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Office Hours by appointment before or after class

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**THE PROBLEM OF GOD
THEOLOGY 001-10**

Local and Global Diversity Requirement

M-TR 10:45-12:45

6/4-7/7

Location tbd

Syllabus may be changed at instructor's discretion.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do some people believe in God? Why don't others? How does one's cultural location shape one's faith or views of religion? This course explores individual and communal religious experience, sacred texts and religious practices; arguments for and against the existence of God and; questions relating to the nature of God and human suffering. Multiple disciplinary lenses are used to understand the religious dimension of human experience and students are expected to build a learning community through active engagement with course material and peers.

There will be an emphasis on recognizing the intellectual and personal challenges often implicit in cultural and religious misunderstandings and an emphasis on building empathy for a range of religious identities, practices, and beliefs. The content and structure of this course are informed by the Doyle Program, which aims to enhance and incorporate themes of difference and diversity in Georgetown courses. 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.

COURSE MATERIAL

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.

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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 POLICIES

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 and dialogue are essential to this course. 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.
- No laptops are to be used in class. Exceptions for documented need only and at instructor permitted times.
- **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 THREE unexcused absences. Absences are considered excused for sickness (a note from the health center is required), official GU activities, religious observance, and at my discretion. Exceeding three unexcused absences **will negatively affect your course grade:**

- Four unexcused absences will result in a participation grade of F.
- More than four unexcused absences will result in course failure.

COURSE EVALUATION

Class Participation and InClass Work: 15%

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 and class group work.**

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.

Paper (25%)

Exams: (55%)

Exams will include multiple-choice questions, short answer, and one essay question.

Grading Policies:

- Papers 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

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: "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. 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. The student must present his/her professors with a letter from the ARC outlining the recommended accommodations at the start 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 weekdays (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.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Introduction

- M: 6/5 Getting Comfortable Talking and Thinking About the Concept of God
- Syllabus Overview
 - Building Religious Cultural Competency
 - Introduction to Sacred Texts

I. Religious Experience and Practice

- T: 6/6 Scripture
- Hellwig, Monika K. “God Revealed as Powerful Compassion” in *Understanding Catholicism*. New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1981. 15-28. (Blackboard)

- W: 6/7 Scripture
- Quran Background and Excerpt (Blackboard)
 - Starboy (Blackboard)

- TR: 6/8 Interpreting Scripture and Rituals
- Sölle, Dorothee, two chapters beginning with the title “Use of the Bible: . . .” in *Thinking About God* (London: SCM Press, 1990) (E-reserve).

- M: 6/12 Prayer and Music
- 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)
 - Code of Indian Offenses (optional, Blackboard).

- T: 6/13 **Short Exam (25%)**

II. Arguments For and Against the Existence of God

- W: 6/14 Introduction
- Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 49-52; 71-83 (Everyone reads)
 - You will also be assigned one of the following: 53-57; 58-63; 64-70.

- TR: 6/15 Ontological and Cosmological Arguments
- Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 119-141.

- M: 6/19 Moral Argument and Begin Freud
- Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 151-159
 - *The Future of An Illusion*, chapters 1-4
 - God in the News: _____
- T: 6/20 Freud: Is God a Function of Wish Fulfillment?
- Finish *The Future of an Illusion* (Remaining chapters)
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____
 - God in the News: _____
- W: 6/21 The New Atheism Movement
- Hitchens, Christopher. "Religion Kills," in *god is not Great* (New York: Twelve) 15-36 (Blackboard)
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____
- TR: 6/22 Neurotheology and Science
- Newberg, Andrew, "What Does God Do to Your Brain," 41-63 in *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010) (E-Reserve)
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____

III. The Nature of God and Human Suffering

- M: 6/26 Problem of Evil and Divine Omnipotence
- Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 161-176.
 - **Problem of God Short Paper Due**
- T: 6/27 Problem of Evil Continued
- Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 177-187; 195-207
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____
- W: 6/28 Karma and NonWestern Conceptions of Evil/Suffering
- 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)

- TR: 6/29 Social Sin and Structural Sin
- Stewart, *Philosophy of Religion*, 275-283
 - Gula, Richard, “Understanding Sin Today” (Blackboard)
 - Blumenthal, David. “Resistance as Happiness” *Cross Currents* (March 2014): 73-89. (Blackboard)
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____
- M: 7/3 Jesus and Suffering
- Callahan, excerpts of “God and Creation” in *Created for Joy*, 59-75 (Blackboard)
 - Callahan, “Ch. 5: Jesus the Man of Sorrows” (Blackboard)
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____
- T: 7/4 **HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**
- W: 7/5 Relationship between Personal Sin, Social Sin, and Suffering
- Sobrino, Jon. *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2004. Excerpts. (Handout)
 - Class Discussion Leader: _____
- TR: 7/6 Class Wrap-up and Evaluations
Exam with Essay Question