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THE PROBLEM OF GOD
Summer 2016
THEOLOGY 001-20
M-TR 8:30-10:30 a.m.
7/11-8/12

Syllabus may be changed at instructor's discretion.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the religious dimension of human experience. It considers arguments for and against the existence of God as well as questions relating to the nature of God, religious practice, and human suffering. Students are expected to reflect on and to articulate their own views and experiences of faith, religion, religious practice, and identity, and to build a learning community through active engagement with course material and their peers.

There will be an emphasis on recognizing the intellectual and personal challenges often implicit in cultural and religious misunderstandings and building empathy for a range of religious identity, practices, and beliefs. Exercises related to the practices of good note taking, the writing of summaries, and other tactics to increase student comprehension and reflection are incorporated into the daily work of the course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To practice talking about faith and religion with people who may not share your beliefs.
- To explore various images of God and what these images imply about God and humans.
- To speak and write competently and precisely on religious and theological matters, using basic terminology and concepts in the field.
- To gain an appreciation of the historical nature of theology and sacred texts.
- To think critically about the diverse expressions of individual and community faith.
- To gain knowledge of a range of religious experiences, practices and beliefs within some specific religious communities.

Class exercises, discussion, and assignments ask you:

- To identify where and how religion and faith impacts you personally, your community, and the country.
- To summarize, critique and engage others' beliefs, practices, and opinions in a manner respectful of persons with different views.
- To reflect on and articulate others' and one's own ideas (orally and in writing) with coherency and precision.

UNIVERSITY WIDE POLICIES

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Fraud: Students are expected to be familiar with Georgetown's Honor System and to abide by the Standard of Conduct. The section on plagiarism is especially important: "Plagiarism, in any of its forms, and whether intentional or unintentional, violates standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another. While different academic disciplines have different modes of attributing credit, all value the contributions of individuals to the general corpus of knowledge and expertise. Students are responsible for educating themselves as to the proper mode of attributing credit in any course or field. Note that plagiarism can be said to have occurred without any affirmative showing that a student's use of another's work was intentional" (Undergraduate Bulletin, IV.3.b). Academic dishonesty is a serious breach of the contract we all have with each other and all cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be referred to the Honor Council.

Accommodations: Students with documented and qualifying learning, physical and psychological disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (ARC), which arranges for reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and University policies. In order to arrange accommodations in each course, the student must present his/her professors with a letter from the ARC outlining the recommended accommodations at the beginning of the semester.

All Students: Resources are available for students when they experience life events or academic pressures that leave them feeling anxious, confused, depressed, lonely, or overwhelmed. Although such students may not be eligible for accommodations through the Academic Resource Center, they are encouraged to:

1. Visit the Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) in Darnall Hall. A free intake can be arranged by walk-in, or by calling 202-687-6985 during normal business hours (202-444-PAGE (7243) for emergencies).
2. Talk to their deans, who can connect students to the appropriate resources and help them work through their academic options.
3. Communicate proactively with faculty if anxiety or depression have disrupted class attendance and/or productivity.

Students who are not registered with the ARC are not entitled to accommodations (including extensions), nor are registered students who fail to follow established ARC procedures. Any student with a *chronic* condition which affects class performance is urged to contact the ARC to pursue whether accommodations may be appropriate for future coursework.

COURSE MATERIAL and PRACTICES

Required Texts:

Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of An Illusion*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989.
Stewart, David. *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion* (7th edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010.

Additional Readings for this course can be found on Blackboard (<https://campus.georgetown.edu>) OR on e-reserve at the library in one of two ways:

- *From Blackboard:* Tools>Reserves and Library Resources>Danner or
- *From the Library website:* (<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/undergrads>). Scroll down and select “Course Reserves.” Search by Instructor using my last name, “Danner.” Be sure to check that you are clicking on the electronic copy as print copies may also display on the reserve list.

COURSE ASSUMPTIONS

General Classroom Policies: Discussing complex ideas and expressing your ideas can be intimidating. This is particularly true when other persons or readings challenge deeply held beliefs. However, intellectual challenge is an essential part of this course. All students should come to class with an inquiring mind and carefully listen to the views of others. No questions are off limits but respectful dialogue is expected.

- Anyone text messaging will be asked to leave the class.
- If you feel you must use a laptop in class, please sit in the back row so you do not distract others. Exceptions for documented need only.
- **All assignments are to be turned in on paper unless otherwise stated.**

E-mail and Office Hour Policies: Be sure to check the syllabus before e-mailing me. Frequently, the answer to your question will be found here. I normally respond to e-mail within 36 hours. Come see me during my office hours if you anticipate the need for an extensive discussion.

Absences: Each student may have TWO unexcused absences. Absences are considered excused for sickness (a note from the health center is required), official GU activities (like debate team or sports), religious observance, and at my discretion. If you know you will miss class, please let me know via e-mail as early as possible. **Not attending class will negatively affect your course grade regardless of participation:**

- Three unexcused absences will result in a participation grade of F.
- Four unexcused absences will result in course failure.

COURSE EVALUATION

Class Participation: 10%

Regular attendance, thoughtful participation, and a commitment to creating a good learning environment are expected. **Your participation will be evaluated by your attentiveness and contributions to class discussion as well as the timely submission of all minor, ungraded assignments.**

Class Leadership Roles: 5%

A detailed explanation of each of these roles can be found under Assignments in Blackboard.

- **Discussion Leader:** You will lead the discussion of a text, movie, or book once during the semester. Student led discussions will last no more than 15-minutes.

- **God/Religion in the News Reporter:** You will select an issue in the news that is related to religion or faith and come prepared to discuss the issue and facilitate a 15-minute discussion around it.

In Class Writing Exercises, Quizzes, Reflections, and Group Work: 20%

There will be various in class work to practice skills such as summarizing another’s work, thesis writing, critique, and personal reflection.

In Class Reflections: 40% (20% each)

One reflection will focus on God’s existence and the other on the problem of evil and suffering.

Exam: 25%

The exam will include multiple-choice questions and one essay question.

Grading Policies:

- As a safety measure, you should retain one copy of every paper that you hand in and should retain all course assignments until you have received your final grade.
- If you wish to contest a grade, you may do so in writing within one week of my handing the assignment back. You should include a copy of the graded assignment and a typed explanation of why you feel the grade was inappropriate.
- The Georgetown Intellectual Life Report of 1996-97 recommends that no more than 30% of grades be in the “A/A-” range.
- Any paper turned in late, without prior approval, will lose 10 points the first day and 5 points each additional day. Exceptions will be made ONLY in case of serious illness.
- Final grades are only rounded up if they are equal to or higher than .50. For example, 86.50 will be rounded up to a B+, 86.49% is a B.

Grading Scale:

A	94-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	C	74-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-73
B	84-86	D+	67-69
B-	80-83	D	64-66

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Introduction

- M: 7/11 Getting Comfortable Talking and Thinking About God
- Syllabus Overview
 - Building Religious Cultural Competency
 - Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 1-5

Weeks 1 & 2: Arguments for and Against God's Existence

- T: 7/12 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 53-92. (You will be assigned one of four readings)
Hitchens, Christopher. "Religion Kills," in *god is not Great* (New York: Twelve) 15-36 (Blackboard)
- W: 7/13 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 119-141.
- TR: 7/14 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 142-159
- M: 7/18 Freud. *The Future of An Illusion*, chapter 1-4
- T: 7/19 Finish *The Future of an Illusion* (remaining chapters)
- W: 7/20 Newberg, Andrew, "Do You Even Need a God When You Pray," 22-40 and "What Does God Do to Your Brain," 41-63 in *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010) (E-Reserve)
- TR: 7/21 **In-Class Essay**

Week 3: Religious Experience and Practice

- M: 7/25 Hellwig, Monika K. "God Revealed as Powerful Compassion" in *Understanding Catholicism*. New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1981. 15-28. (Blackboard)
- T: 7/26 Ulanov, Ann and Barry, "Primary Speech" and "Prayer and Desire" in *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982, 1-25 (E-reserve)
Eastin, Carol Lakota, "Living in Two Worlds: A Native American Perspective" *Chaplaincy Today* 19:1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 33-36. (Blackboard)
- W: 7/27 Watch In Light of Reverence
- TR: 7/28 **Exam**

Weeks 4 & 5: Suffering and God's Benevolence and Power

- M: 8/1 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 161-176.
- T: 8/2 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 177-187.
- W: 8/3 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 195-207.
- TR: 8/4 Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 188-194; 112-116.
Vajiragnana, Medagama. "A Theoretical Explanation of Evil in Theravada Buddhism" in *Evil and Response of the World Religions*. Edited by William Cenkner (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1997) 99-108 (E-reserve)
- M: 8/8 Callahan, excerpts of "God and Creation" in *Created for Joy*, 59-75. (Blackboard)
- T: 8/9 Callahan, "Ch. 5: Jesus the Man of Sorrows" and "Ch.6: Suffering in Practice" in *Created for Joy*, 95-146 (E-reserve).
- W: 8/10 Blumenthal, David. "Resistance as Happiness" *Cross Currents* (March 2014): 73-89. (Blackboard)
- TR: 8/11 **Second In-Class Essay**