

Dr. Laurence Carlin

Philosophy 207: Philosophy of Religion

Spring 2008

Office: Polk 62

Office Hours: MWF 4pm-5pm, and by appointment

Phone: 424-1368 (with voice mail)

E-Mail: Carlin@uwosh.edu (this is the best way to reach me)

Course Web Page: http://www.uwosh.edu/faculty_staff/carlin/relighome.html

Course Text: *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, Louis P. Pojman, and Michael Rea, eds. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2008), 5th edition. (It must be the FIFTH edition!)

Course Description

This course will explore the most important, most fundamental, and most interesting questions concerning religious belief and practices. Through an intense examination of some of the best historical and contemporary thinkers, we will ask such questions as: Can we prove that there is a God? If not, is it nonetheless reasonable to believe in the existence of God? If there is a God, what is this being like (i.e. what is its nature)? What, if anything, can science tell us about these matters? Does the fact that there is horrendous evil in the world count as evidence against the existence of a higher benevolent being? What exactly is a miracle and should we believe that miracles have occurred? Is there any reasonable justification for the practice of prayer? Can morality have a religious foundation? Students will learn some of the ways that philosophers have answered these and other questions. The emphasis will not be on adopting any one particular point of view, but on coming to grips with the complexities involved in these issues.

Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

1. The Divine Attributes: Is the idea of a supremely perfect being coherent?

Omnipotence

George Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," POR 267-269.

C. Wade Savage, "The Paradox of the Stone," (on e-reserve)

Omniscience

Nelson Pike, "God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will ..." POR 249-260.

Alvin Plantinga, "God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will ..." POR 260-264.

2. Arguments for the Existence of God: Can we prove that a higher being exists?

The Ontological Argument

St. Anselm, "The Ontological Argument," POR 3-5.

Alvin Plantinga, "A Contemporary Modal Version of the Ontological Argument," (on e-reserve)

The Cosmological Argument

William Rowe, "An Examination of the Cosmological Argument," POR 24-33.

William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument," POR 33-45.

Paul Draper, "A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument," POR 45-51.

The Teleological Argument

William Paley, "The Watch and the Watchmaker," POR 54-56.

David Hume, "A Critique of the Design Argument," POR 56-63.

Richard Swinburne, "The Argument from Design," POR 63-74.

The Argument from Religious Experience

C.D. Broad, "The Argument from Religious Experience," POR 119--126.

Louis Pojman, "A Critique of the Argument from Religious Experience," POR 127-136.

3. The Problem of Evil: Can we prove that a higher being does not exist?

J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," POR 173-181.

Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," POR 181-200.

John Hick, "Evil and Soul-Making," POR 165-169.

Edward Madden and Peter Hare, "A Critique of Hick's Theodicy," POR 169-173.

William Rowe, "The Inductive Argument from Evil Against the ...," POR 200-207.

4. Faith, Rationality and Religious Belief: Without a definitive proof, what should a rational person believe?

Pragmatic Justification

Blaise Pascal, "The Wager," POR 364-366.

W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," POR 366-370.

William James, "The Will To Believe," POR 370-379.

Justified Religious Belief

Alvin Plantinga, "Religious Belief Without Evidence," POR 389-404.

Michael Martin, "A Critique of Plantinga's Religious Epistemology," POR 404-412.

5. Various Topics to be Elected by the Class

Suggestions Include:

Evolution and Intelligent Design

Miracles

Divine Hiddenness

Divine Punishment

Religion and Ethics

Religious Pluralism

Death and Immortality

Justification of Prayer

Grading

Two Essay Examinations:	25% each (= 50%)
One Major Paper:	30%
Unannounced Quizzes:	10%
Class Participation:	10%

Attendance/Participation/Methodology

THIS IS A DISCUSSION CLASS. Therefore, attendance is *required*. The course will involve lecturing by the instructor, as well as lively critical discussion in class. Students are expected to come to class having read and thought about the assigned material. You are strongly encouraged to actively participate in class discussions. I am aware that some people are a bit shy when it comes to speaking in class. If you are one of these people, please feel free to ask me questions over e-mail, during office hours, after class, etc. But an integral part of learning philosophy is the active exchange of ideas. I guarantee that active engagement with the material, and careful attention to the readings, will maximize your enjoyment of this course. Note that class participation constitutes a significant portion of your course grade. The class participation portion of the course grade is taken very seriously. *Rest assured that lack of participation will have an adverse affect on your grade. Indeed, it can cost as much as 10 course points! Be prepared to discuss.*

Paper

There will be a paper assignment. You will receive specific details in class about the paper project and the choice of topics. You are strongly encouraged to get an early start on the paper.

Unannounced Quizzes

There will be several unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. These are designed to test your knowledge of the reading (and, of course, they provide further incentive to *do* the reading). The quizzes will be in a variety of different formats (short answer, multiple choice, etc.). Provided you stay on top of the reading throughout the semester, you should have no problem with the quizzes. **Students will be permitted to make up a quiz only in the most extreme circumstances.** Except in the most extreme circumstances, if you miss a quiz, you are assigned a grade of zero. Note that your average quiz grade constitutes 10% of your course grade. This percentage can make the difference between (for example) a grade of B and a grade of C. Thus, you are strongly advised to take advantage of this portion of the course grade by staying on top of the required reading.