
2. What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?
3. What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?
4. How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?



FC-VALUES

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain the contexts in which questions of justification arise.
2. Assess ethical values in terms of reasons offered.
3. Recognize different ethical perspectives and the distinctive approaches these perspectives bring to the questions of value, evaluating ethical justifications for different ways of organizing civic and political communities.
4. Analyze the differences between personal ethical decisions and those bearing on the public and civic spheres.

Questions for Students:

1. How can people think fruitfully (individually and together) about how they should live their lives?
2. What is required to judge a standard or value as worthy of support?
3. How should we distinguish between prejudices and reasonable grounds for value judgments?
4. What considerations – stories, reasons, testimony, documents, data, etc. – can justify our values and commitments, whether personal or social?

Recurring Capacities

Every focus capacity course includes the following activities:

- **Writing**, totaling at least 10 pages in length or the intellectual equivalent
- **Presenting** material to the class, smaller groups, or the public through oral presentations, webpages, or other means
- **Collaborating** in pairs or groups to learn, design, solve, create, build, or research

These elements – referred to as “recurring capacities” – will help you repeatedly practice crucial skills for future study, life, and career success.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENTS

Expected Time Dedicated to the Class

The typical amount of time required to complete work for the course is 10-12 hours weekly including class/synchronous activities.

Assignment Overview

Assignment	Percentage
Participation and Attendance	20%
Reading Questions	10%
2 Papers (2000 words/8 pages)	30%
Group Quizzes	15%
Presentation	5%
Final Exam (1300-1800 words/5-7 pages)	20%



Assignment Descriptions

Attendance

Attendance is required and makes up 8% of the “Participation and Attendance” grade. If you do not think you will be able to show up to class regularly, please drop this course. Each student gets two unexcused absences that will not count against their grade. Each unexcused absence after the two “free” ones will negatively impact the student’s attendance grade.

If circumstances arise which merit an excused absence, please send me an email before class explaining those circumstances. I will be reasonable in granting excused absences, but please keep in mind that I am also responsible for facilitating learning, which requires keeping students accountable. I see our class as an evolving community, and the failure to regularly attend class disrupts this community. If you provide relevant documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) for why you will be absent, then you will be excused.

Participation

Participation makes up the other 12% of the “Participation and Attendance” grade. This is a measure of each student’s engagement with the lectures, discussions, and other course material. To receive a good participation grade, students must demonstrate their engagement by making regular and thoughtful contributions in class. This can be done in several ways, including:

- Asking relevant questions about the readings or lectures – e.g., how a key move in an argument works, what an important concept means, how an idea/theme relates to some other idea/theme we’ve encountered in the course, etc.
- Helping to advance the conversation by offering comments/objections about the philosophical problems being discussed. Contributions will not be graded according to their philosophical sophistication. That is, students are not expected to come to class with fully fleshed out thoughts on the readings. Rather, they are encouraged to share their tentative ideas/hypotheses and then work together with the rest of the class to refine and evaluate these ideas.
- Respectfully and charitably responding to classmates’ comments – e.g., strengthening a point someone else has made, pointing out weaknesses in (or objections to) others’ arguments/examples, etc.

In-class engagement can be supplemented by, but not altogether substituted with, questions and/or contributions made during office hours or sent to me by email.

To facilitate active participation and minimize distractions, all electronic devices must be completely powered off during the entirety of the class period. (Exceptions can be made in reasonable cases – e.g., medical reasons – but we must discuss it ahead of time). This means students should print out the assigned readings and bring them to class.

Reading Questions

Before each class, students will submit three questions to the required reading. Information regarding what kinds of questions are permissible will be provided in the assignment description on Canvas. These will be graded pass/fail.



Papers

Students are required to write two papers (see schedule below). These papers are intended to help students practice refining philosophical writings skills we will learn and develop throughout the semester. I will distribute a prompt a least a week before each deadline.

Group Quizzes

At the end of each unit, students will be assigned to small groups to complete a short quiz covering material from the corresponding unit. Each group will collaborate on their answers to the quiz questions.

Presentation

Students will present in small groups during the last few classes. At least a week prior, I will assign each group a particular concept, argument, theory, etc. on which to prepare and give a presentation. These presentations will also serve as a review for the final exam. More information regarding the format and duration of the presentations will be provided as we near the end of the semester.

Final Exam

The take-home final exam will consist of 5-7 essay questions covering material from throughout the semester. It will be distributed on May 1st and must be submitted by 8am on May 10th. Students may consult the readings and their own notes.

Grading Scale

Your final grade will be the weighted average (using the weights above) of your assignment grades. Your numerical grade will then be converted to a letter grade according to the following scale:

Numeric Grade (%)	Letter Grade
92.5 and above	A
89.5 – 92.4	A-
86.5 – 89.4	B+
82.5 – 86.4	B
79.5 – 82.4	B-
76.5 – 79.4	C+
72.5 – 76.4	C
69.5 – 72.4	C-
66.5 – 69.4	D+
59.5 – 66.4	D
59.4 and below	F

Table a: Grading Scale



Late Policy

Unless special permission is obtained from the instructor in advance of the deadline, late work will not be excepted without grade penalty, and incompletes will not be given. Permission will only be given when there is a genuine emergency, or the circumstances are exceptional in some other way.

- **Reading Questions:** Reading Questions submitted late will not receive credit.
- **Papers:** Papers submitted late without special permission will receive a 10% deduction for each 24-hour period after the deadline, the first of these periods occurring immediately after the deadline. For example, if a paper is due at 5:00pm on Thursday and submitted between 5:01pm Thursday and 5:00pm Friday, it will receive a 10% deduction. If it is submitted between 5:01pm Friday and 5:00pm Saturday, it will receive a 20% deduction, etc.
- **Quizzes/Presentations:** If a student is absent (without that absence being excused) on a day when we have a Group Quiz or Presentation, they will receive no credit for that assignment.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit #1: Arguments for God's Existence

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings/Assignments</u>
R Jan 11	Introductions	-----
T Jan 16		
R Jan 18		
T Jan 23		van Inwagen – “The Ontological Argument”
R Jan 25		Craig – “The Kalam Cosmological Argument”
T Jan 30		Draper – “A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument”
R Feb 1		Collins – “A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God”
T Feb 6	Catch-Up Day	Hawthorne & Isaacs – “Misapprehensions About...” Juhl – “Fine-Tuning is Not Surprising”
R Feb 8	Group Quiz #1	

Unit #2: The Problem of Evil

T Feb 13	NO CLASS (Wellbeing Day)	
R Feb 15		Mackie – “Evil and Omnipotence”
T Feb 20		Rowe – “The Inductive Argument from Evil...”
R Feb 22		Rowe – “The Inductive Argument from Evil...”
T Feb 27		Plantinga – “The Free Will Defense”
R Feb 29		Stump – “The Problem of Evil and the Desires of the Heart”



T Mar 5		Ekstrom – “Suffering as Religious Experience”
R Mar 7	Group Quiz #2	
F Mar 8		Paper #1 Due

-----SPRING BREAK-----

Unit #3: Belief, Science, and Religion

T Mar 19		Pascal – “The Wager”
R Mar 21		W.K. Clifford – “The Ethics of Belief”
T Mar 26		Peter van Inwagen – “Is It Wrong, Everywhere, Always...?”
R Mar 28	NO CLASS (Wellbeing Day)	
T Apr 2		Plantinga – Religious Belief as ‘Properly Basic’”
R Apr 4		Plantinga – Religious Belief as ‘Properly Basic’”
T Apr 9		Dawkins – Is Science a Religion?
R Apr 11		Gould – “Nonoverlapping Magisteria” Paper #2 Due
T Apr 16		Pope John Paul II – “Faith and Science...”
R Apr 18	Group Quiz #3	
T Apr 23	Presentations	
R Apr 25	Presentations	
T Apr 30	Presentations	
F May 10	Final Exam Period – Reflections on the Semester	Take-Home Final Exam Due by 8am



POLICY STATEMENTS

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Attendance Policy

University Policy: As stated in the University's [Class Attendance Policy](#), no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities: [University Approved Absence Office \(UAAO\) website](#) provides information and [FAQs for students](#) and [FAQs for faculty](#) related to University Approved Absences
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

Instructors may work with students to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview, illness/ flu or club activity), instructors are encouraged to work directly with students to determine the best approach to missed classes and make-up assessment and assignments.

Honor Code

All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC Honor Code. In particular, students are expected to refrain from “lying, cheating, or stealing” in the academic context. If you are unsure about which actions violate the Honor Code, please see me or consult studentconduct.unc.edu.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy

Use of generative AI tools of any kind is not permitted in this course. Any use of these tools will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty and will be referred to the Honor System.

Acceptable Use Policy

By attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) sets the expectation that you will use the University's technology resources responsibly, consistent with the University's mission. In the context of a class, it's quite likely you will participate in online activities that could include personal information about you or your peers, and the AUP addresses your obligations to protect the privacy of class participants. In addition, the AUP addresses matters of others' intellectual property, including copyright. These are only a couple of typical examples, so you should consult the full [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual property. Additionally, consult the [Safe Computing at UNC](#) website for information about data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Accessibility Resources and Service

[Accessibility Resources and Service](#) (ARS – ars@unc.edu) receives requests for accommodations, and through the Student and Applicant Accommodations Policy determines eligibility and identifies reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or chronic medical conditions to mitigate or remove the barriers experienced in accessing University courses, programs and activities.



ARS also offers its Testing Center resources to students and instructors to facilitate the implementation of testing accommodations.

Faculty and instructors with any concerns or questions about accommodations and/or their implementation, are invited to [reach out to ARS](#) to discuss.

Counseling and Psychological Services

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](#) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to their website <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

Title IX and Related Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/> or by contacting the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, titleixcoordinator@unc.edu) or the Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu). Confidential resources include Counseling and Psychological Services and the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu). Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered, and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (email reportandresponse@unc.edu or see additional contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Undergraduate Testing Center

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with ARS and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by ARS. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit <http://testingcenter.web.unc.edu/>.

Learning Center

Want to get the most out of this course or others this semester? Visit UNC's Learning Center at <http://learningcenter.unc.edu> to make an appointment or register for an event. Their free, popular programs will help you optimize your academic performance. Try academic coaching, peer tutoring, STEM support, ADHD/LD services, workshops and study camps, or review tips and tools available on the website.

Writing Center

For free feedback on any course writing projects, check out UNC's Writing Center. Writing Center coaches can assist with any writing project, including multimedia projects and application essays, at any stage of the writing process. You



don't even need a draft to come visit. To schedule a 45-minute appointment, review quick tips, or request written feedback online, visit <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.