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Office Hours: MW 3:00-4:00 and by appointment.  
Class Website: [www.people.umass.edu/jaklocks/Phil383](http://www.people.umass.edu/jaklocks/Phil383)**

## **Class Description**

This class is a survey of the most important questions in the philosophical study of religion and religious belief, with a focus on the mainstream Western theistic religions (i.e., the various Christian, Islamic, and Jewish faiths). Questions we will consider include: is there any reason to think that there is a God? Is there any reason to think that there couldn't be a God? Are these kinds of arguments even necessary? Is belief in God rational? If there is a God, what is it like? What is the relationship between religion and science?

We will approach these topics mainly by way of the writings of some important philosophers, both classic and contemporary. The goal will be careful formulation and critical evaluation of the ideas and arguments of these philosophers.

This is a course in the philosophy of religion. It is not a course in comparative religion, or in the history of religion, or in the psychology of religion, or in apologetics/theology/religious philosophy. We will expose the arguments and theories we discuss to a surpassing level of rational criticism.

This is meant to be a very challenging course. At least some background in philosophy and logic is assumed. Much of the reading is difficult and must be read slowly and repeatedly, with a high level of concentration if it is to be understood. Many of the ideas and arguments presented in lecture and in the readings are unfamiliar, difficult, and technical. On the exams, you will be expected to think deeply and write very clearly and precisely about the issues. If you are looking for a blow-off course, look elsewhere.

## **Required Reading**

Most assigned readings are in a book called *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*. It is available at Amherst Books in downtown Amherst. I reserve the right to assign readings that do not appear in the anthology. If I do that, I'll make the reading available to you some other way.

## **Attendance**

Attendance is not a component of your grade. However, regular attendance is necessary for satisfactory progress through the course. Lectures will contain information not contained in the readings. Handouts will be distributed and important administrative information will be provided.

## Course Requirements

There will be two exams, one at the approximate midpoint of the semester and one on the date of the final exam. Exams will take place in class, and will be based on material covered in lectures, readings, handouts, and review sessions. There will be no comprehensive final exam. Each exam will comprise 50% of your final grade

There will be an option for a final paper, between 8 and 10 pages in length, due on the date of the final exam. You can choose your own topic, but it must be something that we've covered during the semester and you must talk with me about it and get my approval before you begin. If you'd like, I can suggest something. No paper on an unapproved topic will be accepted. No late papers will be accepted. If you'd like to write a paper, you should start thinking about a topic soon after the first exam. The paper option, should you choose it, will comprise 50% of your final grade. There will be no homework assignments.

## Website

I will maintain a website at <[www.people.umass.edu/jaklocks/Phil383/](http://www.people.umass.edu/jaklocks/Phil383/)>. It contains the syllabus, handouts, study guides, scheduling information, notes and news, some of the readings, and other information for the class. You must check the site regularly. I will try to keep it up to date, but I may sometimes fail. If you notice a failure, please email a gentle reminder. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

## Cheating

Violations of university regulations concerning academic honesty will not be tolerated in this course. The university's policy concerning academic honesty can be found at <[http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/rights/acad\\_honest.htm](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm)>. I will do my best to see to it that any student who cheats will be caught, and that any student caught cheating will be subjected to the most severe penalties consistent with university policies. A more detailed description of the philosophy 383 cheating policy can be found here: <<http://www.people.umass.edu/jaklocks/Phil383/cheating.html>>

## Respect

This course will deal with difficult issues in the philosophy of religion. Some of these issues are at the center of ongoing, emotionally charged controversy. Some members of the class may have very strong feelings regarding one or more of these issues. However, we will always treat one another with respect and courtesy. I will not tolerate any disrespect among the members of this class. Any member of Phil 383 who shows another member even the most insignificant level of disrespect will be immediately asked to leave the room and will be withdrawn from the class.

## Email

I maintain two email addresses: [jaklocks@philos.umass.edu](mailto:jaklocks@philos.umass.edu) and [philosophy164@gmail.com](mailto:philosophy164@gmail.com). I check them both regularly and strive to reply quickly. If, by some chance, an email to one account goes unanswered for more than 24 hours, please send a gentle reminder to the other account. Because of gmail's much larger storage capacity, please direct all file attachments to that account.

## **Course Calendar**

January 29: First day of class

March 12: Exam #1

April 17: Paper Topics Due

May TBA: Final exam/Paper due

## **Potential Topics of Discussion**

Divine Attributes

Omnipotence

Omniscience

Omnibenevolence and Evil

Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge

Theistic Arguments (arguments in favor of the existence of God)

Ontological Argument

Cosmological Argument

Teleological Argument (traditional)

"Fine-Tuning" Argument (contemporary)

Atheistic Arguments

Argument from Evil (classic and contemporary versions)

Responses to the Argument from Evil

Rationality of Theistic Belief

Hume on Miracles

Evidence and belief

Pascal's Wager

The Problem of Divine Hiddenness

Religion and Ethics

Divine Command Theory

God as the basis of morality

The Meaning of Life