

Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

Instructor: Rockwell F. Clancy
Course: VR 262 – Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion
Email: rockwell.clancy@sjtu.edu.cn
Meeting: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday 12:10-1:50 pm
Location: Dong Xia Yuan 303
Office Hrs: Monday 2:00-3:40 pm and by appointment
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Teaching assistant

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1. Course Description

This course acts as an introduction to philosophy through reflection on issues central to religion. These include – but are not limited to – the nature and social function of religion, arguments for and against the existence of God, and the problem of evil. In addition to philosophical and religious content, this course will develop the skills of reading closely, thinking critically, and writing clearly. Having successfully completed this course, students will be expected to demonstrate these skills, an understanding of philosophy and its relations to the academic study of religion, describe differences in religious and nonreligious views of reality, and reflect rationally on religious concepts and claims.

2. Texts

Required – you need to read/we'll discuss specifically in class

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.

Rowe, William and William Wainwright, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*.
(selections)

Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. (selections)

Recommended – these are books in which I'm currently interested and have informed my understandings of the topics we'll discuss this semester, which you might find interesting

Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*.

Richerson, Peter J. and Robert Boyd. *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*.

De Cruz, Helen and Johan De Smedt. *A Natural History of Natural Theology: The Cognitive Science of Theology and Philosophy of Religion*.

Norenzayan, Ara. *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*.

Hall, David and Roger Ames. *Thinking Through Confucius*.

Fung, Yun-Lan. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*.

Slingerland, Edward. *Trying Not to Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity*.

You might find the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (available online) helpful as well.

3. Course Requirements

You are expected to have read the assigned text (multiple times) before class, taking notes and raising questions regarding the reading, and coming to class ready to discuss the text in depth. Try to identify questions the texts raise and answer regarding the different branches of philosophy, dealing with the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge and what one can know, and what one should do given some conception of the good, as well as the way these pertain to religion. (I will more fully explain what I mean by this throughout the semester.) The success of this course hinges on your willingness to actively participate in discussion.

A. Attendance: Attendance is required. Failure to attend each class will affect your grade. Students who miss over 1/3 of classes cannot pass. A percentage of your grade is based on class participation, which consists in attendance as well as active participation, for example, answering questions, asking questions if the course material is unclear, etc. You will be responsible for all material covered in class, including lecture content, schedule and policy changes, and other general information. **You are expected to take copious notes in class. The midterm and final exams will contain questions on content not covered in the readings but only the lectures. You will not do well on the essays unless you have taken notes in class to use in the process of writing your essays.**

To quote the JI policy on leave/missed classes:

- a) "An advance request for leave of absence is required if the student cannot attend the class due to illness or other reasons. Absence without approval will be regarded as skipping classes."
- b) "A note that a student visited a medical facility is not a sufficient excuse for missing an assignment or an exam. The note must specifically indicate that the student was incapable of completing an assignment or taking an exam due to medical problems and that this condition was sudden enough that it was impractical to contact the instructor in advance."

Students will receive a zero for any in-class work or tests they miss due to unexcused absences. Please note that even with an excused absence, you are still required to hand in any work due for the class, on time. For example, if you have an approved leave of absence on Monday, you are responsible for handing in any homework at the same time as other students.

TIP: Be sure to ask for the contact information of several classmates so you can contact them about what you missed.

B. Attendance questions: Each day of class will end five minutes early, at which point you'll write out at least two questions you have regarding the class discussion, assigned reading, or issues you encounter in your life you think are relevant to the course. I will review these at the beginning of the next class. They count towards your attendance grade, helping me to know you better and what you do and do not understand about the course. The questions should include your name and student ID number. If you are excused from class, then you should let me know and will receive four points for that day's questions. If you have an unexcused absence, then you will receive a zero for that day's questions. Anyone caught

handing in questions for a student not in class or acting in an otherwise dishonest way will face a lowered score and be reported to the Honor Council.

C. In-class presentations: After answering questions and an initial review of the previous class’s content, each class will begin with a five to ten minute presentation of the reading by a student. I will call on the student at random, so each day you should be prepared to give a presentation. The presentation should begin with one to two sentences describing the main point of the reading, going on to summarize the content of the reading, answering questions other students might have, and raising at least two questions to facilitate further discussion. This will be followed by lecture and time at the end of class for more questions and “house cleaning” issues.

D. Papers: You will write two word-processed essays of four to five pages for this course. **Your grade will be determined as much by content as form – i.e., that your essays follow standard essay form (introduction, body, etc.) and are free of punctuation, grammar, and syntactical mistakes. Please consult the guidelines/grading criteria for your written work that I have posted on Sakai. Your papers should be no more than five – and no less than four – full pages.**

Late Papers: Your grade for essays will drop by 1/3 for each day that they are late, including weekends. In other words, a paper that would otherwise receive an A, if handed in one day late, would drop to an A- (and so on).

E. Exams: The exams will be closed book, closed notes, with short answer questions drawn from the readings, lectures, *and class discussions*. **For this reason, it is absolutely necessary – not only for your participation grade but also for exam performance – that you attend *all* classes or get notes from someone you trust for classes you miss.**

4. **Grading Policy**

Participation – attendance, in-class presentations, and questions/discussion	15%
Paper one	15%
Paper two	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%

Grades will be assigned according to this chart:

Final average	Course grade	Final average	Course grade
98% and above	A+	77% and above	C+
93% and above	A	73% and above	C
90% and above	A-	70% and above	C-
87% and above	B+	60% and above	D
83% and above	B	59.9 and below	F
80% and above	B-		

5. Academic Integrity

As a Joint Institute student, you are bound by the UM-SJTU JI Honor Code. All work handed in for this class must be your own. The inclusion of any data, words, or ideas from any other source must be acknowledged, and that source must be given proper credit. Failure to do so is a violation of the Honor Code. Any suspected violation of the Honor Code will be reported to Honor Council for investigation.

Please be sure you understand JI's policy on plagiarism. For this course, it is defined as:

- a) The use of any passage of **three words or longer** from another source without proper attribution. Use of any phrase of three words or more must be enclosed in quotation marks ("**example, example, example**"). The source of the material must be identified in the text, by a parenthetical reference, footnote, or endnote.
- b) Use of material from an uncredited source, making very **minor changes** (like word order or verb tense) to avoid the three-word rule.
- c) Inclusion of **facts, data, ideas, or theories** originally thought of by someone else, without giving that person (organization, etc.) credit. You must identify the source, whether in an endnote, footnote, parenthetical reference, or in the text.
- d) **Paraphrasing** ideas or theories (writing them in your own words) without giving the original thinker proper credit.
- e) Allowing another person to make extensive changes to your paper. This is considered "unauthorized aid." Allowing a friend to check your work for minor errors is fine.
- f) Use of an electronic translation program such as Google Translate. The use of machine translation programs is classified as "unauthorized aid."

Please note that because **even partially plagiarized** assignments will receive a failing grade, it is in your best interest to do your work on your own. Even assignments that you have struggled with will probably result in a grade higher than that of plagiarized work that is discovered by the instructor or TA.

If you have any questions about what constitutes or how to avoid plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask.

6. Language

As long as students are in the classroom, they should speak English. Students should also speak English when meeting with me or the TA. If students must ask for the definition of an English word, this should be done in English.

7. Courtesy

Please foster a learning atmosphere by respecting classmates, TAs, and the teacher. Students are asked to turn off their cell phones when class begins. Please do not play with electronic devices (Game Boy, etc.) during class. Please be polite to other students, especially those with a lower English level than your own. Any discussions about grades should take place calmly. It is recommended that students wait 24 hours before contacting an instructor or TA about a disputed grade.

*This syllabus is tentative and subject to revision as the instructor sees fit.

8. Assignments and Tentative Course Schedule

Class	Topic	Reading	Work due/exams
1 – 3/2 (M)	Introduction to the course/philosophy – What is philosophy? Why should we care about religion?	Eliade, Introduction (8-18)	
Unit one – The nature of religion (in human affairs)			
2 – 3/4 (W)	Introduction to religion: The sacred and the profane	Eliade, chapter one (20-9)	
3 – 3/5 (T)	Sacred space and the world	Eliade, chapter one (29-47)	
4 – 3/6 (F)	Sacred space and the world	Eliade, chapters one and two (47-72)	
5 – 3/9 (M)	Sacred space and the world and sacred time/myth	Eliade, chapter two (73-95)	
6 – 3/11 (W)	Sacred time/myth	Eliade, chapter two (95-113)	
7 – 3/12 (T)	(Sacred) nature and the cosmos	Eliade, chapter two and three (116-29)	
8 – 3/13 (F)	(Sacred) nature and the cosmos	Eliade, chapter three (129-51)	
9 – 3/16 (M)	(Sacred) nature and the cosmos, distribute first essay topic(s)	Eliade, chapter three (151-72), work on first essay	
10 – 3/18 (W)	(Sacred) nature and the cosmos	Eliade, chapter four (172-92), work on first essay	
11 – 3/19 (T)	Human existence and religion	Eliade, chapter four (192-213), work on first essay	
12 – 3/20 (F)	Human existence and religion	Rowe 90-4 (Intro), 95-7 (Anselm), 102-4 (Descartes), work on first essay	
Unit two – (Western) Philosophy of religion			

13 – 3/23 (M)	Introduction to the philosophy of religion and a monotheistic notion of God; Ontological arguments for God’s existence	Rowe 95-7 (Anselm), 102-4 (Descartes), 104-8 (Kant)	First essay due
14 – 3/25 (W)	Ontological arguments for God’s existence and Kant’s critique	Rowe 126-32 (Aquinas), 137-40 (Hume)	
15 – 3/26 (T)	Cosmological arguments for God’s existence and Hume’s critique	155-61 (Paley), 162-172 (Hume)	
16 – 3/27 (F)	Teleological (“design”) arguments for God’s existence	Rowe 184-93 (Kant), 210-15 (Introduction)	
17 – 3/30 (M)	Kant’s moral argument for God’s existence and introduction to the problem of evil	Rowe 216-24 (Leibniz), 224-33 (Hume)	
18 – 4/1 (W)	Leibniz and Hume on the problem of evil	Study for the midterm	
19 – 4/2 (T)	Review for the midterm	Study for the midterm	
20 – 4/3 (F)	Midterm, distribute second essay topic(s)	288-91 (Intro) 313-27 (Hick), work on second essay	
21 – 4/8 (W)	Objections to traditional theism and religious pluralism	313-27 (Hick) and 356-61 (Intro), work on second essay	
22 – 4/9 (T)	Religious pluralism and introduction to mysticism and religious experience	362-76 (Stace), work on second essay	
23 – 4/10 (F)	Religious and mystical experience	384-92 (Broad)	Second essay due
24 – 4/13 (M)	Religious and mystical experience	430-35 (Intro) and 461-72 (James)	
25 – 4/15 (W)	Introduction to the nature of faith and belief	461-72 (James)	
26 – 4/16 (T)	The nature of belief	Chan 3-13	
Unit three – Eastern philosophy (of religion?)			
27 – 4/17 (F)	Chinese philosophy (/religion?) and “humanism”	Chan 14-8, 18-33	

28 – 4/20 (M)	Confucius and humanism	Chan 49-51, 77-9	
29 – 4/22 (W)	Mencius' "idealism"	Chan 95-9, 104-5	
30 – 4/23 (T)	The "Mean"	Study for the final exam	
31 – 4/24 (F)	Review for the final exam	Study for the final exam	
32 – 4/27 (M)	Final exam		Final exam