

**COURSE SYLLABUS**  
**Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion**  
**Fall 2013**



Course Title: PHL 116  
Tuesdays and Thursdays  
3:10-4:25 pm

Professor: Elvira Basevich  
Office Hours: Tuesday 5 – 6 pm  
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**PURPOSE OF THE COURSE**

Rather than focus on isolated problems in the philosophy of religion, this class will focus on the relationship between faith and reason, as it develops in the history of philosophy. Our journey through time and space will take us from ancient Greece to the Arabian peninsula, from Medieval Italy to nineteenth-century Germany, with our journey ending in twentieth-century France. Students will be introduced to a wide variety of difficult but extremely important readings. The course is broken up into five sections, with each dealing with the contentious relationship between reason and faith as it develops in the history of philosophy. To help students better understand the course material, each section ends with a piece of literature that captures or interrogates the key philosophical ideas of the section.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The principal objective is to give students knowledge of central ethical concepts as they developed in the history of philosophy. **This is a reading intensive class.** Reading all the assignments **before** the lecture is essential for success in this course. You are highly encouraged to develop reading techniques such as taking the time to read and reading with a questioning and critical mind. All the reading assignment will be available on Blackboard. You **must** bring a hardcopy of the reading assignment to class. Failure to do so will significantly impact your final grade for participation.

**Policies:**

- **CLASSROOM CONDUCT**

The classroom is a public space for serious work. Everybody in the classroom is expected to behave as a mature, respectful, thoughtful, and responsible person. The instructor reserves the right to take appropriate measures should this general rule be violated. Due to the sensitive nature of the reading material, class decorum must be maintained at all times. Please be mindful and respectful of each other's different faiths and spiritual persuasions.

- **DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability or think you may have one, get in touch with the Office of Special Services right away: <http://sl.qc.cuny.edu/oss/>

- **NO IN-CLASS ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

All cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices must be turned off or silenced AND stored out of sight. (Discuss with the instructor in advance if there is a reason to violate this rule.)

Any student using electronic devices in class will be considered absent for the day.

- **TIMELY SUBMISSION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade. (In the case of emergency, students should contact the instructor as soon as possible.) Late papers will NOT be accepted without proof of illness or emergency.

- **DO NOT** use the Internet as a resource in writing papers. If you need help or clarification, ask me. Complete evaluation criteria are provided at the end of this syllabus.

- **COMMUNICATE!**

Communicating to the instructor any issue that may affect your learning is very important for your success. Visit the instructor during the office hours or e-mail the instructor with specific questions.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Class attendance and participation	10%
Writing Assignments	70%
Presentation	20%

### **REQUIRED BOOKS**

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. Grove Press, 2011. ISBN 080214442X

Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Ed. & Tr. John Cottingham. Cambridge University Press, 1996. ISBN 0521558182

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Aug. 29: Introduction

Sept. 3: Plato, *Euthyphro*

Sept. 5: No Class

#### **Part I: FAITH**

Sept. 10: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Articles 1-8; St. Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will* (excerpt)

Sept 12: St. Teresa of Avila, "The Autobiography of St. Teresa" (excerpt)  
**Optional:** William James, "The Will to Believe"

Sept. 17: Rumi, *Selected Poems*

## **Part II: REASON AS THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH**

Sept. 19: Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1 & 2

Sept. 24: *Meditations*, 3

Sept. 26: *Meditations*, 4

Oct. 1: *Meditations*, 5

Oct. 3: G. W. von Leibniz, *Monadology*

Oct. 8: *Monadology*

Oct. 10: Leibniz, *Theodicy* (excerpts); Voltaire, *Candide* (excerpts)

Oct. 15: No Class

## **Part III: A TRUCE BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON?**

Oct. 17: Immanuel Kant, “*What is Enlightenment?*” & *Critique of Pure Reason* (excerpt)

Oct. 22: Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Preface 1

Oct. 24: *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Preface 2

Oct. 29: *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Part I, pp. 45-61

Oct. 31: *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Part I, pp. 61-73

Nov. 5: Goethe, “Prometheus” & *Faust*, Part I, “Prologue in Heaven”

Nov. 7: Joseph Brodsky, “Nature Morte,” Part X; Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”

## **Part IV: REASON & SELF-DETERMINATION AS SUPERIOR TO FAITH**

Nov. 12: Karl Marx, “Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right;” Leo Tolstoy, “A Confession”

Nov. 14: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay §1, 7, 9, 11, 15-19

Nov 19: *Genealogy of Morals* §26-8; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (excerpts); Xenophanes (fragments)

Nov. 21: Freud, “On Religion”; Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, “The Grand Inquisitor”

## Part V: MODERN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Nov. 26: Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought* (excerpts)

Nov. 28: No class – Thanksgiving recess begins

Dec. 3: Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, pp. 117-136; Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 22-25

Dec. 5: *Waiting for God*, pp. 208-227; Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 109-113

Dec. 10: Samuel Beckett, “Waiting for Godot,” Act I

Dec 12: cont’d, “Waiting for Godot,” Act II

### Extra Credit Option:

Henry Miller, “Good News! God is Love,” in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*

Extra credit could add up to **THREE (3)** points to your final grade. Since the idea of extra credit is to have students earn extra points by demonstrating philosophical and scholarly excellence that goes beyond the normal class requirements, expect it to be difficult. You would have to relate Henry Miller’s essay to the last reading section. Speak to me after class or during my office hours if you’re interested in pursuing this option.

### Final Grade Evaluation Tools

#### 1) Class attendance and participation (10% of final grade)

This portion of your grade includes all in-class writing assignments, group work, and quizzes. Lectures will presuppose familiarity with the texts. Coming prepared to discuss the assigned text and participating in class discussions are requirements. Except in extraordinary circumstances absences will not be excused. Lateness, absences, and lack of positive participation (or any negative participation) will affect your grade dramatically.

#### Level Criteria

Letter Grade ‘C’

- Present, not disruptive
- Tries to respond when called on but does not offer much
- Demonstrates sporadic involvement in discussion

Letter Grade ‘B’

- Demonstrates adequate preparation
- Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from the reading)
- Regularly contributes to discussion

Letter Grade ‘A’

- Demonstrates good preparation
- Offers interpretations and analysis

- Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion.
- Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement

Letter Grade 'A+'

- Demonstrates excellent preparation
- Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material and helps class analyze which approaches are appropriate, etc.
- Demonstrates ongoing, very active involvement

## 2) Paper evaluation criteria (70% of final grade)

You are required to complete **Four (4)** writing assignments for the course. The assignment prompt will be given several days in advance of the due date. The first three writing assignments must be **at least TWO (2) pages long** and each is worth 15% of the final grade. The final writing assignment must be **at least FOUR (4) pages long** and is worth 25% of the final grade.

### Basics:

- Is in 12 pt Times New Roman font and is double spaced
- 1 inch margins
- Is stapled
- Paper was on time (if not, days late \_\_\_\_\_)

### Writing:

- Has a clearly stated thesis in the opening paragraph that is supported by the rest of the paper
- Is the appropriate length and is concise, not redundant
- Has few or no spelling and/or grammatical errors (misspellings will be circled)
- Is clearly written at the paragraph level
- Is clearly written at the sentence level
- Paper is well organized overall
- Words have been used appropriately (awkwardly used words will be circled)
- Quotes are well integrated into paper, appropriately chosen, understood, introduced, and followed-through with an explanation
- Ideas or passages are attributed to their author and page # is provided

### Content:

- Answers all aspects of the question(s) in the paper prompt
- Fairly and accurately represents the views of the authors mentioned
- Paper includes a genuine conversation with the authors engaged

**'B' level papers will have done all of the above.**

**'C' level papers will have done most of the above.**

**'D' level papers will have done only some of the above.**

**'A' level papers will have gone beyond the usual expectation in at least three of the following (in addition to all of the above):**

- Contains your own original and creative insights

- Demonstrates extraordinarily strong grasp of theory
- Uses compelling personal (or other) examples
- Gives the subject thought beyond what was required
- VERY clearly written
- Demonstrates a willingness to challenge your previous assumptions

**Queens College Writing Center:** For help with writing and tutoring in philosophy.  
<http://writingatqueens.org/>

### 3) Presentation (20% of final grade)

You are required to give one presentation for the course. Presentation topics will be distributed the first week of class. You are expected to select one topic. (Topic preference is NOT guaranteed). Presentations must be **at least TEN (10) minutes long** and evaluate assigned readings' the key points and arguments. Like the writing assignment, presentations must go well beyond summarizing key points and arguments, but provide a critical and original evaluation of the readings.

**Queens College Academic Honesty Policies:** From Queens College Handbook, “Academic dishonesty is one of the most serious offenses in the academic community. Acts of academic dishonesty include – but are not limited to – plagiarism and/or cheating on examinations and papers, the purchase or sale of academic papers, and the falsification of records. Any student who engages in an activity that is academically dishonest, such as submitting a paper, examination, project, or other academic work not his or her own without appropriate attribution (plagiarism), is subject to disciplinary charges, as is any student who knowingly aids another who engages in them. Allegations of cheating and plagiarism are initially handled between the faculty member and the student. If the student admits to the violation, a range of penalties may be imposed at the discretion of the faculty member. These may include – but are not limited to – an F on the paper, examination, or course, or requiring the student to rewrite the paper or retake the examination. The Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs may be notified, in which case a record of the incident will be maintained for the duration of the student’s enrollment at the college. If the student denies the charge(s) and the faculty member believes there is sufficient evidence to pursue the matter, formal charges may be filed with the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs for penalties beyond the grade in the course. Students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty are subject to discipline, including – but not limited to – failure in the course and suspension or dismissal from the college. It should be noted that the buying and selling of term papers is expressly forbidden under the provisions of the New York State Education Law. Therefore, those found guilty of this offense are subject to both disciplinary action at the college and (subsequent) criminal action.”

\*Plagiarism includes, copying definitions of terms or theories from the internet or books without citing your source properly. For the definition of plagiarism, what it includes, and how to avoid it: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>