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PH 501 Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

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Welcome! I'm so glad you decided to register for Introduction to Philosophy of Religion this semester. In the first module assignment, you'll get a chance to say why you decided to register for PH501X. My interest in the subject is essentially two-fold. First, as I indicated in my video, I believe that God has called me into a teaching career as a Christian philosopher. Second, I found in seminary that it was the Christian philosophers who were addressing many of the questions I had often asked, such as: Why does God allow people to suffer horrible evil? In fact, I've found that many of the questions I've asked since childhood are addressed by Christian philosophers. Take, for example, the question: Are there bathrooms in heaven? Well, Christian philosophers address this issue. Of course, their discussion usually takes the form of "What constitutes personal identity?" or "What is the relationship between mind and resurrected body?".

It's interesting to me just how many of the 'basic' questions children and youth ask that end up being discussed by professional philosophers of religion. By the way, I have a theory that many adults wonder about the questions children and youth sometimes ask (I know I do); but as adults we're often uneasy about asking 'stupid' questions. Please know that, as far as this class is concerned, there are no stupid questions. If you're new to the subjects we're going to discuss (as I was when I took PH501 at Asbury), consider yourself squarely in the mainstream.

If you've not yet filled out a resume in Asbury's computerized directory of staff and students, let me invite you to do so. It's a good way for us to begin to get to know each other. Include anything you feel comfortable including. Please do feel free to read my resume/personal profile (although I'm afraid it's hopelessly out of date). I'm currently the philosophy tutor at Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford. Also, I remain a member of the Kentucky Conference in the United Methodist Church, having spent three years as an assistant pastor at Pikeville, KY UMC. I'm excited to think what I might learn from our time together in this class, and I look forward to being a part of your learning experience this semester, which I pray will better equip you to be an effective ambassador for our Lord Jesus Christ.
II. COURSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Broadly speaking, our goal will be to become more effective ministers for the kingdom of God. Part of one's being an effective minister clearly includes being on firm ground oneself as to what one believes. One of our goals this semester will be to gain a deeper personal understanding of the God we embrace, as well as a deeper personal understanding of what it means to have a Christian worldview.

Another part of effective ministry for the kingdom involves being able to address the concerns of those in the modern world who do not embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. This involves understanding why they find Christianity problematic and being able to offer a Christian apologetic to them that makes sense. One of our goals this semester will be to gain a greater preparation to offer to those in our culture "an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1Peter 3:15).

Given that Asbury is a seminary in the Wesleyan tradition, we will also keep an eye toward better understanding how our own Christian background (predominantly, I presume, as Wesleyans) fits into the larger Christian tradition. Such understanding will better allow us to distinguish a non-Christian perspective from a Christian, non-Wesleyan perspective.

More specifically, there are a number of course and learning objectives for PH 501X:

(1) We will learn to distinguish different types of arguments and to discern good arguments from poor arguments.

(2) We will learn to identify the different accounts of human freedom found within the Christian tradition.

(3) We will gain a better understanding of who God is by examining his attributes.

(4) We will become familiar with the traditional arguments for God's existence and learn to state these arguments in succinct form.

(5) We will develop our own perspective on the relationship between reason and Christian faith.

(6) We will examine why people form religious beliefs and under what circumstances people are justified in holding religious beliefs.
(7) We will look at the various religious experiences people testify to having and whether religious experiences should be considered reliable.

(8) We will develop a better understanding of what a miracle is and why some people reject the idea that miracles might occur.

(9) Utilizing the various approaches within the Christian tradition, we will develop our own response to the question: Why does God allow suffering and evil in this world?

(10) We will develop a better appreciation for the ways in which religious investigation is related to scientific investigation.

(11) We will gain a better understanding of how our finite human language can be used to describe an infinite God.

(12) We will examine the relationship between the human mind and the human body, and how this issue impacts discussions on personal identity and the nature of our resurrected 'self'.

(13) We will develop a Christian perspective on the phenomenon of religious diversity and on the fate of those who never hear the gospel message.

(14) We will get a taste for how philosophical analysis can help us better understand such Christian doctrines as the Incarnation and the Atonement.

III. REQUIRED TEXTS


*PLEASE NOTE: We will hit the ground running this semester, so you will need to have your books by **September 7**, the first day of class. The first assigned paper is **due 27**.

These books can be ordered from Asbury's bookstore, which you can call (859) 858-4242 or e-mail at exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu.
IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

There are 7 modules in the course center. Each module has 2 lessons, each with its own assignment. Modules due dates and required readings are given below. Full module assignments will be posted in the course center at least one month prior to assignment due dates. The course schedule is as follows:

01 Module - Due September 27* 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time

LESSON 01 - What IS Philosophy of Religion?!
reading assignment: Hasker 13-28; Reason and Religious Belief, 5-14.

LESSON 02 - Freedom and Responsibility
reading assignment: Hasker 29-55; RRB 154-172; excerpt from H. Frankfurt article.

PAPER DUE
Topic: Identify and critique the account of freedom implicit in the Westminster Confession

02 Module - Due October 7* 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 03 - What are God's Attributes?
reading assignment: RRB 58-76; Selected Readings 124-129, 139-148

LESSON 04 - Traditional Arguments for God's Existence
reading assignment: RRB 77-106; SR 187-209, 218-230, 241-246

03 Module - Due October 23* 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 05 - Faith and Reason
reading assignment: RRB 39-57; SR 67-71, 77-108

PAPER DUE
Topic: TBA

LESSON 06 - Justification for Religious Belief
reading assignment: RRB 107-127; SR 355-365
04 Module - Due November 2*  11:59 p.m. ET
LESSON 07 - Religious Experience
   reading assignment: RRB 15-38; SR 5-55

LESSON 08 - Miracles
   reading assignment: RRB 173-193; SR 415-444

05 Module - Due November 18*  11:59 p.m. ET
LESSON 09 - The Problem of Evil
   reading assignment: RRB 128-153; SR 249-273, 287-326
PAPER DUE
Topic: TBA

LESSON 10 - Science and Religion
   reading assignment: RRB 246-266; SR 497-530

06 Module - Due November 29*  11:59 p.m. ET
LESSON 11 - Religious Language
   reading assignment: RRB 220-245; SR 369-413

LESSON 12 - Mind-Body Issues
   reading assignment: Hasker 57-80; RRB 194-219; SR 445-488

07 Module - Due December 15*  11:59 p.m. ET
LESSON 13 - Religious Diversity
   reading assignment: RRB 267-288; SR 539-570

LESSON 14 - Philosophy and Christian Doctrine
   reading assignment: SR 597-629
PAPER DUE
Topic: TBA

* Note on due dates: Within each module, there are two different due dates for various parts of the assignment. Please read carefully the modules when they are posted and take note of various due dates within each module.
One final note on papers: Since I will be providing a discussion summary the day after each module is due, and since some of the discussion summaries will provide some of the 'answers' to the papers, it is important that papers are in on time. Late papers (unless arrangements are made in advance with the professor) are subject to grade reductions. Of course, the Exl program is designed with flexibility in mind; and I readily understand that unexpected events in ministry, at work, and at home can sometimes demand immediate attention. So, please do feel free to let me know in advance if there is a problem with getting an assignment in on time. My experience has been that we can always work out some kind of arrangement.

V. HOW WE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER

discussion center
Every lesson assignment will ask you to answer 2-4 questions and to respond/reply to 2 other classmates' answers.

If you have any general questions about assignments, sudden explanatory revelations regarding difficult material, etc.—post all such items here. Unless the class size is unduly small (which would be a rarity indeed), you will be assigned to a team. Each team will include up to ten students. Each team has its own Discussion Center; and your answers and responses to the questions for each lesson should be posted in your team’s Discussion Center. Typically, I will not post responses in the discussion threads here—though I do read through all the answers and responses in each team’s discussion center. If you have a particular question or issue that you would like me specifically to respond to, then please post such a question in the general Discussion Center to which the entire class has access. The day after each module is due, I will post a Discussion Summary of the material just covered. Given that my discussion summaries come after the assignments are due, please do feel free to post in the general Discussion Center any questions about the readings that crop up along the way. Also, if you have any general questions about assignments, please post such items in the general Discussion Center. Finally, if you have any prayer requests/praises (please feel free to post them), they can go here (as well as in Asbury's general 'Prayer News' folder, which the whole Exl community can read). The discussion center is a Public Forum, in that all of us in PH501xl can read and respond to all the messages posted there. This will be our primary method of communication with one another.

archive center
7-10 days after posting the discussion summary for each module/lessons, I will move all the threaded discussions from that module into the Archive Center. You can access and read any of the material in the Archive Center at any time during the semester, but the Archive Center will not allow you to post messages there.

my office
Any personal messages to me (problems getting an assignment in on time, suggestions for how the course structure might be altered/improved, etc.) should be sent to me at my office (click on "office" icon). This is a Private Forum in that only I will see these messages, and my replies to you will go to your private mailbox.

Your assigned 4-5 page papers should be sent to my office via an attachment to an e-mail. (This is done by sending an e-mail to my office and attaching your paper, which you will save as an "rtf document" (or .doc document if you use Microsoft Word as I do).

my phone
If calling from the USA, my phone number is 011 44 01865 553261. Please note that I live in England and am 5 hours ahead of Eastern Time. The cheapest way to talk personally to me is to meet me in an Exl chat room. This can be arranged by e-mailing me and then agreeing with me on a time we can both be online together so that we can meet in the chat room.

chat room
Anytime someone else from our PH501 class or from any other Exl class is online, you can invite that person(s) into a chat room. Other people are able to join an existing chat only by invitation. Unlike our threaded discussions in our PH501 discussion center, chat room messages are not saved; once you exit the chat room, your discussion is lost forever (unless you choose to copy the discussion and paste it in one of your other files).

VI. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING ASSESSMENTS

There will be a separate assignment for each of the 14 lessons (2 lessons per module). In addition to the required readings found in each assignment, each assignment will ask you to answer 2-4 questions and to respond to two other classmates' posted answers. While we won't be too strict about making sure that every sentence is grammatically impeccable, we will stay away from 'cyber slang' and 'stream of consciousness' writing in these assignments. In addition to giving answers/responses for each of the fourteen lessons, you will be assigned four 4-5 page papers (double-spaced) during the course of the semester. These papers are to be formal papers. I'm of the firm opinion that, as ambassadors of
Christ Jesus, we are called to communicate clearly to the world in which we find ourselves. Consequently, in assessing the overall line of argument in your papers, I will look to see whether that line of argument is clear, smooth, and uninterrupted by grammatical and spelling mistakes.

How grades will be assigned:

For each of the fourteen lessons, each student will be expected to give thoughtful answers to all assigned questions, as well as thoughtful responses to other classmates' answers to the assigned questions. While these answers and responses will not be officially given a letter grade, they will constitute class participation that is required of all students. (Note, however, that in cases of borderline grades, I will look at class participation as to whether the grade should be rounded down or rounded up.) Having satisfied class participation requirements, students will be graded on a series of 4-5 page papers assigned during the course of the semester. While four papers will be assigned, students will only be required to submit three of the four papers; and class grades will be awarded based on the average of a student's three papers. Also, you may choose to submit all four papers. If you do submit all four papers, then (at the end of the semester when grades are averaged) your lowest-graded paper will be thrown out, and you will receive a grade based on the average of your three highest-graded papers.

My general guidelines for paper grades are as follows:

A = Essay accurately covered the relevant material and was integrated into a unified, flowing line of argument that led to a strong and well-supported conclusion that answered the assigned essay question. Various possible objections to the line of argument and conclusion were considered along the way and were dealt with adequately. Structure of paper was clear and the overall line of argument was not interrupted by poorly written sentences or problems of grammar.

A- = Conclusion not as strong or well-supported as it might have been; or various possible objections not adequately considered; or structure and/or writing style of paper not quite of an A standard.

B+ = Conclusion not strongly reached and/or supported (perhaps more of a simple summary of various authors given instead of using the authors's ideas as part of one's own line of argument.) Or various possible objections not noted. Or student’s own particular line of argument not always unified, flowing, and clear.

B = Good individual points made at times, though the overall material is not always integrated into a unified line of argument pointing to a clear conclusion.
Some sentences beginning to be a bit ambiguous or otherwise lack the needed philosophical precision needed to show a clear understanding of all the material.

B- = Inaccuracies in assessing the material beginning to prevent a demonstration through the essay that the material has correctly been understood at all crucial points. Style of writing tending to be a bit sloppy in places, indicating that perhaps another draft is needed to smooth out spelling and grammar mistakes. Some good points made in the essay, but essay still lacking a cohesiveness that indicates an understanding of how the various parts of the material fit together.

C range = Some confusion is evident in the attempted line of argument, indicating that there are still some central misunderstandings as to what the various authors’ writings and the various philosophical positions actually entail. Or, numbers of grammar and syntax problems have interrupted attempted line of argument so as to make it, from the reader’s perspective, seem confused.

D range = Assigned material simply not dealt with. Style of writing and mistakes of grammar indicate that not enough time was spent on the essay to come to grips with the philosophical material.

VII. AVAILABLE EXL SUPPORT

Asbury has an excellent EXL staff to support you.

For general questions regarding the ExL program, email ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu

For technical support, email ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu

For library research support, contact Information Commons at Information_Commons@asburyseminary.edu

For library loans, contact Dot James at Dot_James@asburyseminary.edu

Obtaining Library Materials and Assistance
General Questions: information_commons@asburyseminary.edu  Toll-free 1-866-454-2733

This is the best place to start when you have questions about library resources. Help is available Monday-Thursday from 8AM-7PM and Friday and Saturday from 8AM-5:45PM. If the people at the desk can not answer your questions, they will direct you to the person or department who can.

Materials Requests: library_loan@asburyseminary.edu Or call toll-free 1-866-454-2733

Exl Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/reference books from Asbury Seminary’s Library. Please allow 3-10 business
days for all requests to be filled. Contact the library loan office for information on costs and instructions on how to make requests.

ExL students are also encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Wilmore campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

Research Questions: [Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu)

Or call the toll-free number and ask to be transferred to Hannah (x2189).

ExL students are encouraged to contact Hannah Kirsch for research assistance including help choosing a paper topic, determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

Online Databases:
To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to [www.asburyseminary.edu/library](http://www.asburyseminary.edu/library) and enter your 10 digit student id number in the login box. Your student id is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0’s to the front to make a ten digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id). If you have questions, contact the information commons desk.

VIII. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

While part of our learning experience will include uncovering for ourselves what certain terms mean, it might prove helpful if we have a glossary of some basic terms found in the philosophical literature before we begin reading. Feel free to keep this glossary handy as you read through the material.

**a priori**: Prior to experience. Take, for example, the three line argument: (1) All bachelors are unmarried; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob is unmarried. You do not need any experiences in the world to evaluate this argument. You only need to know the meaning of the word 'bachelor'.

**a posteriori**: Following experience. Take, for example, the three line argument: (1) All bachelors have brown hair; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob has brown hair. To evaluate this argument, you will need to rely on your experiences about the world--e.g., whether you've ever seen or heard others talk about bachelors with blond or red hair.

**apologetics**: The task of providing a defense for one's beliefs.

**causal relation**: This is how the connection between two events is described when one event (e.g., a breeze blowing) is said to be the cause of another event (e.g., a pencil rolling across a desk).

**cumulative case argument**: An argument which proceeds from several separate pieces of evidence to a conclusion which best explains that evidence.
**deductive argument:** An argument which necessarily/logically follows from premises to a conclusion. Take, for example, the two premises: (1) All bachelors are unmarried; and (2) Bob is a bachelor. If these two premises are true, then it is definitely/necessarily/logically the case that the conclusion—'Bob is unmarried'—is true.

e.g.: Abbreviation for 'for example'.

**epistemology:** The study of human knowing—i.e., how humans come to form beliefs and know things.

i.e.: Abbreviation for 'that is', or 'in other words'.

**inductive argument:** As opposed to a deductive argument, and inductive argument is one in which the conclusion is made probable by the premises. Take, for instance, the argument: (1) Most bachelors have brown hair; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob probably has brown hair. A cumulative case argument is one kind of inductive argument.

**modus ponens:** A deductive argument of the form: (1) If p, then q; (2) p; (3) Therefore, q. For example: (1) If I hear a knocking sound, then someone is at the door; (2) I hear a knocking sound; (3) Therefore, someone must be at the door.

**modus tolens:** A deductive argument of the form: (1) If p, then q; (2) not q; (3) Therefore, not p. For example: (1) If I hear a knocking sound, then someone is at the door; (2) No one is at the door; (3) Therefore, I can be sure I'm not hearing a knocking sound. BUT BE CAREFUL! Unlike modus tolens, the following is NOT a valid argument: (1) If p, then q; (2) not p; (3) Therefore not q. For example, it is not a valid argument to claim: (1) If I hear a knocking sound, then someone is at the door; (2) I don't hear a knocking sound; (3) Therefore, there is no one at the door.

**natural theology:** The study of God from the natural world, apart from special revelation (e.g., scripture).

**necessary cause:** Some cause, C, the occurrence of which is necessary for the occurrence of some effect, E. In other words, the only way in which E (the flooding of a town in five minutes) can occur is by C (the breaking of a dam) occurring and causing E to occur.

**ontology:** The study of being in its most general terms.

**sound argument:** A deductive argument that is valid and has all true premises (and conclusion). Consider the following argument: (1) All bachelors have brown
hair; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob has brown hair. This is a valid argument, as there is no logical error in the argument. However, the first premise is clearly not true. Thus, the entire argument, while valid, is not sound.

**special revelation**: Information about God which comes from a special and unique revelatory act of God.

**theodicy**: Explanations for the problem of evil intending to justify God in allowing evil to occur.

**valid argument**: A deductive argument in which the conclusion follows logically from the premises. Take, for example, the argument used in our previous definition of a 'deductive argument'. Note: An argument can be valid without being sound.
Philosophy of religion is the philosophical study of the meaning and nature of religion. It includes the analyses of religious concepts, beliefs, terms, arguments, and practices of religious adherents. The scope of much of the work done in philosophy of religion has been limited to the various theistic religions. More recent work often involves a broader, more global approach, taking into consideration both theistic and non-theistic religious traditions. The range of those engaged in the field of philosophy of religion is broad and diverse and includes philosophers from the analytic and continental traditions. 

**CORONAVIRUS UPDATE:** Because it is unsafe and unwise for us to meet in person, we will have to conduct this course online. Since this course was not initially intended as an online course, we will have to make due, and it will in many ways feel chimeric. Know central problems in philosophy of religion, and traditional responses to those problems; know central figures and texts in philosophy of religion. Figures and Topics. Know and evaluate major arguments for God's existence, and learn how to examine the role of reason and evidence in religious belief. Critical Reading and Writing. Practice philosophical analysis and argument orally and in writing; write a cogent and well-researched essay on the philosophy of religion. Related Courses. Survey of World Religions. Philosophy of Religion. Introduction to the Sociology of Religion. Introdu...