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PHIL 240-01, Philosophy of Religion, Fall 2005

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Authors	O'Sullivan, Brendan
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Philosophy 240
Philosophy of Religion
Fall 2005

TTh 2:00-3:15pm, Buckman 330
Professor: Brendan O'Sullivan
Office: Clough 402
Office hours: M 4:00pm—5:30pm,
Th 3:30pm—5:00pm and by appointment
Phone: 843-3096
Email: osullivanb@rhodes.edu

Course Description and Goals

The idea of God, and religion more generally, has had a profound impact on civilization. In a study of God, there are many perspectives one might adopt—historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, personal, or philosophical. In this course, as its name indicates, we will adopt a philosophical perspective. We will study God and religion using reason alone, unaided by sacred texts or church tradition. Our focus will be on 'classical theism', according to which God is an absolutely perfect being. (Classical theism's major representatives are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.)

Our primary task will be to answer one, disarmingly simple, question: Is it rational to believe that such a god exists?

In addressing this question, I have several objectives for this course. They can be divided into two categories.

Skills:

1. To teach you how to read a philosophy essay
 - a. (This may sound easy. I assure you that it is not)
2. To teach you how to present a philosophical argument clearly and accurately, both orally and in writing.
3. To teach you how to assess critically an argument.
4. To foster your ability to think critically and constructively about your own (and others') religious views.
5. To foster your ability to do philosophy independently.

Content:

1. To teach you some of the basic concepts of philosophy.
2. To acquaint you with some of the main arguments for and against the existence of God.
3. To teach you some of the main objections and replies to these arguments.
4. To guide you in formulating a rationally defensible answer to the question of whether God exists.

Texts

There are three books that are required for the course.

1. Louis Pojman, ed. *Philosophy of Religion*. 4th Ed. Wadsworth, 2003.
2. C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. Simon & Schuster, 1943.
3. Bertrand Russell. *Why I Am Not a Christian*. Simon & Schuster, 1957.

In addition, there will be articles placed on reserve in Barret Library.

Required Work and Grading

The written work for this course will consist of one midterm and two 5 page papers. In addition, you will be a participant in a debate and also will get a course participation/preparation grade. The due dates below are tentative. At the end of the semester, I'll calculate your course grade as follows:

Midterm:	20%	October 4
5 pg. Paper:	22.5%	November 8
5 pg. Final Paper:	22.5%	December 11
Final Debate:	15%	TBA (December)
Preparation/Participation:	20%	Continual

I will hand out topics two weeks before papers are due. As due dates approach, we will discuss the nature of the assignments and strategies for preparing for them.

Preparation/Participation

You will notice that 20% of your final grade is determined by your participation in, and preparation for, class. You should begin to develop, in an intentional way, your participation/preparation skills. What is it to make a positive contribution to a class discussion? You should think about that question.

I've attached the criteria I will be using to grade your class participation. Each day, after class, I will give each of you a grade from 0 to 4, with 4 being the highest. Let me highlight a few of the skills that you should be working on:

- Actively reading the assignment.
- Thinking critically about the assignment.
- Voicing your interpretation of a text in a clear way.
- Grounding your interpretation with specific textual references.
- Listening and responding to your fellow students.
- Contributing judiciously, neither dominating discussion, nor silently withdrawing.

In terms of preparation, I have included a handout outlining a standing written assignment you have for each reading.

Attendance

Attendance is required. I will allow 3 absences, whether excused or unexcused. Beyond that, your course grade will be penalized by excessive absences. In extreme cases, an F for the course may be assigned.

Late work policy

I am extremely reluctant to grant extensions on written work, and typically will do so only given circumstances so serious that they require the attention of the Dean of Students (e.g. medical or family emergency). For unauthorized late work, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade each day (e.g., A- to a B+, or a B+ to a B). Each calendar day counts. Note: you can always submit your paper via e-mail.

Class Conduct

Please treat each other with courtesy and respect. Listen when your classmates offer their insights. Offer your own criticisms constructively.

I expect students to arrive to class on time. Do not make a habit of entering the class 5 min. late. It is distracting to the other students and to me and undermines the course's goals.

The Honor Code

You are expected to observe the Honor Code at all times. All written work submitted for a grade should be your own. I encourage you, however, to study for the assignments together, and in general to discuss the course material outside of class (with each other and with me). We'll talk about Honor Code restrictions on specific assignments as the need arises.