**God & Human Nature**

University of Virginia

Summer 2016

Level—Introductory

4-week semester

Five 2.5 hour meetings/week

Dr. Jonathan Barker

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Office Hours: 8am-10am Fridays

**Course Overview**

Does God exist? What difference would God’s existence or non-existence make for our nature as human beings? This course will focus on these two questions. In the first part of the course, we will examine arguments for and against the existence of God. In particular, we will look at the cosmological argument, the ontological argument, the argument from evil, and the problem of divine hiddenness. In the second part of the course, we will ask what implications God’s existence or non-existence might have for human nature. For example, what does the existence of the Judeo-Christian God entail about the metaphysics of human nature? Are we souls, human organisms, or something else? If God does not exist, are we human being still bound by objective moral duties? Could life have meaning, even if there is no God?

**Texts**

All readings are available for download under the “Resources” tab on Collab.

**Course Requirements**

Attendance and Participation: Attendance and participation are worth 15% of your overall grade. You may miss one session, but every absence thereafter will negatively affect your grade.

Exam: There will one written exam, which will be worth 25% of your overall grade. The exam will consist of two or three essay questions, and should take around an hour to complete. By preparing for and taking this exam, you will acquire some of the tools employed by philosophers—valid arguments, reasoned defenses of or objections to the premises of those arguments, and clear writing. Acquiring these tools is crucial for the next two assignments, writing your own philosophical essays.

*Papers*: You will write one short (2-3 page) paper, and one longer paper (5-6 page). The first paper will be worth 25% of your overall grade. Your main job in this paper is to carefully outline, in your own words, one of the arguments we have discussed in class. The second paper will be worth 35% of your overall grade, and will be due on the last day of class. In this paper, you will have a chance to explain and defend your *own* view on one of the following topics: divine hiddenness, the relationship between God and the meaning of life, or the relationship between God and morality.

*Late assignment policy:* Late papers or exams will be reduced by a letter grade each day after the deadline. So an A paper turned in a day late will be reduced to a B, an A paper turned in two days late will be reduced to a C, and so on.

**Schedule of Readings**

\*= assignment due date

**Week 1: Arguments for the Existence of God**

July 11th: Introduction; Arguments, Validity, and Soundness; Ontological Argument I

Reading: Peter van Inwagen, “Necessary Being”

July 12th: The Ontological Argument II

Reading: van Inwagen, cont.

July 13th: The Ontological Argument III

Reading: van Inwagen, cont.

July 14th: The Cosmological Argument I

Readings: Leibniz, “A Seventeenth-Century Cosmological Argument” and William Rowe, “The Cosmological Argument”

July 15th: The Cosmological Argument II.; Review for Test 1

Readings: Leibniz & Rowe, cont.

**Week 2: Arguments Against the Existence of God**

\*July 18th: Exam

July 19th: The Problem of Evil I

Reading: J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” Howard-Snyder, “God, Evil, and Suffering”

July 20th: Problem of Evil II

Readings: Mackie & Howard-Snyder, cont.; John Hick, “Soul-Making Theodicy”

July 21st: Problem of Hiddenness I

Readings: J.L. Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism”; Paul Moser, “Divine Hiddenness Does Not Justify Atheism”

July 22nd: Problem of Hiddenness II & Writing Workshop

Readings: Ted Poston and Trent Dougherty, “Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief”

**Week 3: God, Meaning, and Morality**

July 25th: God and Meaning I

Readings: William Craig, “The Absurdity of Life without God”; Richard Taylor, “The Meaning of Life”

July 26th: God and Meaning II

Readings: Wolf, “The Meanings of Lives”

\*July 27th: God and Morality I

Readings: Russ Shaffer-Landau, “Ethical Relativism,” CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (excerpts)

July 28th: God and Morality II

Readings: C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (excerpts); Plato, *Euthyphro*; Wes Morriston, “What if God Commanded Something Terrible?”

July 20th: God and Morality III

Readings: Plato, *Republic* II (excerpts); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book I (excerpts)

**Week 4: God and the Afterlife**

August 1st: Writing workshop

August 2nd: God and Personal Identity I

Readings: Patricia Churchland, “Substance Dualism”

August 3rd: God and Personal Identity II

Readings: Trenton Merricks, “The Resurrection of the Body”

\*August 4th: God and Personal Identity III

Readings: Merricks, cont.

August 5th: Wrap-up