

Syllabus
Philosophy of Religion (PHIL 3316-001)
The University of Texas at Arlington
29 August 2006

Instructor: Keith Burgess-Jackson, J.D., Ph.D.
Classroom: 110 Preston Hall
Meeting Time: 9:30 to 10:50 A.M., Tuesday and Thursday
Office: 303 Carlisle Hall
Office Hours: 11:00 A.M. to 12:00 M., Tuesday and Thursday
E-mail: kbj@uta.edu
Website: <http://kbjcourseblog.blogspot.com/>

Course Description. [David Hume](#) (1711-1776) viewed its persistence among reasonable people as a “miracle.” [Charles Darwin](#) (1809-1882) was born into it, embraced it, and eventually abandoned it. [Karl Marx](#) (1818-1883) called it “the opium of the people.” [Sigmund Freud](#) (1856-1939) pronounced it an “illusion.” [Bertrand Russell](#) (1872-1970) declared it “both untrue and harmful.” These thinkers, among the greatest to have trod the earth, were referring to religion, one of the oldest and most pervasive human institutions. Religion is perennially fascinating to the scholarly mind. Philosophers in particular have been obsessed with it. The aim of this course is to apply the concepts and methods of contemporary analytic philosophy to religious belief. It is a course *about* religion, not *in* religion. It is a *philosophy* course, not a history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, or theology course. Among the topics to be covered are the nature of religion, religious experience, faith and reason, divine attributes (such as omnipotence), arguments for and against the existence of God, religious language, miracles, life after death, and religious diversity. At no point will you be evaluated on the basis of the *content* of your beliefs (or values). There are no course prerequisites. Keep in mind, however, that this is an upper-level course. The material will be difficult for those who have had little or no exposure to philosophy.

Objectives. By the end of the course, each student will be able to demonstrate an understanding of (1) the central figures and (2) the main concepts, arguments, problems, and methods discussed in the course. Students will also acquire knowledge of key works in the field that will enable them to read the contemporary literature in philosophy of religion with care and comprehension.

Materials. There is one book: Michael Peterson et al., eds, [Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings](#), 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), ISBN 0-19-518829-2. The book is available, in paperback, at the UTA bookstore and (I assume) at privately owned bookstores near the UTA campus. You may also order it online. From time to time, I will post additional material on the course blog. You are responsible for all postings, so please print and study them as they appear.

Requirements. There are two in-class examinations, each of which constitutes half your grade for the course. One exam will be given in the middle of the semester (on Tuesday, 17 October) and the other (which is noncomprehensive) at the end, during the first 75 minutes of our regularly scheduled final-exam period. Each 75-minute exam comprises 25 multiple-choice questions (worth two points apiece) and one essay question (worth 50 points). No study questions will be provided, so it will not be possible for you

to ignore any subjects during your studies. The aim of the exams is to test the breadth and depth of your knowledge and skill. The multiple-choice questions are designed to test your comprehension of technical matter. (Philosophy is highly technical, as you will see.) You are responsible for *all* the readings, handouts (if any), blog posts, lectures, and discussions. Yes, *discussions*. I do not duplicate lectures in my office or provide notes to students; nor do I allow audio or video recording of my lectures. So, if you miss a class, you must ask another student for assistance. I *strongly* recommend that you find a study partner the first week of class and meet regularly throughout the semester to drill each other. This will keep the material fresh in your mind. I do not give quizzes, assign homework, take attendance, or permit extra credit.

Grading Procedure. The maximum score on each exam is 100 points. At the end of the semester, I will add your two scores and divide by two (to reflect the equal weighting). I will assign grades on the basis of a 10% scale, which means that a final score of 90 or above is an A, 80 to 89.9 a B, and so on. In principle, everyone in the course can receive an A. In principle, everyone in the course can receive an F. How you do depends on *your* performance, not on how others do. In other words, there is no grading curve.

Readings. See the handout entitled "[Lecture Schedule](#)" for details; it is incorporated herein by reference. You *must* have the reading done before we meet; this is a necessary condition of coming to class. I also expect you to be present at every class meeting. It follows that you will read everything assigned.

Office Hours. I have set aside two hours per week for discussion of course material with students. If you have questions about the course, come to see me. It will help (i.e., be more efficient) if you have the questions written down. Since all students have access to e-mail, which is less intrusive than office visits or the telephone, feel free to make use of it.

Academic Dishonesty. The UTA policy on academic dishonesty is as follows (from the [Undergraduate Catalog 2005-2007](#)):

All students are expected to pursue their scholastic careers with honesty and integrity. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a test or other course work, plagiarism (offering the work of another as one's own), and unauthorized collaboration with another person. Students found guilty of dishonesty in their scholastic pursuits are subject to penalties which may include suspension or expulsion from the University.

I will enforce this policy.

Disabled Students. UTA complies with the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#). For information, see the [Undergraduate Catalog 2005-2007](#).