**Philosophy 342-01: Philosophy of Religion**

Time and Location: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:10 to 4:00 PM in English 0312

Professor Robert Wallace

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Office Hours: Mondays 12-1 in Bldg. 47, Room 36P, Tuesdays 2-4PM on Zoom ([Link](https://calpoly.zoom.us/j/93678558948)), Wednesday 1 in Bldg. 47, Room 36P, or by appointment.

**The information contained in this course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policies, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.**

**Course Description**

Philosophy of religion is the branch of philosophy that aims to investigate religion, religious thought, and religious practice. Philosophers of religion ask difficult questions about religion. For example: what is a religion? Does God (or Gods) exist? What does “God” mean, anyway? Is religious language literally true? What is the difference between believing in a religious doctrine and having faith in it? Does praying to a deity make rational sense? How does a religious worldview compare to a secular one? How do religious ethical theories compare to other ethical theories? What is the relationship between religion and science? Should religious reasons be grounds for political and legal exemptions?

As such, philosophy of religion deals with all other areas of philosophy, including metaphysics (the study of reality in the most general and fundamental way), epistemology (the study of knowledge), ethics, the philosophy of science, political philosophy, and more.

The course will offer an introduction to contemporary analytic philosophy of religion by way a couple of these important questions. (Contemporary, insofar as we will look at texts and ideas from about the last 30 or 40 years; analytic, insofar as we will engage with these questions with a focus on argumentative precision and clarity). In doing so, the course will offer some introduction to several other branches of philosophy. The philosophy of religion in English-speaking analytic philosophy has been largely concerned with metaphysical questions concerning the philosophical presuppositions of the Abrahamic faith traditions, and Christianity in particular. Our course will cover this material, but also aims to cover a more diverse set of religious traditions, following trends in the field.

**Course goals**

You might have thought that the goal of this course was for me to offer definitive answers to these questions. But it isn’t. Instead, the goal of the course is to provide you with the tools to think critically, for yourself about these questions, and for you to develop good answers to them. This course will help you develop your own thoughts on these matters. I’m looking forward to hearing what you think!

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

* State, explain, and assess some leading theories and arguments in philosophy of religion.
* Describe the contributions of contemporary philosophers about primary questions in the philosophy of religion.
* Write thoughtful and concise argumentative papers that exhibits the rhetorical and explanatory standards of contemporary analytic philosophy.
* Articulate and assess the reasons behind their own religious beliefs or lack thereof.

**Required Text**

*Philosophy of Religion: The* *Basics* by Samuel Lebens, 978-1-032-07695-9

**Grading and Assignments**

**Grade Breakdown:**

Attendance: 5%

Discussion Questions: 5%

Personal Belief Reflection: 10%

Exam 1: 20%

Exam 2: 20%

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 20%

(Alternative Term Paper: 40%)

Due dates for assignments can be found in the “course outline” section of the syllabus.

**Attendance**: Attending class is an essential part of succeeding in this course. You will not do well in this course if you don’t show up. \ You will lose two points for each unexcused absence. Obviously, life happens. Please get in touch with me as soon as you are able if something comes up. Please be aware that religious holidays are “excused absences” for students according to [Cal Poly’s Class Attendance Policy](https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/academicpolicies/class-attendance).

**Discussion Questions:** Before class, you must post a question about our assigned reading for that day. Questions are due at 11:59PM the day before class. (So, you’ll post your questions by 11:59PM on Sunday and Tuesday, respectively.) You can’t ask two questions about the same reading. I will use these questions to structure our discussions. And I mean “post a question” literally. What did you find confusing? The idea is for me to get a sense of what is not making sense from the readings so we can cover that material thoroughly in class, and for me to see what parts of the readings are interesting to you!

**Personal Belief Reflection:** Twice during the quarter, once near the beginning and once near the end, you will be asked to write a short personal essay explaining why you think what you do—are you agnostic, an atheist, do you have some religious commitment, or something else entirely? Are you not sure? I will **not** be grading this assignment for content, only for clarity and cogency. My hope is that these assignments will provide you the opportunity to critically reflect on your own beliefs, for your own sake.

**Exams:** We will have two exams, both of which will be available for you to take on Canvas. Exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer sections. They will be open book. (Consider this to be the digital equivalent of a take home exam). You can take these exams anytime during the week they are assigned. Once you start the exam you will have 2 hours to complete it. The second exam will be due at the end of the finals period for this class.

**Papers:** You will write two papers during the quarter. Each paper will ask you to describe an argument for a view and then critique that argument. These will not be research papers insofar as you will not need materials from outside our course readings. My job is to help you write these papers. I am more than happy to read drafts and outlines, or simply talk through the ideas with you. Your aim in writing these papers is to be clear and concise.

You may, with permission of the instructor, write a single term paper for the course of equivalent length as the two shorter papers. Please reach out to me **early** in the quarter if you are interested in this option. This option is primarily intended for philosophy majors who are interested in preparation for 400 level courses and the senior project. (Notice how much of your grade will be determined by the single paper).

The instructions for the papers and the outline are our Canvas website. We will discuss in class. I will also post a writing guide.

**Late Work**: Work that is handed in after the day after the deadline has passed will be marked down one full letter grade, and so on. For instance, an A paper that is received within 24 hours of the deadline will receive a B, 48 hours late will receive a C, and so on. The following *do not count* as legitimate excuses: failure to read the syllabus, sleeping in, or forgetfulness. If you require an extension, please contact me as soon as possible.

If Canvas goes down, everyone will get an extension for 1 day for every outage period.

**Rounding and Curving**: I will not round any grades in the course. Standing policy is that no grades will be curved in the course, but I reserve the right to curve when needed. Please do not rely on this possibility!

**Syllabus Acceptance**: Before I record any grades for a student in this course, they must complete the “syllabus acceptance” assignment on Canvas.

**Academic Integrity**

Students are encouraged to share intellectual views and discuss freely the principles and applications of course materials. However, graded work/exercises must be the product of independent effort unless otherwise instructed. Ignorance of the academic integrity policies is not a viable excuse.  Please thoroughly familiarize yourself with the [Office of Students’ Rights and Responsibilities page on Academic Integrity](https://osrr.calpoly.edu/academic-integrity), as well as the information found on [Academic Programs and Planning website regarding cheating and plagiarism](https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/academicpolicies/Cheating).

Bottom line: do your own work!

If you have any questions about academic integrity, please do not hesitate to ask me!

**Inclusion and Classroom Behavior**

As in any course, you must be respectful to myself and the other students during this class. Beyond this, as philosophers in training, you have special reason to treat each other’s thoughts and ideas charitably. Each of you (and myself) will be coming at these fundamental questions with different backgrounds, belief systems, intellectual strengths, and interests. Our class is a place where thoughts can be expressed without fear of bullying or discrimination. Aristotle thought that the best kind of friendship was one where friends make each other more virtuous people; in this class, we should strive to be friends-in-thinking, helping each other to think more clearly about the problems at hand.

Please be aware that you can update your pronouns on Canvas in the user settings. If you would like more information on pronouns, visit Cal Poly’s [Pronouns Matter](https://culture.calpoly.edu/PrideCenter/PronounsMatter) . If your preferred name or pronouns change during the quarter, please let me know. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen. If you make a mistake or are corrected, please briefly apologize and correct yourself. (I will do the same if I make a mistake!)

**Accessibility and Accommodations**

We can’t be friends-in-thinking unless the learning experience is as accessible as possible for everyone. If you anticipate or experience physical, technical, or academic barriers to your learning experience, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. You can always contact the [Disability Resource Center](https://drc.calpoly.edu/). They are located in Building 124, Room 119. I’d be happy to help you with this. I have also set up a page in our Canvas site that has a comprehensive list of student resources with links. You can find it here: [Student Resources Page.](#_top) If your documentation status presents obstacles to engaging in this class, you may request confidential accommodations. You may consult with [RISE](https://clfsa.calpoly.edu/rising-immigrant-students-educationrise) or the [Dream Center](https://dreamcenter.calpoly.edu/)) for examples of possible accommodations. Such arrangements will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence.

**Student Care Resources**

If you face challenges securing food, housing or other basic needs, please be aware that many resources are available to support you through [Cal Poly's Basic Needs](http://basicneeds.calpoly.edu/) initiative or by contacting the [dean of students](mailto:deanofstudents@calpoly.edu). An extensive list of critical care resources is also listed and updated on the Cal Poly Coronavirus information pages [Student Care Resources](https://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/student-care-resources) page.

Mental health is an important part of your overall well-being. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises during the quarter are encouraged to contact Counseling Services (805-756-2511) for assistance, support and advocacy. This service is free and confidential. Check out the [Campus Health and Wellbeing](mailto:https://chw.calpoly.edu/) website for more information.

If you have specific questions about the Covid-19 pandemic, please visit the [Cal Poly Coronavirus website](http://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/). For specific information on frequently asked questions about Cal Poly classes and programs, visit the [Classes and Programs](https://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/classes-and-programs) section of this website. If you have concerns about accessing the tools that you need to continue with your studies, including technology, please contact [retention](mailto:retention).

If I can help you in any way to access the resources above, or if you have any questions about student care resources, please contact me so that I can assist you. I am committed to ensuring that all students have the resources they need to be able to participate in this course.

**Course Materials and Intellectual Property**

Please note that all course materials, provided by the instructor and/or other sources, are covered by copyright protections. Students are not authorized to record, share, repost, and/or redistribute these materials in any form(s) (such as, but not limited to, hard copy and electronic forms) in any venue(s) (such as, but not limited to, social media platforms and online study material sites). In some cases, sharing, re-posting, recording, and/or redistributing course materials constitutes a violation of Cal Poly academic integrity policies, while in other cases such actions constitute a violation of copyright protections.

**Outline of the Course:**

Below please find an outline of the course, subject to change. Required readings are just that: required. You have to read these for the class session. Further readings are additional readings to help develop your views on a particular topic. They are not required reading.

**Week 1: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion**

Monday, April 3

No Reading

Wednesday, April 5

Lebens, skim Introduction and read Chapter 1

**Weeks 2: Talking and Thinking about God and Religion**

Monday, April 10

Lebens, Chapter 2

Wednesday, April 12

Ekstrom, “Religion on the Cheap”

Pogin, “God is not Male”

Assignment: Personal Belief Reflection #1 by Sunday April 16th by 11:59 PM

**Week 3: Arguments for God’s Existence**

Monday, April 17

Lebens, Chapter 3

Further Reading: Anselm and Gaunilo Debate excerpts

Wednesday, April 19

Hildebrand and Metcalf, “The Nomological Argument for The Existence of God”

**Week 4: Arguments for Specific Religions**

Monday, April 24

Lebens, Chapter 4

Wednesday, April 26

Ebels-Duggan, “Why I Am A Christian”

Yaser Mirdamadi, “Why I Am A Muslim”

Assignment: Paper 1 Due by Sunday April 30th by 11:59 PM

**Week 5: Argument’s Against God’s Existence**

Monday, May 1

Lebens, Chapter 5

Wednesday, May 3

Oppy, “An Argument for Atheism from Naturalism”

Johnson, “Why I Am an Atheist”

Assignment: Test 1 Due by Sunday May 7th by 11:59 PM

**Week 6: Arguments Against Religion**

Monday, May 8

Lewis “God and Evil”

Wednesday, May 10

Street, “If Everything Happens for a Reason, Then We Don’t Know What Reasons Are”

**Week 7: Religion and Ethics**

Monday, May 15

Lebens, Chapter 6

Wednesday, May 17

Plato, *Euthyphro* excerpts

Adams, “A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness”

**Weeks 8: Religious Practice**

Monday, May 22

Lebens Chapter 7

Wednesday, May 24

De Cruz, “Etiological Challenges to Religious Practice”

Assignment: Paper 2 Due by Sunday May 23rd by 11:59 PM

**Week 9: Religion and Politics**

Monday, May 29

No Class – Memorial Day

Wednesday, May 31

Lebens, Chapter 8

Assignment: Personal Belief Reflection #2 by Sunday June 4th by 11:59 PM

**Week 10: Religion and Disagreement**

Monday, June 5

Buchak, “A Faithful Response to Disagreement”

Wednesday, June 7

Concluding Reflections

**Final Exam Week**

Final Exam Due by Friday June 16th by 10 AM