

PHL/REL 351, Philosophy of Religion  
T,R 2 to 3:15 (HUMB 136)  
Office Hours: 3:15 to 4:15 & by appt  
Email: [poston@southalabama.edu](mailto:poston@southalabama.edu)  
Update: Wednesday, April 11, 2018

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Course Webpage: <http://www.southalabama.edu/philosophy/poston/courses/documents/philosophyreligion.pdf>

Course Notes: <http://www.southalabama.edu/philosophy/poston/courses/documents/existencegodS18.pdf>

**Course Description:** The objective of this course is to teach students how to think critically and systematically about fundamental questions central to religion. We shall study Richard Swinburne's systematic case that *probably* there is a God. We will learn probability theory, a Bayesian account of evidence, and how to apply probabilistic reasoning to theism. We will study the traditional arguments for and against the existence of God and see how these arguments fit into a Bayesian framework. We will look at challenges to Swinburne's project. The student will come away with a thorough knowledge of fundamental issues in the philosophy of religion as well as a framework for tackling these issues.

**Objectives:**

1. To explore the philosophical issues raised by religious belief.
2. To become acquainted with several major philosophers of religion & major themes in the philosophy of religion.
3. To develop the students' writing skills.
4. To develop the students' critical thinking skills. Such skills include being able to understand complex issues, detect presuppositions, evaluate arguments, and form reasoned judgments in both philosophy and everyday life.

**Text:**

Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*. 2nd edition (2004) Clarendon Press.

**Evaluation:** All written assignments should be emailed to me before class the day it is due. Please email the document as a pdf, doc, or pages. I will return the document to you with comments. If you don't know how to display comments, talk to me after class and I'll show you how to do this.

1. Quizzes 20%
2. Argumentative Paper 20%
3. Midterm 20%
4. Final 20%
5. Attendance & Participation 20%

Quizzes

Quizzes will be determined by a coin flip each day. The quizzes will cover aspects of our reading and lectures. If you do the reading, come to class, and get the basics then you should do well on these quizzes.

Argumentative Paper

You shall formulate a thesis statement, argue for it, and defend it from possible objections. Your discussion should manifest a good understanding of the relevant literature—you'll gain this understanding from our readings and class discussion. I will give you a list of topics. Before you begin writing confirm your topic with me. If you would like to pursue a different topic than one I have given then discuss it with me. The paper shall be no more than 2000 words. Use footnotes with standard documentation practices (e.g., MLA).

### Statement of Grading Criteria:

**A** : the essay adequately states and defends an argument, and answers the counterexamples and counter arguments suggested by the lectures and the readings; it shows knowledge of the topic, is well structured and well written.

**B**: the essay contains an argument, it shows a satisfactory knowledge of the subject, but it does not account for all the counter examples and counter arguments suggested by the readings and the lectures. The main claims are not adequately supported by textual evidence.

**C**: The essay states an argument or thesis, but its supporting premises are missing, or incorrect, or not sufficiently specific. It is not well structured and it is poorly written

**D**: The essay makes no serious attempt to frame an argument or defend a thesis. It simply describes the readings or lectures, and includes several errors. It fails to address the question posed, it lacks structure, and it is poorly written.

**F**: The essay completely ignores the questions set, or it contains very serious errors in reasoning, and shows no knowledge of the subject. /The essay is incomprehensible due to errors in language and usage./ The essay violates the requirements of academic integrity

### Attendance & Participation

Attendance and participation are crucial. Each lecture will introduce new concepts. Moreover, this class is a mix of lecture and discussion. The lectures will not only set the context for the readings, but also explain the arguments and ideas supporting various positions. The task of evaluating these arguments and ideas, though, will be a joint venture. As a result, we will spend much of our time discussing the reasoning behind certain positions. The participation grade measures the quality of your input. But if you don't attend you can't participate. I will keep track of attendance using USAonline. I'll drop the lowest attendance & participation score.

### **Participation Expectations**

I will evaluate your participation based on quantity and quality:

10 = participate often and constructively

8 = participate sometimes or not always constructively

7 = participate very little or not constructively

5 = rarely participate or disrupt the discussion

0 = never participate

### Electronic devices

Laptops and cell phones negatively affect both the users themselves and also the students around them in the classroom. They disrupt the classroom atmosphere and my teaching. No laptops are allowed. No phones (and related devices) should be used; don't even have them out. Because it is disruptive to good philosophical dialogue, if I see you with your cellphone out I will count you as absent. (If you are waiting for an emergency call, let me know ahead of time, and you can excuse yourself from class for the call.)

## Analytical Outline

- I. Inductive Probability
  - A. Reading: Swinburne Ch 1 pp. 5-22
  - B. Additional Resources
    - 1. Patrick Maher (2006) "The concept of inductive probability" *Erkenntnis* 65: 185-206.
    - 2. Patrick Maher (2010) "The explication of inductive probability" *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 39: 593-616.
- II. The Nature of Explanation
  - A. Reading: Swinburne Ch 2 pp. 23-51
  - B. Additional Resources
    - 1. Salmon *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation*
    - 2. Lipton *Inference to the Best Explanation*
    - 3. Poston *Reason & Explanation* Ch 4, pp. 69-85
- III. The Justification of Explanation
  - A. Reading: Swinburne Ch 3 pp. 52-72
  - B. Additional Resources
    - 1. Poston *Reason & Explanation* Ch 4, pp. 85-109
    - 2. Lipton *Inference to the Best Explanation*
- IV. Complete Explanation
  - A. Reading: Swinburne Ch 4, pp. 73-92
- V. The Simplicity of Theism
  - A. Reading
    - 1. Swinburne Ch 5, pp. 93-109
    - 2. Draper "Simplicity & Natural Theology"
    - 3. Elliot Sober 2015, *Ockham's Razors: A User's Manual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - B. Additional Resources
    - 1. Swinburne, R., 1997, *Simplicity as Evidence for Truth*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
    - 2. C. Miller "Simplicity & Theism" *Religious Studies*
- VI. The Explanatory Power of Theism
  - A. Reading
    - 1. Swinburne Ch 6, pp. 110-132
  - B. Additional Reading
    - 1. Gregory Dawes, *Theism & Explanation*
  - C. Additional Resources
- VII. Cosmological Arguments
  - A. Reading
    - 1. Swinburne Ch 7, pp. 133-152
  - B. Additional Reading
    - 1. C. Miller "The Bayesian Cosmological Argument"
- VIII. Teleological Arguments
  - A. Reading
    - 1. Swinburne Ch 8, pp. 153-191
    - 2. Swinburne Ch 8, pp. 153-191
    - 3. Hudson "'Swinburne's Aesthetic Appeal'" *Reason and Faith: Themes from Richard Swinburne's Philosophy of Religion* Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 64-82.
  - B. Additional Resources
    - 1. Glass "Can the Evidence for design be explained away?"
    - 2. Swinburne "Bayes, God, and the Multiverse"
- IX. Consciousness & Morality
  - A. Reading
    - 1. Swinburne Ch 9, pp. 192-218
- X. Providence
  - A. Reading

1. Swinburne Ch 10, pp. 219-235

#### XI. Evil

##### A. Reading

1. Swinburne Ch 11, pp. 236-272
2. Swinburne Ch 11, pp. 236-272
3. Richard Otte “Comparative Confirmation and the Problem of Evil”
4. Michael Tooley “Inductive Logic and the Probability that God Exists”

#### XII. History & Miracles

##### A. Reading

1. Swinburne Ch 12, pp. 273-292
2. McGrew & McGrew “The reliability of witnesses and testimony to the miraculous”

#### XIII. Religious Experience

- ##### A. Swinburne Ch 13 pp. 293—327

##### B. Additional Resources

1. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*

#### XIV. Balance of Probability

- ##### A. Swinburne Ch 14 pp. 328-342.
- ##### B. Poston “The Argument from so many arguments”

**Schedule:** (This schedule is subject to change. Pay attention to current schedule on website)

Day	Topic	Reading Schedule	Summaries & Quizzes
Tuesday, January 9	Introduction	Introduction	
Thursday, January 11	Inductive Probability	EG, 5-22	
Tuesday, January 16	Explanation	EG, 23-51	Quiz 1
Thursday, January 18	Explanation	EG, 23-51	
Tuesday, January 23	Justification & Explanation	EG, 52-61	Quiz 2
Thursday, January 25	Justification & Explanation	EG, 61-72	
Tuesday, January 30	no class - out sick		
Thursday, February 01	Complete Explanation	EG, 73-92	Quiz 3
Tuesday, February 06	Simplicity & Theism	EG, 93-109	
Thursday, February 08	no class	no class	Quiz 4 (summary on chapter 5)
Tuesday, February 13	<b><i>Mardi Gras</i></b>	<b><i>Mardi Gras</i></b>	<b><i>Mardi Gras</i></b>
Thursday, February 15	Simplicity & Theism	EG, 93-109	
Tuesday, February 20	Simplicity & Theism	Draper, "Simplicity & Natural Theology"	
Thursday, February 22	Explanatory Power & Theism	EG, 110-132	Quiz 5
Tuesday, February 27	<i>Review</i>	<i>Review</i>	<i>Review</i>
Thursday, March 01	<b>Midterm</b>	<b>Midterm</b>	<b>Midterm</b>
Tuesday, March 06	Cosmological Arguments	EG., 133-145	
Thursday, March 08	Cosmological Arguments	EG, 145-152	Quiz 6
Tuesday, March 13	Teleological Arguments	EG, 153-172 (Order)	
Thursday, March 15	Teleological Arguments	EG, 172-191 (Fine-Tuning)	Quiz 7
Tuesday, March 20	Consciousness & Morality	EG, 192-212 (Consciousness)	
Thursday, March 22	Consciousness & Morality	EG, 212-218 (Morality)	Quiz 8
March 26 - April 1	<b><i>Spring Break</i></b>	<b><i>Spring Break</i></b>	<b><i>Spring Break</i></b>

Tuesday, April 03	Providence	EG, 219-235	
Thursday, April 05	no class - out sick		
Tuesday, April 10	Evil	EG, 236-257	Quiz 9
Thursday, April 12	Evil	EG, 257-272	Quiz 10
Tuesday, April 17	History & Miracles	EG, 273-292	
Thursday, April 19	Religious Experience	EG, 293-327	Quiz 11
Tuesday, April 24	Balance of Probability	EG, 328-342	
Thursday, April 26	Review	Swinburne "Christianity and the world religions"	Quiz 12
<b>Tuesday, May 2</b>	<b>Final Exam 1-3pm</b>	<b>Final Exam 1-3pm</b>	