



NEW ORLEANS
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

PHIL 5300

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Fall 2019

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

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Texts

Steve Lemke, *A User-Friendly Guide to Philosophy of Religion*. New Orleans: NOBTS, 1998.

The User Friendly Guide is available to be accessed or downloaded free from the class Blackboard pages in the “Course Documents” section. If you would like a hard copy, you can purchase it from Dr. Lemke’s office.

Ronald Nash, *Faith & Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.

James K. Dew and Paul M. Gould, *Philosophy: A Christian Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.

Course Description

A philosophical examination of the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts with primary focus on the claims and warrants of Christian theism. Lectures and readings address classical and contemporary perspectives on the relationship of faith and reason, the nature of religious language, arguments for the existence of God, religious experience, the nature and persistence of evil, miracles, death and immortality, and the relationships of Christianity and other religious traditions. The course constitutes a call to intellectual accountability in relation to issues of ultimate concern to Christian faith.

NOBTS Mission Statement, Core Values, and Competencies

The mission of NOBTS is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries. This course relates primarily to the Seminary core values of *Doctrinal Integrity* and *Characteristic Excellence*, and primarily addresses the key competency in the Seminary curriculum of being able to understand and interpret the *Christian theological heritage*. The seminary-wide focal core value for this year is *Spiritual Vitality*.

Biblical and Doctrinal Commitments

This course operates under the assumption that the Bible is the inspired, totally true and trustworthy Word of God, and thus holds ultimate authority in Christian doctrine and practice. *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* summarizes the doctrinal beliefs that the consensus of Baptists understand the Bible to affirm.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will read broadly on issues in philosophy of religion.
2. Students will become familiar with issues related to philosophy of religion by completing course assignments.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to think philosophically by completing Philosophy of Religion worksheets.

Course Objectives

The objectives of this course are for the successful student to be better prepared to minister to persons with doubts about the Christian faith by:

- mastering the basic vocabulary of philosophy.
- improving the student's ability to express his/her thoughts clearly, concisely, and logically.
- gaining knowledgeable acquaintance with the major philosophical movements and thinkers.
- thinking through the student's own presuppositions to achieve a more cohesive Christian worldview.
- applying one's knowledge and comprehension of the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism to their own lives.
- comprehending and articulating coherently the fundamental religious beliefs and concepts of Christian theism.
- increasing the student's ability to defend the faith once delivered to the saints.
- improving the student's skill in witnessing effectively to persons from other world religions and other non-Christian perspectives.
- gaining greater confidence in the reasonableness of his/her own faith.
- valuing things such as intellectual accountability in relation to issues of ultimate concern to Christian faith.

Class Policies

Grades will be determined on the basis of the NOBTS grading scale--
an A for 93-100, B for 85-92, C for 77-85, D for 70-76, and F for 69 or below.

A-assignments (93-100) demonstrate a *superior* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, and presents very good, clear, and thoughtful arguments, with very few, if any, significant grammatical and/or form and style problems.

B-assignments (85-92) demonstrate a *good* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, presents an argument that exhibits good reasoning, with minimal significant grammatical and/or form and style problems.

C-assignments (77-84) demonstrate an adequate though perhaps limited understanding of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, mixed with a significant number of incorrect claims, presents weak arguments, contains significant grammatical or structural problems.

D-assignments (70-76) demonstrate significant misunderstandings of factual matters, uses poor logic or fallacious reasoning (if any) to argue points (e.g., merely makes a series of unconnected assertions), fails significantly with respect to technical specifications.

F-assignments (0-69) result from a failure to submit a paper, a paper that commits plagiarism, or a paper that presents no argumentation.

A more complete grading matrix for the paper assignments is posted in the class Blackboard pages.

Plagiarism – Note the policy on plagiarism found in the NOBTS Graduate Catalog and Student Handbook. Remember the words of the proverb: *“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out”* (Prov. 10:19).

Late Work will be penalized. No assignment will be accepted that is over two weeks late, and all late work will be assessed a proportional penalty (two points per office day).

Participation in Class Discussions is a crucial element in a Philosophy course. Each student has a positive contribution to make to the class, and is expected to participate meaningfully in both the regular class meetings and the online discussions. We will be dealing with some difficult and controversial issues, however, and language that is disrespectful of other class members or the instructor is unacceptable.

Use of Laptops and Other Electronic Devices in Class -- Laptops are permitted in class as long as they are used for taking notes or accessing materials directly related to this particular course. *Students using laptops are requested to sit in the front of the classroom for accountability purposes.* Gaming, e-mail, social networking, and web browsing of any kind are strictly prohibited. Failure to heed this policy *will* result in dismissal from the class session; repeat violations may result in removal from the course. *Any student using social networks such as Facebook or texting during a class meeting may be asked to leave the class for the remainder of the semester. Phones should always be set at “silent” ring during class.*

Make-up Exams are not permitted except in extreme situations, in order to insure fairness that all students have approximately equal time to prepare for exams. The instructor has the final decision regarding the legitimacy of excuses in cases of missed exams. The student who misses the exam bears the entire responsibility to initiate explaining the delay and arranging for a make-up exam within the prescribed two-week period.

Extra Credit opportunities are available through meaningful participation in the online class discussions. Students who make thoughtful contributions are eligible for possible extra credit points, which are posted in the online gradebook. For instructions in how to sign up for the Blackboard online aspect of the course, see the following section.

The Class Web Site is an important supplement for the class meetings. It provides a number of resources related to the class, including a gradebook to get your grades quickly, links for further information on philosophical topics, and online discussions in which the student can earn extra credit. After you sign in for the course, you can begin engaging in the threaded discussions for bonus points, and, when you're ready, take the first short quiz, the Philosophy Vocabulary Test. You can retake the test more than once to improve your score.

Class Assignments

Ten Short Quizzes, 10 points each = 100 points. These must be taken by the date listed on the Class Schedule. The quizzes include the Philosophy Vocabulary Test, the Philosophies and Philosophers Test, the Logic Test, the World Religions Vocabulary Test, etc. The purpose of these short quizzes is to give you practice to help learn the material for the Unit Tests. There are 11 quizzes. You will be scored for your best 10 of the 11 quizzes. You may retake the quizzes to improve your score.

Three Unit Tests, 100 points each. Each test is limited to the material in that unit. Guidance will be given in advance concerning the material to be covered and the direction of the questions asked. The exams will both test mastery of content (significant thinkers and their contributions, summaries of models presented in class, philosophical vocabulary, etc.) and critical thinking skills (the ability to articulate and defend a position in an essay). NOLA2U students must take the test the same day as on-campus students. Please set up a specific time for the test to be sent to you. You'll also need to get a monitor to affirm that you have taken the test in the prescribed time without notes.

Term Project, 100 points. The student will choose to do one of the following. Submit your proposal by email to Dr. Lemke the track and topic you prefer before starting it, by October 3. Before you start your assignment, read again carefully over the assignment description in this syllabus and review the appropriate Grading Matrix in the Course Documents section of Blackboard before you start your assignment, so you'll know what to focus on in your work.
Due: November 21.

- (a) *Academic Track* -- The student will research and write a paper on a topic in the area of philosophy of religion. The paper should be approximately 10-15 pages, typed double spaced in proper Turabian form. A research paper should show adequate research in books and scholarly journals reflected in footnotes and bibliography. Plagiarism, as stated in the NOBTS registration booklet, is strictly prohibited. About two-thirds of the paper should be descriptive, and at least one-third should be evaluative, reflecting the student's own perspective on the issue. The paper would ordinarily address one specific issue.
- (b) *Ministry Track* -- The student will prepare a seminar dealing with one of the major topics covered in class that can be taught in four to six one-hour sessions in a church or discipleship group setting. All teaching materials should be included that would make for an effective presentation, including a full outline of lesson plans and all teaching materials (handouts, presentation programs, and materials for activities). It may be focused on youth or adult aged pupils. A premium is placed on accuracy and depth of the material presented, as well as the attractiveness and usability of the materials.

- (c) *Reading Notes* – Read one of the following books and take careful notes on them. Note: *Sophie's World* and *John Calvin Goes to Berkley* are novels which may seem silly at points, but they do help you learn the history of ideas). Conclude with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the content and ideas presented (*not* the style) in the book.
- Jostein Gaardner, *Sophie's World* (New York: Penguin, 1996).
 - James McCarthy, *John Calvin Goes to Berkley* (San Jose: City Christian Press, 2010).
 - Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).
 - Erickson, Millard J. *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It? The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
 - Erickson, Millard J. *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).
 - James K. Dew, Jr., and Chad Meister, eds. *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013.
 - Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.

Evaluation

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Class Schedule

**UNIT 1: LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR MINDS:
DEVELOPING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

Date	Class Discussion Topic	Assignment
8/20	Introduction to the Class	UFG 1-12 You can review the Powerpoint slides on "Introduction to Philosophy" on Blackboard in "Course Documents," then take the Philosophy Vocabulary Quiz
8/22	Introduction to Philosophy and Apologetics	UFG 1-12, FR 11-18, PCI 1-10
8/27	The Relation of the Church to the World	UFG 13-23
8/29	Idealism	UFG 25-26, 29, 44; FR 21-34, PCI 98-115 Take the Church/World Quiz
9/3	Naturalism	UFG 27, 44; FR 21-34; PCI 95-96, 116-130 You can review the Powerpoint on "Worldviews" and the video "Lecture on Worldviews," parts 1, 2, and 3) in "Course Documents," then take the Classical Philosophies and Philosophers Quiz
9/5	Realism	UFG 28-29, 44; FR 21-34; PCI 116-130
9/10	Existentialism/Postmodernism	UFG 30-45, 111-121 You can review the Powerpoint presentations on "Postmodernism" and "The New Age Movement" and watch videos of "Lecture on Existentialism and Postmodernism," parts 1, 2, 3, and 4
9/12	Pragmatism	UFG 28, 44
9/17	Test over Unit 1	Test over Unit I See study guide at UFG 81-82

**UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING GOD:
EVIDENCE FOR BELIEF IN THE ONE TRUE GOD**

Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
9/19	Faith and Reason and Epistemology	UFG 61-66; FR 69-92; PCI 15-56 You can review the Powerpoint presentation on “Epistemology,” then take Rationale for Religious Belief Quiz
9/24	A Primer in Logic	UFG 67-71; FR 105-120 Take Logic Quiz
9/26	Arguments for the Existence of God A	UFG 73-80; FR 121-174; PCI 165-177 You can review the Powerpoint presentation on “Arguments for the Existence of God,” then take Arguments for God’s Existence Quiz
10/1	Arguments for the Existence of God B	UFG 73-80; FR 121-174; PCI 165-177
10/3	Arguments against Belief in God	UFG 73-80; 177-221; PCI 178-189 Research project proposals due
10/8	The Nature and Attributes of God	UFG 47-63
10/10	The Christian Worldview	UFG 46-50, 84-99; FR 51-66
10/22	Western Religious Worldviews	UFG 84-99 You can review the Powerpoint presentations on “Philosophical Theology” and “Religious Worldviews,” then take Western Religions Quiz
10/24	Eastern Religious Views of God	UFG 100-121 Take Hinduism Quiz, Buddhism Quiz, and Eastern Religions Quiz
10/29	Exclusivism and Pluralism	UFG 118-121
10/31	Test over Unit II	Test over Unit II Study guide at UFG 122

UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING GOD’S CREATION: ANSWERING CHALLENGES TO THE FAITH

Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
11/5*	The History of Cosmology	UFG 124-131
11/7*	The Relation of Faith and Science	UFG 132-135; FR 69-79; PCI 57-71
11/12	Creation and Evolution	UFG 143-148
11/14	Anthropology and Freedom	UFG 201-214; PCI 190-205, 144-161, 206-221
11/19*	Ethics	UFG 193-200; PCI 223-254
11/21*	The Problem of Evil	UFG 215-229; FR 177-221; PCI 178-189 Papers Due
12/3	The Problem of Evil	UFG 215-229; FR 177-221; PCI 178-189 Take the Problem of Evil Quiz
12/5	Miracles	UFG 136-142, 162-163; FR 225-272
12/10*	Test over Unit III	Test over Unit 3 See study guide at UFG 179-181, 230-232

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