Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy 131 • Spring 2014

Instructor: Dr. David Corner
Office: MND 3014
Office Hours: M 3:00-3:30, T 12:15-1:30, W 11:00-11:45
Office Phone: 278-6970
Voicemail: 572-6474
Philosophy Department: 278-6424; 278-5364 (fax)
Email: dcorner@csus.edu
Web: http://www.csus.edu/indiv/c/cornerd

TEXTS

Required: Philosophy of Religion, 5th edition (Oxford); Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach, and Basinger; additional readings will be available online

A clicker- the Turning Technologies Response Card NXT

Optional: Companion volume, Reason & Religious Belief, 4th edition (Oxford); Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach, Basinger (order online)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog Description: Introduction to philosophical theology, the philosophical study of religious assertions, arguments, and beliefs: the existence and nature of God; the rationality of religious belief; the relation of faith to reason; the problem of evil; immortality and resurrection; the possibility of miracles; the meaning of religious language. Includes both traditional and contemporary approaches. 3 units.

This course satisfies area C3: Introduction to the Humanities

The emphasis of this course is on the epistemology of religious belief, and in particular, of belief in God. Is it reasonable to believe in God? Does the rationality of belief in God require us to be able to justify that belief, i.e. to give good reasons for holding it?

We may not be able to answer this question until we can say something about what it is to believe in God. What is it to believe in God, anyway? Consider the following set of sentences:

I believe that:
Sacramento is the capital of California.
There is a particle, the Higgs Boson, that gives physical objects mass.
There are physical objects.
There is a line around the middle of the Earth called ‘the equator.’
There is such a thing as justice.
God is the Creator of the universe.

Are all these the same kind of belief? This is an important question. If religious beliefs have a distinctive character, it may not be appropriate to assess their reasonableness in the same way we would assess the reasonableness of other beliefs. Indeed, it may be dif-
Difficult to assess their reasonableness at all. This will be the underlying interest of our explorations.

Our discussions will range over several areas: Religious realism, arguments for the existence of God, belief without argument, religious experience, belief in miracles, and the relation between religion and science.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Develop the ability to think critically, objectively, and carefully about religious claims and issues.
- Familiarize students with major issues and arguments in the philosophy of religion.
- Equip students with a number of basic, essential skills of philosophical analysis.
- Expose students to diverse ethnic, cultural, historical, and social traditions as they intersect with religious issues.
- Develop students' writing skills, textual analysis skills, and oral discussion/debate skills.

This course meets the GE requirements for area C3; requirements for this area are given at: http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/geareaC3.stm

**COURSE GRADE**

A basic requirement for passing this course is that the student make an evident attempt to complete all of the assignments listed below. Assuming this requirement is met, the following cutoff scheme represents the maximum course total required for each letter grade. Target scores for the individual assignments are also provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Clicker Quizzes</th>
<th>Online Quizzes</th>
<th>Mid-term</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instructor will be following the Philosophy Department's grade definitions.

**DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**Exams:** Exams will be a combination of essay and multiple choice. Please bring scantron 882e. The midterm will have one essay question, mandatory and chosen at random from a list published in advance. The final will have two essay questions, mandatory, with one chosen at random from a list published in advance, and one assigned at the beginning of the semester. Except for this last essay question, the final will not be cumulative. Recommended minimum length for each essay is 2-3 pages. All writing will involve the critical appraisal of philosophical argumentation, and will be evaluated for proper handling of philosophical concepts presented in the course as well as for mastery of the course material. For an explanation of what is involved in philosophical writing, see the Philosophy Department's writing guidelines.
**In-Class Quizzes:** Students should expect a quiz to be given each day in class. (There may be rare exceptions.) Quiz questions will normally be interspersed with the lecture and responses will be given via clicker. Some questions may cover a reading assignment and some may be review of a previous lecture; others may deal with online instruction. Some questions may be aimed at polling the class regarding their philosophical views; for these, no answer will be scored as incorrect.

It is your responsibility to insure that you have a working clicker- your own- with you in class. There will be no makeups for quizzes missed either as a result of absence or a missing or malfunctioning clicker. In order to accommodate such problems, I will add a bonus equal to 15% of the total possible clicker points. (This will probably be in the range of 12-20 points.) This bonus will not allow your clicker score to exceed the maximum possible number of correct in-class clicks- i.e. it will not work to give you extra credit.

I will convert clicker points to course points using a conversion factor, which will be 300 / the total possible clicker points. Your course points will then be calculated by multiplying your clicker total by this conversion factor. For example: Suppose there are 160 possible clicker points. The conversion factor would be 300/160, or 1.875. Suppose Sally has 150 points (including her bonus). Sally will receive 281 points as her clicker score (150 x 1.875).

It is a requirement of this course that you register your clicker by the end of the first week of classes. You cannot get credit for your in-class quizzes or exams if you do not register your clicker. Should there be any unregistered clickers at the end of the semester, I will delete their scores.

It is your responsibility to check your clicker scores online to insure that your clicker has been properly registered and you are getting the appropriate credit for your clicker quizzes.

**Online Quizzes:** There will be online quizzes designed to test your mastery of the course material and prepare you for your exams. You will be allowed to retake each quiz at least once; you will always keep your last score.

Please be sure that you have received credit for each quiz before the quiz closes. Leave yourself enough time so that, if your quiz scores are not being recorded, you can get assistance from the SacCT help desk. I will not reopen quizzes or add quiz credit retroactively to students who complain, after the quiz has closed, that they did not receive proper credit.

To calculate your course grade, I will create a conversion factor for your online quiz points as outlined above for the clicker quizzes: The conversion factor in this case will be 100 / the total possible online quiz points.

Once a quiz has closed, it will not be reopened unless there are documented problems with SacCT (i.e. on the University side) during the last 24 hours before the quiz closes. Please note that this is very rare. If you encounter difficulties, please check the log of service interruptions at http://www.csus.edu/webct/serverstatus.stm. If there has been no unexpected service interruption, please do not ask me to reopen a quiz.

I may occasionally give you some rough indication, in class, of when a quiz is likely to open or close. However, please understand that it will always be your responsibility to know, by checking online, precisely when each quiz closes. This information is readily available on SacCT. You are required to check on closing times at least once per week.

**Makeup Quizzes:** There are none. This applies to all quizzes, both online and in-class. Please be sure your clicker is functioning properly before each class session; you.
may want to keep a spare set of batteries with you. You are strongly advised to finish all online quizzes as soon as possible after they open, and in all cases at least 24 hours prior to their closing time; it is your responsibility to insure that you have properly submitted your quiz answers and received credit for them. Problems should be directed to the SacCT service desk at 278-7337.

Online Instruction: Some of the instruction for this course may be given online. Normally, online instruction will be intended to supplement lecture material; it will give you important background to help you understand the lecture and readings, and provide valuable information for inclusion in the essay portion of your exams. However, exams may be based on any of the course materials made available to you, and in some cases online materials may be your primary source of exam-relevant instruction.

Disability Accommodation: If you have a documented disability and require accommodation with assignments, exams, or note-taking etc. please see the instructor by the end of the third week of class. Also, be sure to consult with Services for Students with Disabilities in Lassen Hall to see what campus services are available to you.

Testing Center: If you take your final exam in the testing center, please insure that it will be returned to the Philosophy Department before I have given my last final and I leave campus for the semester.

Extra Credit/Participation: Class participation is strongly encouraged and may earn you extra credit. You may participate by asking or answering questions in the classroom, posting to discussion boards on SacCT, or by coming to office hours. Normally there will be a 40 point maximum for extra credit, but this limit may be extended in recognition of outstanding effort or exceptional mastery of the course material. No other form of extra credit will be offered.

Missed Exams: If you are going to miss an exam, please contact me soon as possible. Make-ups for missed midterms may be given during the final exam period. There will be a penalty equal to 20% of the points possible on the exam unless you are able to document serious and compelling reasons for missing the exam. There are no exceptions to the requirement for documentation not even for funerals. Students who miss the final exam, and who do not schedule a makeup with me or arrange to take an incomplete, will receive a grade of WU.

Withdrawal from the course: Please be aware of drop deadlines; as the term progresses it becomes harder to withdraw from the course. After the close of online withdrawals, you will be asked to explain to me, my department chair, and the University administration why you did not drop the course before the previous deadline passed, and if your explanation is not satisfactory your petition to drop will be denied, resulting in a grade of “WU” (unauthorized incomplete), which counts as an F on your transcript. If you do not complete the course, but do not formally withdraw from it, you will receive a grade of “WU.”

Incompletes will be granted only when circumstances beyond a student’s control prevent them from completing the course. Normally there will not be more than a single assignment outstanding; otherwise, withdrawal is the appropriate remedy. Incompletes will not be granted after a student has failed the course for nonattendance. Absent extenuating circumstances, arrangements for an incomplete must be made prior to the end of finals week. In all cases I will have to set up an incomplete contract which you must accept online at least 48 hours before grades are due. If we are not able to set up an incomplete contract in a timely manner, you will receive a grade of WU.
**Disciplinary Matters**

Disruption of class will not be tolerated. Those who engage in impermissible behaviors risk losing attendance or participation credit, and may be dropped from the class. Impermissible behavior includes, though it is not limited to: Making comments in class without raising your hand to be recognized; talking or passing notes to other students, habitual tardiness or leaving early, texting, doing outside homework or reading during class time, and discourtesy to other students or to the instructor. Be sure that you are well rested enough to be attentive. Please turn off your pager or cell phone before class begins.

**Laptop Use:** Laptops, tablets, and smart phones may not be used during lecture. Exceptions will be made only to accommodate disability.

**Academic Dishonesty:** This usually involves using unauthorized notes during an exam or plagiarism, which is presenting the work of someone else—whether copied or paraphrased—as one’s own. When material is copied without use of quotation marks, plagiarism is presumed. Please understand that it is not enough simply to reword material you find online to avoid the charge of plagiarism. You are responsible for what you turn in; check to be sure all appropriate citations are included in your paper. Those who permit others to cheat are considered accomplices and thus guilty of plagiarism themselves. If unauthorized notes are found accessible to you during an exam, you will be presumed to be using them.

You must not use, or even handle, anyone else’s clicker after the start of lecture. This will be considered cheating.

Please review the [University’s policies regarding academic dishonesty](#). The library also maintains a [very useful page on plagiarism](#).

Anyone caught cheating will lose credit for the assignment on which they cheated, with no possibility of make-up. The minimum penalty will be 150 points, which is likely to drop the offender 1-2 letter grades in the course. If your clicker is used while you are not in attendance, the penalty will be 150 points against you as well as the person who uses your clicker on your behalf. All cases of cheating will be reported to the Administration for further action.

**Outside Sources:** Students sometimes try to use material from outside sources on their course assignments, when they find that their notes are inadequate—perhaps because they were not attentive during lecture, did not understand the lecture and did not ask for help, did not do the required reading, or were simply absent. If you consult outside sources you should indicate the source of your material in your work. You are strongly advised to check these sources with me, as many (e.g. Wikipedia) are unreliable and therefore completely unsatisfactory for scholarly purposes. Students sometimes fail their assignments when they rely on such dubious sources.

I recommend, as a source for background information, the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). Articles in the IEP, unlike those in Wikipedia, are reviewed for accuracy by people who know something about the subject matter.