

University of Calgary
Faculty of Arts
Department of Religious Studies
RELS 205 L20: The Nature of Religion
Spring 2010

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

Location: ST 139

Instructor: Christopher Morrison

Contact: cdmorris@ucalgary.ca

Office Hours: Thursdays after lecture 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Office: SS 1330

Required Text:

Peterson, Michael et. al. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, Fourth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Other readings will be posted on Blackboard and it is the student's responsibility to print out and bring the text to the relevant class

Course Description

In this course, students will be introduced to key concepts that influence what "religion" is and how it manifests itself in various cultures. Our primary modes of analysis will be historical and philosophical. This course introduces students to the academic study of religion and attempts to tackle the "big" questions concerning religion in general. Questions concerning the nature of "God" and belief, as well as questions about the roles and functions of religions in societies will permeate the course discussions through topics including: the problem of the "one" and the "many," ontological arguments attempting to prove the existence of the divine, the problem of nothingness, the problem of evil, and the problems that inevitably arise when attempting to arrive at a stable definition of "religion" in general.

Core Competencies

Students will be able to critically engage, analyze, and reflect upon religious questions that have traversed many cultural histories. Students will develop an awareness of the difficulties of making grandiose claims about religion or religious devotees. Students will learn to cultivate skills of critical analysis, focussed reading, and the development of writing at an academic level. These skills will lay the groundwork for future success in humanities research carried out in upper-level courses. The ability to identify and maintain acute sensitivity to the problematic nature of religion should help students to carefully consider and critically reflect upon their own religious concerns.

Assignments

Journal Assignment #1	25%
Journal Assignment #2	25%
Mid-Term Test	20%
Take-Home Final Essay/Exam	20%
Participation/Attendance	10%

**There will be no Registrar scheduled final exam for this course.*

Journal Assignments

These writing assignments are personal reflections on some of the themes that you find important in the course. You are free to include creative responses through art or poetry, or you can simply complete standard prose academic responses to course themes. There needs to be a minimum of 3 journal entries/topics (no more than two or three pages for each topic) for Journal # 1 and again for Journal #2. Therefore, Journal # 1, for example, will have at least 6-9 pages of entries. We will discuss more about the journal assignments in class. The goal of this assignment is to allow you to creatively engage with the material in alternative modes of scholarship that extend beyond mere lecture/test formats.

*****Late Assignments are deducted 5% per day (including weekends).*****

Final Exam (Take-Home)

The exam topics will be handed out on the last day of class (June 24th) and you will have 6 days complete the essay/exam. Further details about the expectations and marking format will be given on the last day of class. The exams must be handed in to the Religious Studies drop-box, SS1301 (13th Floor of the Social Science building) by Wednesday, June 30th, at 12 pm. Exams handed in after this time will receive an automatic failing grade.

Grading

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. A letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+	100 - 96	A	95.9 - 90	A-	89.9 - 85
B+	84.9 - 80	B	79.9 - 75	B-	74.9 - 70
C+	69.9 - 65	C	64.9 - 60	C-	59.9 - 55
D+	54.9 - 53	D	52.9-50	F	Under 50

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is not tolerated at the University of Calgary and has serious consequences. Your essays/presentations must be your own work and inadequate referencing may be seen as plagiarism. Please see the relevant sections on Academic Misconduct in the current University Calendar. If you have questions about correct referencing, please consult your instructor.

Academic Accommodation

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 403-220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor **two weeks** before the scheduled date.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: gnosis@ucalgary.ca or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

Lecture/Reading Schedule

- Week One: May 18) Introduction: The Nature of Religion. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 5-18.
 May 20) Religious Experience. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 35-43; 68-85.
- Week Two: May 25) Faith Vs. Reason. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 87-99; 104-115
 May 27) Predicating God. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 128-141; 150-162
- Week Three: June 1) Ontological Arguments for the Existence of God. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 163-196, 212-221 **[Journal #1 due]**
 June 3) The Problem of Evil. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 269-288; 297-315
- Week Four: June 8) What is Nothingness? Readings: Sartre (selections) Nishitani (selections)(posted on Blackboard) **[Mid-Term Test in class]**
 June 10) Miracles. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 427-459
- Week Five: June 15) The Afterlife. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 465-506
 June 17) Religion vs. Science. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 515-526; 542-550; 560-569 **[Journal #2 due]**
- Week Six: June 22) So Many Religions! Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 573-604
 June 24) Ethics and/or Religion. Readings: *Philosophy of Religion* pp. 612-629