

**CARLETON
UNIVERSITY**

**PHIL 2601:
The Philosophy of
Religion**

**Course Syllabus
Summer 2019**

**Professor
Ken Ferguson**

**kenneth.ferguson
@carleton.ca
(613)520-2110
3A54 Paterson**

**Office Hours:
TBA**

Class Time

**Tues/Thursday:
6:05-8:55**

**Location:
TBA**

COURSE SUMMARY

Recently there has been increased interest in religion in many different fields, including sociology, psychology, cognitive science, as well as philosophy and religious studies. If there is a difference between the way philosophy and other subjects approach the study religion, it is that philosophy is more normative; it does not merely describe religion but also seeks to evaluate it. We want to ask whether religious beliefs are true? Are there good reasons to believe that God exists? Should we believe in miracles? Should religious experience be seen as the actual perception of divine beings, or should they be explained away as psychological phenomenon? Is God's existence compatible with evil? Why would God remain hidden?

In addition to these core issues, we will also be exploring the relationship between religion and other areas of human culture. What is the relationship between religion and science? Do they conflict or complement each other? Is God's existence essential to ground morality? Does the meaning of life presuppose a religious outlook? What is the best approach to take in trying to explain religion? Is it an essential feature of human psychology? Does it perform some essential function in human societies? In addressing these and other issues, we will be reading selections from some of the foremost researchers in the field, including Plantinga, Swinburne, Dennett and others.

CLASS FORMAT

The emphasis in the course will be on reasoning, analysis and critical evaluation. The role of the Instructor will be to guide students through the readings, and to illustrate the processes of analysis, interpretation and criticism by repeated example in class. Although attendance will not be taken, students are fully responsible for any material missed due to absence.

REQUIRED TEXT

A course pack of readings with the title, *Philosophy 2601*, has been prepared by the Instructor. This course pack can only be purchased at **Haven Books**, located at 43 Seneca Street, Their phone number is: (613) 730-9888.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Midterms: There will be two midterm exams each worth 30% of the overall grade. They will have the following form: one week before the date of the midterm a list of study questions on topics central to the material covered will be distributed to students; the instructor will then select a number of these questions for students to answer on the midterm.

Final Examination: There will be a final exam, worth 40% of the final grade, scheduled during the examination period. The format for the final will be similar to the midterms.

Optional Participation Grade: Students will be given the option of having 20% of their grade determined by participation in class discussions. For those who choose this option, one midterm will be worth 20% and the final 30%.

SHORT LIST OF TOPICS/ISSUES (For more details see the list of Topics and Readings)

- 1) Can reason alone prove God's existence?
- 2) Is God necessary to explain the universe?
- 3) The Argument from Design
- 4) Pascal's Wager
- 5) Hume's critique of miracles
- 6) The nature of religious experience
- 7) Kierkegaard's leap of faith
- 8) The problem of evil
- 9) Is the concept of God coherent?
- 10) Do science and religion conflict?
- 11) Do souls exist? Is there an afterlife?
- 12) Religion and the meaning of life
- 13) Does morality depend on religion?
- 14) Using science to explain religion

**Philosophy 2601A: Philosophy of Religion
And Religious Studies 2738A
Fall Semester, 2018: Dr. K. Ferguson
List of Topics and Readings**

I. Introduction

Reading 1: Louis Pojman and Michael Rea, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2008) pp. xiii-xvi

II. Traditional Arguments for the Existence of God

a) The Ontological Argument

Reading 2: Rene Descartes: “The Supremely Perfect being must Exist”, taken from *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 2nd edition, edited by William Rowe and William Wainwright, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Publishers, 1989) pp. 103-105

Reading 3: St. Anselm, selections from *Proslogium*, in *Argument and Analysis: an Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by Martin Curd (New York: West Publishing Company, 1992) pp. 5-6

Reading 4: Martin Curd, *Argument and Analysis: An Introduction to Philosophy ... Part I, Discussion: The Ontological Argument*, pp. 46-51

Reading (online): Tim Holt, “Existence is not a Predicate”, from www.philosophyofreligioninfo, 2008 available at:

<http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/theistic-proofs/the-ontological-argument/st-anselms-ontological-argument/existence-is-not-a-predicate/>

Reading 5: Earnest Nagel, “A Defense of Atheism”, taken from *Philosophical Horizons: Introductory Readings*, edited by Steven Cahn and Maureen Eckert (Toronto, Thomson Wadsworth, 2006) pp. 53-57

b) The Cosmological Argument

Reading 6: Saint Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways”, *Argument and Analysis: an Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by Martin Curd, pp. 7-8

Reading 7: Richard Taylor, “The Cosmological Argument”, from

Philosophical Horizons: Introductory Readings, edited by Steven Cahn and Maureen Eckert ... pp. 36-41.

Reading 8 (optional online): William Rowe, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument”, from *The World of Philosophy: An Introductory Reader*, edited by Steven Cahn (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2015) pp. 156-157.

Reading 9 (online): Anthony Flew, “Stephen Hawking and the Mind of God”, 1996, from the website *The Secular Web*, at:

https://infidels.org/library/modern/antony_flew/hawking.html

Reading 10 (optional online): Ron Rosenbaum, “Has the Meaning of Nothing Changed?”, from the website Slate.com, July 23, 2012, at:

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/the_spectator/2012/07/jim_holt_s_why_does_the_world_exist_an_inquiry_into_why_there_is_something_rather_than_nothing_.html

c) The Argument from Design

Reading 11: Gideon Rosen, “The Argument from Design”, Princeton University, available online at:

<https://www.princeton.edu/~grosen/puc/phi203/design.html>

Reading 12: William Paley, “The Watch and the Watchmaker”, taken from *An Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by David E. Ohreen (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2009) pp. 143-146

Reading 13: David Hume, selections from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, taken from *An Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by David E. Ohreen ... pp. 146-151

Reading 14: Richard Dawkins, “The Improbability of God”, taken from *An Introduction to Philosophy*, edited by David E. Ohreen ... pp. 151-157

Reading 15 (optional): Stephen Davis, “Fine-Tuning: The New Design Arguments”, from *Philosophy and Faith: A Philosophy of Religion Reader* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), pp. 222-229

III. Traditional Arguments Against the Existence of God

a) The Argument from Evil

Reading 16: Louise Antony, “No Good Reason – Exploring the Problem of Evil”, from *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*, 2nd edition, edited by Gideon Rosen et al (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018) pp. 36-45

Reading 17 (optional online): J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”, *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 64, No. 254. (Apr., 1955), pp. 200-212, available online at: <http://www.ditext.com/mackie/evil.html>

Reading 18: Richard Swinburne, "The Problem of Evil", from *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, edited by Louis Pojman, (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987) pp. 174-185

Reading 19 (online): Anonymous, "Why Does God Allow Animals To Suffer?" From the website: *500 Questions About God*, <https://500questions.wordpress.com/2013/01/27/42-why-does-god-allow-animals-to-suffer/>

b) The Hiddenness of God

Reading 20 (online): "Divine Hiddenness Makes Faith Possible", from *Philosophy of Religion*, by Phillip Pecorino, at: <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/arguments-for-atheism/the-problem-of-evil/the-argument-from-unbelief/divine-hiddenness-makes-faith-possible/>

Reading 21: Robert McKim, "The Hiddenness of God", from *Philosophical Horizons: Introductory Readings ...* pp. 82-86

Reading 22 (optional online): Adam Green, Review of the book *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* by J.L. Schellenberg, from Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, available online at: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-hiddenness-argument-philosophys-new-challenge-to-belief-in-god/>

c) Is the Concept of God Coherent?

Reading 23 (online): Michael Lacewing, "The Divine Attributes", available from Routledge online at:

http://www.alevelphilosophy.co.uk/handouts_religion/IdeaGod.pdf

Reading 24 (online): Michael Lacewing, "Are the Divine Attributes Singularly or Mutually Coherent?", available from Routledge online at:

http://www.alevelphilosophy.co.uk/handouts_religion/Divineattributescoherent.pdf

Reading 25 (optional online): Yoram Hazony, "An Imperfect God", taken from the New York Times, at:

<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/an-imperfect-god/>

IV. Other Reasons/Evidence for Believing in God

a) Pascal's Wager

Reading 26: Blaise Pascal, "The Wager", from *The World of Philosophy: A Reader*, edited by Steven Cahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 185-187

Reading 27: Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, "Pascal's Wager: An Assessment",

from *The World of Philosophy: A Reader ...* pp.187-189

Reading 28 (online): Peter Kreeft, “The Argument From Pascal’s Wager”, online at: <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/pascals-wager.htm>

b) Should We Believe in Miracles?

Reading 29 (online): David Corner, “Miracles”, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available online at: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/miracles/>

Reading 30: David Hume, “The Evidence for Miracles Is Weak”, taken from *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 5th edition, edited by Michael Peterson et al (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2014) pp. 465-471.

Reading 31: Richard Swinburne, “Miracles”, taken from *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 2nd edition, William Rowe and William Wainwright ... pp. 446-453

c) Religious Experience as Evidence of Divine Beings

Reading 32: C.D. Broad, “The Argument from Religious Experience”, taken from *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1987) pp. 119-126

Reading 33: Louis Pojman, “A Critique of the Argument from Religious Experience”, from *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 5th ed. pp. 127-136

Reading 34: Catherine Giordano, “The Truth About Near Death Experiences: Scientific Explanations of NDE and OBE”, From the website *Owlcation*, Feb. 3, 2017, online at: <https://owlcation.com/stem/The-Truth-About-Near-Death-Experience-Scientific-Explanations>

V. Other Approaches to Religion and Its Justification

a) Religious Faith – Believing in God Without Reasons

Reading 35: Soren Kierkegaard, “The Leap of Faith and the Limits of Reason”, taken from *Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*, 7th edition, ed. by G. Lee Bowie et al (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2011) pp. 71-74

Reading 36: William Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”, taken from *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 2nd edition ... pp. 400-405

b) Thoreau’s Transcendental Naturalism

Reading 37 (online): Robert Michael Ruehl, “Henry David Thoreau (1817–

1862)", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 5 only, at: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/thoreau/#H5>

c) Belief in God is Justified Without Evidence

Reading 38 (online): Anthony Belos and Kyle Scott, "Reformed Epistemology", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, sections 1, 4, 6 (c), and section 7, available online at: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ref-epis/#H6>

d) Fideism

Reading 39: Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Religious Belief", taken from *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 2nd edition ... pp. 275-279

Reading 40 (online): Stephen Law, "Wittgenstein and Religion", from the website Aeon, at: <https://aeon.co/essays/atheists-vs-religious-belief-with-wittgenstein-on-the-stand>

VI. Religion and Science

Reading 41: Stephen J. Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria", online at: http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html

Reading 42: Richard Dawkins, "Science Discredits Religion", taken from *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 5th edition ... pp. 546-548

Reading 43 (online): David Kyle Johnson, "Identifying the Conflict between Science and Religion, Parts 1, 2 & 3", From the website *Scientia Salon* (Editor-in-chief Massimo Pugliucci) April 8 & 9, 2014, online at: <https://scientiasalon.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/identifying-the-conflict-between-religion-and-science-part-i/>

Reading 44 (online): "Naturalism", from the website *The Basics of Philosophy*, at: https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_naturalism.html

Reading 45: Alvin Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible", taken from *Philosophy and Faith: A Philosophy of Religion Reader*, edited by David Shatz, pp. 342-354

VII. Explaining Religion

Reading 46: Michal Lacewing, "Can Social Science Explain Religion Away?", <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/alevelphilosophy/data/A2/Religion/>

SocialScienceReligion.pdf

Reading 47: Elizabeth Culotta, “On the Origin of Religion”, *Science* 06 Nov 2009, Vol. 326, Issue 5954, pp. 784-787, at:

<http://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~ara/media/On%20the%20Origin%20of%20Religion%20-%20Science.pdf>

Reading 48: Patrick Richmond, “Scientific Explanations for Religious Experience and Their Implications for Belief”, from the website, *Science and Christian Belief*, 2010, online at:

https://www.scienceandchristianbelief.org/serve_pdf_free.php?filename=SCB+22-1+Richmond.pdf

Reading 49 (optional online): Rachel Nuwer, “Will Religion Ever Disappear?”, taken from the BBC.com, Dec. 9, 2014, at: <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20141219-will-religion-ever-disappear>

Reading 50 (optional online): “The Spell Breaker: Daniel Dennett on why faith should be investigated scientifically, and why he's coming out of the closet as a nonbeliever”, an interview with Daniel Dennett, at: <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/secular-philosophies/the-spell-breaker.aspx>

VIII. Does Morality Depend on God’s Existence?

Reading 51 (online): Theodore Schick, “Morality Requires God-Or Does It?”

https://www.rationalresponders.com/forum/the_rational_response_squad_radio_show/freethinking_anonymous/670

Reading 52 (online optional): James Rachels, *The Elements of Morality*, chapter 4, “Does Morality Depend on Religion?” (only sections 1 & 2 are required) available online at: <https://faculty.uca.edu/rnovy/Rachels%20--%20Does%20Morality%20Depend%20on%20Religion.htm>

IX. On the Existence of Souls and An Afterlife

Reading 53 (online): Susan Blackmore, “Life After Death or A Dying Brain?”, Excerpts from Susan Blackmore's book *Dying to Live: Near-Death Experiences*, (1993. New York: Prometheus Books)

Reading 54 (online): Edward A. Morris, “The Problem of Personal Identity for the Hope of an Afterlife”, March 31, 2017, available at: <http://www.noble-minded.org/afterlife.html>

Reading 55 (optional online): Steve Stewart-Williams, “Life After Death”, from the online publication *Philosophy Now*, 2002, at:

https://philosophynow.org/issues/39/Life_After_Death

Reading 56: Bertrand Russell, “The Finality of Death”, from *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology ...* pp. 325-327

Reading 57: Bernard Williams, “Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality”, from an *Introduction to Philosophy: Knowledge and Reality*, by Rockney Jacobson (Toronto, Pearson Canada Inc., 2016) pp. 104-109

X. Religion and the Meaning of Life

Reading 58 (online): Daniel Hill, “The Meaning of Life”, from the publication *Philosophy Now*, Issue 35, Sept/Oct, 2014, at:

https://philosophynow.org/issues/35/The_Meaning_of_Life

Reading 59: Robert Nozick, from *The Meaning of Life: A Reader*, 3rd edition, edited by E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 224-232

Reading 60: Adam Lee, “How Religion's Demand for Obedience Keeps Us in the Dark Ages”, from the website *BigThink*, available at:

<http://bigthink.com/daylight-atheism/how-religions-demand-for-obedience-keeps-us-in-the-dark-ages>

XI. Religion and Politics: The Right to Religious Freedom

Reading 61: “Why the onslaught of religious freedom laws?”, by Ray Sanchez, CNN, April 7, 2016, available at:

<https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/06/us/religious-freedom-laws-why-now/index.html>

Reading 62 (online): “4 Reasons Why Religious Liberty Laws Don’t Discriminate”, from the website *The Gospel Coalition*, by Andrew Walk, April 8, 2016, at:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/three-reasons-why-religious-liberty-laws-dont-discriminate>

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Summer 19)

Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- Must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips.
- Must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box).
- Must include the following on the first page: student name and number; course name and number; instructor's name.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates below.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Examinations:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 2.4, 2.5 and 2.5.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 12.0, or [Academic Integrity < Carleton University](#)

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [Equity Services](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.

Important Dates:

May 6	Classes start.	July 1	Statutory holiday, University closed.
May 13	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>early</u> summer courses.	July 2	Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.
May 17	Last day for registration and course changes for <u>full</u> summer courses.	July 9	Last day for registration and course changes for late summer courses.
May 20	Statutory holiday, University closed.	July 22	Last day to withdraw from late summer courses with a full fee adjustment. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
May 24	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from <u>early</u> and <u>full</u> summer courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.	Aug. 5	Civic holiday, University closed
June 11	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade for <u>early</u> summer courses before the official examination period.	Aug. 7	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade for <u>late</u> or <u>full</u> summer courses before the official examination period.
June 18	Last day for <u>early</u> summer classes. Last day for handing in term work. Last day for academic withdrawal from <u>early</u> summer	Aug. 14	Last day of late and full summer term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for handing in term work.

	courses.				Last day for academic withdrawal from late summer and full summer courses.
June 21-27	Final examinations.			Aug. 17-23	Final examinations.
June 27	Take-home examinations for early summer courses are due.			Aug. 23	Take-home examinations for late or full summer courses are due.

Useful Contacts:

Department of Philosophy: 3A35 Paterson Hall – (613) 520-2110
www.carleton.ca/philosophy

Registrar's Office: 300 Tory Building – (613) 520-3500
www.carleton.ca/registrar