

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Summer A 2022

Instructor:	Jim Gillespie	Time:	MTWRF period 2
Email:	james.gillespie@ufl.edu	Place:	MAT 0113

Office: FLO 316

Office Hours: T 11:00–12:30pm, R 11:00–12:30pm, and by appointment. [Zoom link here!](#)

Course Description: This course explores some of the most interesting and important questions in the philosophy of religion: Does God, or something deserving of the name “God”, exist? What kind of evidence—if any—is there for or against the existence of God? What is faith, and can it be rational? We will closely examine these three, interrelated questions throughout the course, engaging with both classic and contemporary readings in the philosophy religion.

While investigating different answers to these questions, we encounter specific topics, including: arguments concerning whether God is necessary for morality; classic teleological arguments from design; contemporary fine-tuning arguments; cosmological arguments (about the initial cause of the universe); ontological arguments (that God must exist given how he is understood or defined); arguments from the problem of evil; connections between religious experiences, miracles, and evidence of God’s existence; concerns about the nature and rationality of faith. At the end of this investigation, students should have significant understanding of these topics as well as an increased ability to think and write critically about the existence of God.

Objectives: While the focus of the course is, obviously, philosophical questions and topics about God and religion, the techniques and methods for dealing with them apply generally. In this vain, this course is designed to introduce students to both the essential questions and topics concerning the philosophy of religion *and* the methods for thinking critically about them. By the end of the course, students will: understand traditional issues in philosophy of religion, know how to engage with those issues directly and in a critical way, and learn general strategies for interacting with complex ideas in a lucid and robust way.

Required Textbook: Torin Alter and Robert J. Howell, *The God Dialogues* . Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-539559-4. Available at the UF bookstore.

Tentative Course Outline: The course is divided in **six sections**, with one section per week for each week in the Summer A semester.

- | Week 1, The Genesis: **Background, God & Morality**
- | Week 2, Arguments, part 1: **Teleological & Cosmological**
- | Week 3, Arguments, part 2: **Cosmological (cont.) & Ontological**
- | Week 4, Humans and God: **Experience & Miracles**
- | Week 5, Squaring God With the World: **The Problem of Evil**
- | Week 6, Faith and Reason: **Rational Belief & Religion**

Each class meeting will require one or two readings (sometimes the same reading on different days) and, occasionally, unannounced quizzes. The full schedule with specific readings is present on Canvas. This will give you a rough breakdown of what to read and when. It is, like all things, subject to change as we progress through the course.

Grade Breakdown: Attendance, participation, & discussion (15%), three short papers (45% total), one final paper, (35%) (quizzes (5%). The table below provides the grading scale for this course as well as the corresponding grade values. Information regarding UF's Grading Policy can be found [here](#).

Grade Scale	Grade Value	Grade Scale	Grade Value	Grade Scale	Grade Value
100–92 = A	A = 4.0	81–79 = B-	B- = 2.67	68–66 = D+	D+ = 1.33
91–89 = A-	A- = 3.67	78–76 = C+	C+ = 2.33	65–62 = D	D = 1.00
88–86 = B+	B+ = 3.33	75–72 = C	C = 2.00	61–59 = D-	D- = 0.67
85–82 = B	B = 3.00	71–69 = C-	C- = 1.67	58–0 = E	E = 0.00

Additionally, I will break down the grading for the three short papers required in this course as follows. Your best paper will be worth 20% of your final grade, the worst will be worth 10%, as follows (ranked from best to worst):

- 1: **20%**
- 2: **15%**
- 3: **10%**

Because your papers are the primary means of determining your grade, this grading system ensures that you aren't unfairly punished for your worst-graded paper and that you are appropriately rewarded for your best work.

Quizzes: In order to ensure that you are actively working through the material, there will be frequent assignments (your papers) and occasional, unannounced quizzes. These are not meant to serve as any sort of punishment or excess challenge; they merely serve to check how well you understand the material independent of your papers. Quizzes will always concern the specific reading assigned for the day.

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is mandatory and will be recorded at the beginning of each class. You will be given **3** grace absences. Each further, unexcused absence will result in a one letter grade reduction in your participation grade, e.g., from a B to a C. More than **6** unexcused absences will result in a ceiling on your **final** course grade: no matter how well you do, your **best possible grade** for the course will be a C. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at [here](#).

Philosophy is not something that is effectively done all by yourself; discussion is vital both to understand complex positions from a variety of perspectives and to check your own reasoning. It is nevertheless essential to appreciating the material in a thorough fashion that you make the effort to work your own way through it, doing your best to decide what you think about it, confronting those thoughts with questions you come up with and those you encounter in class, and so on. To encourage such active engagement with the material, you will be graded on your in-class participation (including office visits).

Papers: In the course, you are required to write three short papers (approx. 700 words each) and one final paper (approx. 1700 words). For each paper, a prompt or series of prompts will be provided. For each of the three short papers, there will be one prompt available to choose from. For the final paper, multiple prompts will be made available, and students are encouraged to pursue their own topics. If a student wishes to pursue their own topic for the final paper, approval must be given by me *at least a week* before the final paper is due.

Canvas: Our course is supplemented by a Canvas page. I will post all readings, a schedule of those readings,

a copy of the syllabus, and other supplementary material on Canvas. If you are having trouble (for whatever reason) finding a reading or notes on Canvas, ask me. If you encounter any general difficulties logging in or accessing anything on the course page, contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4537.

Important Dates: The following is a strong approximation of when each of your papers will be due, but they are subject to change as the semester progresses:

Short Paper #1	22 May
Short Paper #2	29 May
Short Paper #3	6 June
Final Paper	18 June

Classroom Policies:

A note on laptops: Students are expected to attend class and to have done all assigned reading in advance. Failure to do so will adversely affect students' ability to perform well in this course. The use of laptop computers, smart phones, or other electronic devices during class is not permitted. Requirements for make-up exams are consistent with university policies specified at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance>

Accommodations for Students with Disability: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu> for information about available resources for students with disabilities.

Further Resources, Just in Case: You should be aware that UF provides counseling and other kinds of help for students in distress. You can call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center at 352-392-1575 and see their website <https://counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>.

Course Evaluations: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Academic Honesty: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, 'We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.' On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: 'On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.' The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor. Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of "E" for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows: 'A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): (a) Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. (b) Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.' Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.