Course Syllabus

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Office hrs: TR 2:00-3:50, and by appointment – or try me anytime I am in (sometimes in the Logic Lab, UH 052, x72667).

Brief Description:
This course takes up selected issues in philosophy of religion. It is not intended to be a comprehensive survey, but rather to provide a perspective or foothold from which other topics may be explored. The ultimate focus is on the relation between reason and religious belief. We will begin with some standard arguments for and against religious positions, beginning with the question of human freedom and god’s foreknowledge — whether god’s foreknowledge presents a problem for human freedom. After that, there will be some opportunity for student direction of course topics. This initial discussion should motivate stepping back and asking about the rational requirements involved — about wether religious belief needs such arguments and, if so, what they ought to accomplish. With the paper project, there is an opportunity (but not a requirement) to explore some additional topic in depth.

Course Expectations:
The only prerequisites are satisfaction of the GE Critical Thinking and Philosophy requirements. As such, the assumption is of a certain background maturity and skill. No particular religious or philosophical content is assumed. We will set up background to make material accessible. This assumes a partnership: Your professor is obligated to be clear, to be responsive to questions, to provide helpful feedback on work, and so forth. Students cannot expect to succeed without regular class attendance, class participation, appearance at office hours, and faithful, on-time completion of assignments. We need also to respect one another by observing basic rules of course etiquette: Apart from special arrangements, arrive on time, do not leave early, or come and go during class. If you are in the room, be engaged in class activities (not surfing the web, reading for other classes, or the like). Apart from special arrangement, phones should remain off during class; do not answer a ring; if your phone does ring, the “penalty” is to bring cookies for all at the next class meeting.

Texts:
The texts for this class are Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach and Basinger, Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion, along with the anthology edited by them, Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings (both in their 3rd edition, available in the Bookstore); some additional readings will be provided by Prof. Roy.

Grading:
Grading is based on homework (15%), midterm exam (20%), final exam (25%), and paper project (40%); there is also some opportunity for extra credit.
a) The homework (15% of the grade) will be regularly assigned in class and due at the following class meeting. Approximately ten assignments will be collected randomly over the term and marked on a scale of 0 - 3 as follows: 3 is for homework that is complete, crisp, clear and to the point. 2 is for homework that is basically on track, though “wobbly” in some respect. 1 is for homework that makes progress toward the assignment, but goes off-track in some serious way. 0 is for homework that is not received, or so flawed that the assignment is not significantly addressed. Note that flaws of grammar or presentation may result in failure to address an assignment. An average of 2 is sufficient for an overall homework score of 100%. Thus solid homework represents a way to earn extra credit. There is no makeup for this component of the grade apart from compelling, continuing, and documented reasons. Thus the homework component of the grade samples regular effort and attendance. Unless otherwise noted, all homework is to be typed.

(b) The midterm (20% of the total grade) and final (25% of the total grade) are comprehensive take-home examinations of material from lectures and reading. The final will be due at the regular exam period (Tu 3/18). The midterm will be given according to the attached schedule. You may expect exam questions to correspond very closely to homework problems and/or questions on a study list distributed prior to the exam.

(c) There are two options for the paper project.

(i) You may choose to do two short (5-6 page) papers on topics to be assigned in class. These topics will be closely related to lecture and reading; no outside reading will be required. Each paper will be worth 20% of the total grade. For each there will be the opportunity to rewrite; if this option is chosen, the first draft will count for 5% of the total grade, and the second 15%.

(ii) You may choose to write a single (10-12 page) paper. Any such paper should have as its focus some reading(s) and topic from the PR anthology (or one of the lists of readings from the texts), and in any be case approved by the instructor. The paper is due in four installments – to coincide with the 4 due dates of option (i): first, a brief (1-2 page) statement of the topic you will consider, along with a projected thesis statement and a projected bibliography; second, a 5 page start to your paper, in which you set up the issues to be discussed; third, a version of your complete paper; and fourth, the final version. The first part must be approved before other drafts will be accepted. After that, the drafts count 5%, 5% and 30% of the total grade.

Late papers will be accepted up to the last day of instruction with a 5% deduction and up to the final exam with a 10% deduction. Nothing will be accepted after the final exam. Exceptions require some exceptional circumstance (not “I have had a lot to do”) and prior approval.

(d) The department sponsors a “skills assessment” for upper-division philosophy. This is a short quiz aimed at basic reasoning and writing skills. It is offered in the logic lab (UH 052) in weeks 1-3 and 6-8 of each quarter. Any student in a 300-level philosophy course who has not already passed the quiz is required to take it at least once during the quarter. If you pass, you are entitled
to 2% extra credit in the 300-level course, and every 300-level course taken thereafter. There is no penalty for not passing. Successful completion of the quiz is a prerequisite to 400-level philosophy courses.

Grading Notes: All grading is numerical. So work not turned in is much worse than late work: it is important not to miss assignments. Also, final grades are not curved; given your weighted total score, you may expect to receive at least the grade associated with the usual scale: ≥ 90 for an ‘A’, ≥ 80 for a ‘B’, etc.

You are encouraged to discuss anything, especially reading and homework with other students, the instructor, and/or assistants in the Logic Lab. With this said, all written work, especially papers and exams, is to be your own. Academic honesty is always essential, and particularly so in the give-and-take of philosophy, where the project is to work through and clarify your own views. Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course, and standard University discipline. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, feel free to talk things over with me. See also “What is Plagairism” linked from http://philosophy.csusb.edu/~troy/courses.htm and the policy document at http://academic-affairs.csusb.edu/personnel/fam/fam820.htm.

Schedule of Instruction (highly tentative):

1. Introduction / on optional topics

2. Freedom and Foreknowledge
   – first paper topic assigned

3. Optional topics
   – midterm exam
   – second paper topic assigned

4. Faith and reason
   – final exam

The fine print:
There are no adds after the census date. Role is required to be taken at the end of the 6th week and recorded for financial aid purposes. If you will be absent on that day, please make prior arrangements with the instructor. If you are in need of an accommodation for a disability in order to participate in this class, please let me know ASAP and also contact Services to Students with Disabilities at UH-183, 537-5238.