

Philosophy of Religion

Professor Mark Bernier

PHIL 2321-60, Fall 2006

Blinn College, Brenham Campus

Course Description

Philosophy of Religion surveys basic religious issues including the relationship between reason and faith, proving the existence of and characterizing the nature of God, the problem of evil, man's predisposition for religious and mystical experience, and the meaning of religious language, symbols, and ceremony. Three semester hours credit.

Texts

Armstrong, Karen. The History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rev. ed. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Rowe, William L. Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction. 2nd ed. Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1993.

Smith, Huston. The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions. Rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

Recommended

Armstrong, Karen. The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions. New York: Anchor, 2007.

Course Objectives

Philosophy 2321 requires the student to become familiar with the representative problems that define an intellectual approach to man's understanding of both his own spirituality and the associated constructs underlying the problematic nature of "one of the most fundamental and persuasive aspects of human civilization," including

the relationship between faith and reason

the nature of religious belief

the nature of transcendent entities

omnipotence

omniscience

omnibenevolence

infinitude

arguments for the existence of a God defined by the theistic tradition

teleological arguments

cosmological arguments

ontological arguments

the problem of evil

the theistically conceived Absolute

free will

theodicies

universal justice

the nature of suffering

religious meaning

language

symbols

narratives

place/space

religious experience: veridical and delusory

sensory-based experience

mystical experience

the unanimity thesis

the nature of religious traditions

exclusivism

inclusivism

pluralism

the traditions

the primal traditions

Hinduism • Buddhism

Confucianism • Taoism

Judaism • Christianity • Islam

Course Requirements

The student is required to bring the texts and a college-level dictionary to every class meeting.

The student is required to take notes while preparing for class.

The student will compose and submit

seven two-to-four-page (MLA-format) papers; once each week, and

one 1500-word overview of a wisdom tradition (instructor's approval required).

The student will complete three major examinations (essay and objective) and a final

The student should prepare himself for not a few unannounced quizzes.

NB: All written assignments must be submitted in order for the student to earn credit for the course.

NB: The longer paper must reflect a sincere effort in order for the student to earn credit for the course.

Grade Determination

unannounced quizzes and participation	10%
three major examinations	30%
seven weekly essays	35%
longer paper	10%
final examination (required to earn credit)	15%

Important Dates: Tentative

6 October	major examination
20 October	major examination
3 November	major examination
17 November	major paper due
8 December	final examination

All written assignments must be submitted in a timely fashion for the student to earn credit for the course.

Weekly essays not submitted in a timely fashion will earn a zero.

First weekly essay submitted on _____ Fifth weekly essay submitted _____

Second weekly essay submitted on _____ Longer paper submitted on _____

Third weekly essay submitted on _____ Sixth weekly essay submitted on _____

Fourth weekly essay submitted on _____ Seventh weekly essay submitted on _____

Grading Criteria

The **A** paper represents original outstanding work; it shows careful thought, fresh insights, and stylistic maturity. Having practically no mechanical errors to distract the reader, it is free of jargon, clichés, and other empty language. Word choice is marked by a high degree of precision and a varied, advanced vocabulary; sentences are structured in a manner that creates interest and rhetorical power. The tone is appropriate for the designated audience. The reader moves through the **A** paper effortlessly because of its effective transitions, lucid organization, and thorough, purposeful development. Having finished, the reader feels that he has learned something, that he has received some unexpected and welcome illumination. In the **A** paper all research material is correctly documented, and formatting adheres to current standards of the Modern Language Association. Directly quoted passages are gracefully integrated into the text with appropriate attribution.

The **B** paper is significantly more than competent. Besides being almost free of mechanical errors, the **B** paper delivers substantial information and makes cogent, fresh arguments--that is, in both quality and interest-value. Its specific points are logically ordered, well developed, and supported, and unified around a clear organizing principle that is apparent early in the paper. The **B** paper's relatively few syntactic, usage, and mechanical errors do not seriously distract the reader, but the language, while neither trite nor bureaucratic, probably lacks the candor and the precision of the most memorable writing. Its transitions, while appropriate, emphasize the logical turnings of the writer's mind, making the reader occasionally more aware of the efforts taken to unify and control an idea than of the idea itself. In the **B** paper all research material is correctly documented, and formatting adheres to current standards of the Modern Language Association. Directly quoted passages are integrated into the text with appropriate attribution.

The **C** paper represents average college-level work. It is a competent expression of ordinary thoughts in ordinary language; its **content/focus** is general, commonplace, or trivial, or not adequately related to the assignment; its **development** is vague, incomplete, or inconsistent; its **organization** lacks adequate or appropriate transitions or relation of ideas. The **C** paper, in addition to meeting all the requirements of the assignment, exhibits a **writing style** that is basically correct and is marred by a relatively few syntactic, usage, and mechanical errors. By relying on generalities rather than precise, illustrative details, the writer of a **C** paper leaves the reader feeling not much better informed than when the reader first picked up the essay. In the **C** paper all research material is correctly documented, and formatting adheres to current standards of the Modern Language Association. Directly quoted passages are integrated into the text with appropriate attribution.

The **D** paper has only skeletal development and organization. Its serious mechanical errors, together with the awkwardness and ambiguity of its sentence structure, make the reader feel slighted, as if his time and attention were of little concern to the writer.

NB: A paper exhibiting major weaknesses in any specific area—**content, development, organization, grammar and mechanics, documentation conventions, writing style**—or, indeed, a failure to address the assignment is usually considered, at best, a **D** paper.

As writing that falls below minimal standards for college-level literacy, the **F** paper shows lack of thought and purpose, little or no organization, numerous mechanical errors, and a garbled or immature style. Sometimes inadequacy in one area is enough to fail a paper—the writer, for instance, may not have control of punctuation, producing fragments or comma splices in almost every paragraph; however, serious weaknesses usually occur in several areas of concern.

A paper should earn the grade **zero** if it contains plagiarized content in any form, including the failure to acknowledge the source of any borrowed material (summarized, paraphrased, and directly quoted) and unmarked exact wording (directly quoted from either a primary or a secondary source), whether a specific well-chosen word, a phrase (two or more words), a clause, or full sentence(s). A paper can earn a **zero** if it does not address the assigned topic or if directions have been either ignored or not followed.

Division of Humanities, Brenham Campus Class Attendance: Class Attendance Is Required

Blinn College believes that class attendance is essential for student success; therefore, students are required to report promptly and regularly to all their classes. Each class meeting builds the foundation for subsequent class meetings. Without full participation and regular class attendance, students will find themselves at a severe disadvantage for achieving success in college. Participation activities will constitute 10 percent of the final course average. If the student has three or more unexcused absences during the semester, the instructor will report the student to the campus intervention center (PASS Center). The Intervention Center will contact the student and require him or her to discuss the absences with someone in the center. The student is expected to respond to the intervention by regularly attending class. Students are not assessed absences for religious holy days or for absences when representing Blinn College but are responsible for class work missed and for previously indicated due dates. If the student does not positively respond by attending class, the student may be administratively withdrawn from the class.

NB: The instructor is not responsible for ensuring that the student who elects not to attend class and who chooses not to complete a Change of Registration Card is dropped from this course. It is the student's responsibility to officially drop the class. Check the academic calendar for Last Day to Drop dates. The student accruing six hours of absences during the course of a long or short academic term is well on the way to ensuring his failing of the course.

NB: This instructor views arriving to class late and, especially, leaving class before it is dismissed inexcusable.

The student is responsible for all assignments, including those made during any class meeting from which the student has absented himself. Any clarification of directions, etc. for any assigned work will take place during the instructor's conference hours. All assigned work is due before or on the designated day and time. Unless indicated otherwise, all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day designated. If a student is unable to attend class on the day that an assignment is due, he should nevertheless ensure that the instructor receives the assignment by the designated time. In-class essays and daily quizzes can be made up only if the student's absence is excused in accordance with Blinn attendance policy.

Plagiarism

Pride of accomplishment is the boon of any academic achievement. It should be the goal of each student to put forth the best effort possible for each assignment; progression toward better writing is the reward of diligent application to the tasks assigned. The student who demonstrates a lack of integrity by seeking academic gain (good grades, scholarships, etc.) through avenues that circumvent the rigors and rewards of truthful scholarship will be, at some point, thwarted and ill-prepared to work within an honest system.

Any degree of plagiarism appearing in any assignment submitted by the student will earn that student a zero for that assignment. Egregious plagiarism may result in the student's failing the course. For clarification of the concept, see Joseph Gibaldi's MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 3rd, 4th, or 5th edition, which is available for in-library use at the circulation desk, and/or The Little, Brown Handbook, 8e: chapter 44. And because the numerical equivalent for an F earned for an honest paper is 50, it is better to submit a poor paper than to submit a plagiarized paper.

Blinn Board Policy FLB (Local) defines plagiarism as the "appropriating, buying, receiving as a gift, obtaining by any means another's work and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of it in one's own written work." All students should be aware of the several different types--not levels--of plagiarism, including the failure to properly indicate directly quoted passages, phrasings, or significant wordings as such by the proper use of quotation marks, as well as other failures, including misattribution of cited material, as early as possible in the semester. Students should also be made aware that collusion is considered to be as egregious an offense as plagiarism is.

Blinn Board Policy FLB (Local) defines collusion as the "unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing written work for fulfillment of course requirements."

Due Dates

No late work is accepted without severe penalty unless the student and the instructor agree on a different due date well in advance of the original due date. Unless otherwise indicated, all assignments are due at the beginning of the class. Severe penalty means one letter grade off for each calendar day the assignment is late.

Manuscript Form

All papers should be written in dark ink or typed (dark ribbon, etc.) on standard-size paper--one side only—in accordance with the MLA format as outlined in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 4th or 5th edition. (See LBH and handouts.) Handwritten papers must exhibit an understanding of the MLA format, including adherence to margin requirements. All bibliographies and works-cited pages, as well as the researched essays, must be typed. Papers must be argued from the third-person and in the literary present tense. All essays and papers submitted must have a title that is both appropriate and adequate. Philosophy 2321 is not a course in creative writing: Be certain that the paper's title indicates fully the paper's contents. **No staples; use a paper clip or nothing at all.**

ADA Policy

Blinn College would like to help students with disabilities achieve their highest potential in college. In order to receive accommodations on examinations or assignments, proper documentation must first be provided to the Office of Disability Services. The student must then self-identify and conference with the ADA office to begin receiving accommodations in a class.

Decorum / Civility Statement

Members of the Blinn College community, which includes faculty, staff, and students, are expected to act honestly and responsibly in all aspects of campus life. Blinn College holds all members accountable for their actions and words. Therefore, all members should commit themselves to behav[ing] in a manner that recognizes personal respect and demonstrates concern for the personal dignity, rights, and freedoms of every member of the College community, including respect for College property and the physical and intellectual property of others.

Tentative Course Outline

F	1 September	introductions; the nature of philosophical inquiry in general, critical thinking in specific; the nature of the course; the meaning of being educated Rowe: Introduction
F	8 September	the relationship between faith and reason Rowe: chapter 14 Rowe: chapter 12
F	15 September	the nature of transcendental, the supernal, the Absolute Rowe: chapter 1 Great Books handout
F	22 September	rational arguments for the existence of a God as defined by the theistic tradition Rowe: chapter 4 Smith's <i>point de départ</i>
F	29 September	rational arguments for the existence of a God as defined by the theistic tradition Rowe: chapters 2-4 Huston: chapter 9
F	6 October	examination the problem of evil in the theistic tradition Rowe: chapter 6 Solomon handout
F	13 October	the problem of evil in the theistic tradition Rowe: chapter 6 Rowe: chapter 11 Solomon handout Hick handout Smith: chapter 2
F	20 October	examination religious meaning Rowe: chapter 7 Rowe: chapter 8
F	27 October	religious meaning Tillich handout Smith: chapter 3 religious experience Rowe: chapters 9-10 Smith: chapter 4-5
F	3 November	examination the nature of religious traditions Rowe: chapter 13
F	10 November	the wisdom traditions Great Books handout Smith: chapter 7
F	17 November	the wisdom traditions Rowe: chapter 14 Smith: chapter 8
F	1 December	the wisdom traditions Smith: chapters 6 and 10
F	8 December	final examination