

**Philosophy of Religion
Dr. Michael Sudduth
Course Syllabus**

San Francisco State University, Spring 2015
Philosophy 500.01 (70972)
MWF 10:10–11:00am (HUM 408)
[iLearn Resources Link](#)

Office: HUM 547, 3:30-5pm (MW)
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Course Description

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Philosophy of religion is a branch of philosophy that asks fundamental questions about the nature of religious belief, for example, questions about the meaning, coherence, and justification of religious claims or statements. Philosophy of religion is usually interested in critically examining beliefs that are central to many or most of the religious traditions of the world, rather than beliefs at the periphery. Consequently, much of the literature in the philosophy of religion concerns topics such as the existence and nature of God, religious language, faith and reason, religious experience, the problem of evil, religious pluralism, and belief in an afterlife.

In this section of Philosophy of Religion, we will explore questions that fall under three general topics in the philosophy of religion: (1) the concept of God or Ultimate Reality, (2) the grounds for belief in God or Ultimate Reality, and (3) considerations that might count against the existence of God, knowing religious or spiritual truths, or that might otherwise render religious beliefs unreasonable, for example, the existence of evil and the fact of religious diversity. We will explore these topics by critically engaging classical and contemporary readings that have addressed these topics from a variety of different perspectives, religious and non-religious. The first half of the semester will address the above topics from the perspective of western philosophy of religion. The second half of the semester will address them from the perspective of eastern philosophy of religion. The topic of religious diversity will be discussed during the final two weeks of the semester.

Course Objectives

The general course objectives are for students to utilize classical and contemporary readings in the philosophy of religion to demonstrate an understanding of:

- (i) the similarities and differences between eastern and western concepts of God
- (ii) the different ostensible grounds of belief in God and the skeptical evaluation of theism
- (iii) the extent to which, if at all, evil and/or the facts of religious diversity undermine belief in God

These course objectives will be met in the form of exam and paper assignments that require students to engage these questions and any content relevant to answering these questions in a scholarly manner.

Required Course Text: Andrew Eshleman, *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion: East Meets West* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). ISBN-13: 978-1405147170

There will also be some online readings and/or video viewings. Links will be posted on the course page at michaelsudduth.com.

Method of Instruction

The primary method of instruction in this class is lecture. However, I believe that student participation is of great value to the learning process. To that end I want to encourage students to ask questions and make observations during class. Some class sessions will be discussion oriented rather than lecture format. At times I will make use of power point presentations. These power point presentations will be posted on my professional website michaelsudduth.com, along with class handouts and study questions. At times you will be asked to bring handouts to class in connection with the lectures. On other occasions, I will ask you to view power points I make available on the course page, even though we do not view them in class.

Course Teaching Assistant

There is a teaching assistant (TA) for this course to be announced during the first week of the course. The TA will be responsible for grading your papers, keeping track of your grade in the class, and may occasionally give a lecture or lead class discussion. Feel free to contact the TA if you have questions about a grade assigned for your work. Students should also feel free to discuss their work and grades with me. Grades will be posted on iLearn.

Assignments and Grading

Course Assignments

- 30%: 2 semester exams (15% each): objective; 30 multiple choice questions, possible true/false
- 25%: Cumulative final exam: format TBA, likely to at least include multiple choice and T/F questions
- 45%: 3 papers (15% each): 900-1000 words (approx. 4 double-spaced pages in length) each

Assignment Notes

Papers: All papers will be submitted online through Turnitin on iLearn. No late papers will be accepted. Details on paper guidelines and requirements will be announced later. **Quizzes and Exams:** For semester exams/quizzes and final exam, bring a scantron 882 form and a #2 pencil to class. All exams are closed note and closed book. **Point Values:** assignments have point values (out of 500 points possible in the class). Papers grades will be converted into a point value for the purposes of calculating final grades.

Grade Scale	Final Grade Point Scale	Assignment Point Values
93–100% = A	465–500 = A	Semester Quizzes = 75 each (x2)
90–92% = A-	450–464 = A-	Papers = 75 points each (x3)
		Final Exam = 125 points
87–89% = B+	435–449 = B+	
83–86% = B	415–434 = B	
80–82% = B-	400–414 = B-	
77–79% = C+	385–399 = C+	
73–76% = C	365–384 = C	
70–72% = C-	350–364 = C-	
67–69% = D+	335–349 = D+	
63–66% = D	315–334 = D	
60–62% = D-	300–314 = D-	
0–59% = F	0–299 = F	

A Guide to Success in the Class

- (1) Attend class regularly. While I do not grade on attendance, habitual absences and/or tardiness will adversely affect your performance on course work. Students are responsible for knowing what assignments have been given or collected. Contact me by email if you have questions about this.
- (2) Respect the classroom as a learning environment. Do not speak or otherwise distract when the professor or students are speaking. This includes the disruptive use of cell phones, iPods, laptops, and other electronic devices.
- (3) I wish to make this course as accessible as possible to students with disabilities or medical conditions that may affect any aspect of course assignments or participation. Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email dprc@sfsu.edu.
- (4) Academic dishonesty on any assignment will result in a “zero” for the assignment. An academic dishonesty report will be submitted to the Dean for possible further academic action. Any student who is caught plagiarizing is subject to having other written work submitted in the course re-evaluated for plagiarism. Plagiarism is likely to be detected since all response papers must be submitted through Turnitin, a plagiarism detector database. For more information, see <http://turnitin.com/>.

Plagiarism occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgement, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an “F” grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Humanities will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action. (Quotation taken from “College of Humanities Plagiarism Resources,” www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html)

- (5) It is crucial that you complete the reading assignments or view any other course materials in a timely manner. Some reading assignments will be lengthy, and many will be challenging in content. It is important that you keep up with the readings. Be prepared to discuss the readings when you come to class.
- (6) Lecture notes, power point presentations, videos, and study questions will be posted on my professional website michaelsudduth.com. The VIP Lounge in the main menu is the section of my website that is designed exclusively for my students. Go to the VIP Lounge main menu option and scroll down to Philosophy of Religion. A user password is required. The password is **sabbath13**. While class materials will be posted on my professional site, all grades will be posted on iLearn.
- (7) For all written work, aim at clarity and organization of your ideas. Carefully follow instructions for all written work in class. This includes following MLA format and providing a word count. Properly understand the assignment prompt. Provide a clear response to the prompt. A clear response will include a thesis statement (which is the main point you wish to make in response to the assignment question) and support for this thesis statement (often involving textual support). Some prompts will ask you to compare and contrast ideas presented in the course texts. Further details on papers will be provided later.
- (8) If you are having difficulties with class material or receive low grades on assignments, make an appointment with me or the TA so we can discuss your work and provide assistance for improvement.
- (9) Use msudduthsfsu@gmail.com for all correspondence with me. Subject line of emails should read: Philosophy of Religion SP15. Always include your full name in correspondence.

Proposed Schedule of Readings

This is a *proposed* schedule of readings. The schedule of readings is subject to change and may be adjusted as the semester moves forward. Please go to the course page at michaelsudduth.com to monitor any changes to the course calendar, as well as to see assignment details and make use of online resources for the course such as videos and power point presentations.

Week 1: Orientation

January 26 (M): Orientation I
January 28 (W): Orientation II
January 30 (F): *Katha Upanishad* [on-line reading]

Week 2: The Vedic-Upanishadic Concept of Brahman

February 2 (M): Sushanta, "The Vedic-Upanishadic Concept of Brahman" (43–46)
February 4 (W): Sushanta, "The Vedic-Upanishadic Concept of Brahman" (46–51)
February 6 (F): Sushanta concluded

Week 3: The Experiential Basis for Knowledge of Brahman-Atman

February 9 (M): Puligandla, "The Message of the Mandukya Upanishad" (121–125)
February 11 (W): Puligandla concluded
February 13 (F): Buddhism: Three Marks of Existence

Week 4: Buddhism: Self, No-Self, and Nirvana

February 16 (M): Buddhism: Three Marks of Existence continued, + Nagarjuna, "An Analysis of Nirvana" (76–77)
February 18 (W): Ives, "Emptiness in Mahayana Buddhism" (52–54)
February 20 (F): Ives, "Emptiness in Mahayana Buddhism" (54–56)

Week 5: Buddhism Continued

February 23 (M): Ives, "Emptiness in Mahayana Buddhism" (56–58)
February 25 (W): Vedanta and Buddhism
February 27 (F): Exam #1

Week 6: Eastern Religious Philosophy and the Problem of Evil

March 2 (M): Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil" (279–284)
March 4 (W): Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil" (284–290)
March 6 (F): TBA

Week 7: The Classical Western Concept of God

March 9 (M): Peterson, Hasker, et. al, "What is God like?" (21–25)
March 11 (W): Peterson, Hasker, et. al, "What is God like?" (25–27)
March 13 (F): Peterson, Hasker, et. al, "What is God like?" (27–30)

Week 8: Non-Classical Western Theism

March 16 (M): Ruether, "The Female Nature of God" (31–35)
March 18 (W): Cobb and Griffin, "God as Creative-Response Love" (36–39)
March 20 (F): Cobb and Griffin, "God as Creative-Response Love" (39–42)

Week 9: Spring Break

March 23 (M): NO CLASS
March 25 (W): NO CLASS
March 27 (F): NO CLASS

Week 10: Classical Design Argument

March 30 (M): Paley, "Evidence of Design" (144–145)

April 1 (W): Hume, “On the Argument from Design” (146–150)

April 3 (F): Paley and Hume concluded

Week 11: Fine-Tuning Argument

April 6 (M): Swinburne, “How the Existence of God Explains the World and Its Order” (107–110)

April 8 (W): Swinburne, “How the Existence of God Explains the World and Its Order” (110–112)

April 10 (F): Swinburne concluded

Week 12: Western Theism and Religious Experience

April 13 (M): EXAM #2

April 15 (W): Alston, “Religious Experience Justifies Religious Belief” (181–186)

April 17 (F): Alston, “Religious Experience Justifies Religious Belief” (186–190)

Week 13: Western Theism and Religious Experience

*April 20 (M): Fales, “Do Mystics See God?” (191–195)

April 22 (W): Fales, “Do Mystics See God?” (195–199)

April 24 (F): Alston-Fales debate concluded

Week 14: Western Theism and the Problem of Evil

April 27 (M): Eshleman, “Introduction to Section V” (227–231), Rowe, “The Evidential Problem of Evil” (256–258)

April 29 (W): Rowe, “The Evidential Problem of Evil” (258–263)

May 1 (F): Rowe, “The Evidential Problem of Evil” (263–264)

Week 15: Religious Pluralism

May 4 (M): Rowe and the problem of evil concluded

May 6 (W): Hick, “A Religious Understanding of Religion” (364–367)

May 8 (F): Hick, “A Religious Understanding of Religion” (367–373)

Week 16: Conclusion to Course

May 11 (M): Hick concluded

May 13 (W): Course Reflections

May 15 (F): Course Reflections

Week 17: Finals Week

May 18:

May 20:

May 22: Final Exam @8:00am-10:30am*

*Final exam date is scheduled by the university. Students are required to take the final exam at the time designated by the university.

10:10 MWF / MW

Friday May 22

8:00-10:30