

# Recent Work in Analytic Philosophy of Religion

PHIL 754, REL 998, Fall 2024  
Thursdays 1:30–3:20, SDQ SG53

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## Description

An advanced seminar engaging state-of-the-art work in analytic philosophy of religion, with attention given to both traditional questions and areas of emerging interest. Possible topics include theodicy, alternatives to traditional theism and naturalism, fine-tuning arguments, creation ethics, skeptical worries facing various religious and non-religious outlooks, and norms pertaining to religious hope and commitment.

## Objectives

- To familiarize students with cutting edge contemporary work on some of the most important and interesting questions in philosophy of religion.
- To deepen students' understanding of how myriad controversial questions in ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and science all bear on an evaluation of the merits of theism and other (ir)religious outlooks.
- To provide students opportunities to practice and improve in their philosophical thinking and communication (both written and oral).

## Format and reading expectations

This is a seminar, and a significant portion of the class time will consist of guided discussion aimed at critically assessing the views and arguments presented in the week's readings. The success of the seminar depends on student participation, it is critical that students complete the week's readings in advance of the seminar.

## Reading materials and course website

Readings are available online for students on the Yale network or will be made available in the "files" section on Canvas. (See electronic version of the syllabus for links.)

## Assignments and grading

Evaluation will be based on three components:

- Seminar participation (15%)
- Five response papers (40%)
- Final paper (15-20 pages, 45%), due **December 13<sup>th</sup>**.

- Note: Attendance is required, and absences may adversely affect your grade (beyond the effect on the participation grade). More than three absences may result in failing the course.

*Response papers:* Each student will be required to complete five 2-3 page (double-spaced) papers responding to one of the readings for the coming session. These papers are due on Canvas by **noon on Wednesday**, the day before class. **Students must complete at least two response papers by October 2<sup>nd</sup>**. Response papers should *not* summarize a reading, but should develop some sort of critical or constructive response. A response paper might do one or more of the following: develop a line of inquiry for exploration in our seminar discussion, critique an argument developed by one of the authors, explore the implications of a piece for some of the larger questions we are pursuing in the course, or assess a disagreement between two authors on the syllabus. Response papers will be used to help plan our seminar discussion, and you should be ready to comment on your response paper in class. Late response papers will not receive credit.

*Final paper:* The final paper should not be a primarily interpretive paper, but should engage in constructive philosophical argument or assessment. The paper should significantly engage at least one reading from the class. The paper should be submitted on Canvas on **December 13<sup>th</sup>**. Late papers may receive up to a one step reduction per day (e.g., from HP+ to HP) unless the student and professors agree on an alternative arrangement.

## Academic Integrity

*Note:* In this course, you are not allowed to use AI tools to generate any written work, not even a first draft of some part of a paper that you will edit and change. You should not ask an AI tool to express some view or point that you might aim to express in your written work.

Plagiarism or other academic misconduct may be grounds for failure of an assignment or the course and may be reported to the relevant disciplinary committee (which may impose additional penalties). For guidelines concerning use of sources, see:

<http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>

and/or <https://divinity.yale.edu/offices/office-academic-affairs/general-information/academic-integrity-policy> .

## Tentative course topics and schedule

### **Part I: Cosmic teleology**

*Week 1 (Aug. 29): Physics and fine-tuning, part 1*

Philip Goff, *Why? The Purpose of the Universe* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2023), pp. 1–25. [[Link](#)]

*Week 2 (Sept. 5): Physics and fine-tuning, part 2*

Philip Goff, *Why? The Purpose of the Universe* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2023), pp. 26–46. [\[Link\]](#)

Neil Manson, “How Not to be Generous with Fine-Tuning Skeptics,” *Religious Studies* 56 (2020): 303–317. [\[Link\]](#)

Luke Barnes, “A Reasonable Little Question: Formulating the Fine-Tuning Argument,” *Ergo* (2020). [\[Link\]](#)

*Week 3 (Sept. 12): Consciousness and cosmic teleology*

Philip Goff, *Why?*, pp. 47–84.

Brian Cutter and Dustin Crummett, “Psychophysical Harmony: A New Argument for Theism,” forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*. [\[Link\]](#)

*Week 4 (Sept. 19): Mind’s place in reality: Adams on idealism, panpsychism, and physical realism.*

Robert Adams, *What Is, and What Is in Itself: A Systematic Ontology* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2021), chapters 6, 10, 11.

*Week 5 (Sept. 26): Non-theistic accounts of cosmic teleology*

Philip Goff, *Why?*, 85–150.

*Week 6 (Oct. 3): Theodicy and the value of free will, part 1*

Laura Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2021), chap. 2.

*Week 7 (Oct. 10): Theodicy and the value of free will, part 2*

Keith DeRose, *Horrid Suffering, Divine Hiddenness, and Hell* (draft), sections 21–24 (pp. 69–79), 28–34 (pp. 92–115), 42 (pp. 135–139). (Note: It’s suggested that you read section 42 between sections 28 and 29.) [\[Link\]](#)

*October 17: reading period; no class*

*Week 8 (Oct. 24): Disagreement and rational insight in religion and philosophy, part 1*

John Pittard, *Disagreement, Deference, and Religious Commitment* (2020), selection TBD.

*Week 9 (Oct. 31): Disagreement and rational insight in religion and philosophy, part 2*

TBD.

*Week 10 (Nov. 7):* Weeks 10–12 TBD based on student interest; see below for possible  
*Week 11 (Nov. 14):* options.  
*Week 12 (Nov. 21):*

## Other topics and readings (to be considered for weeks 10–12)

### *Multiverse theodicy and non-identity theodicy*

Scott Hill, “Why God Allows Undeserved Horrendous Evil,” *Religious Studies* 58 (2022): 772–786.

John Pittard, “The Skeptical Challenge of the Theistic Multiverse,” *Ergo* 9 (2022): 943–970.

### *New work on the cosmological argument*

Pruss, Koons, Rasmussen?

### *New work on the nature of God*

Mark Murphy, *Divine Holiness and Divine Action* (Oxford Univ. Press), selections.

## Grading criteria for papers

*Note: The criteria below correspond to the grading scale at Yale Divinity School. Papers for doctoral students will be graded according to this scale, though final grades must accord with the GSAS grading scheme and thus will be rounded to H, HP, P, or F. If any undergraduates take the course, H is roughly equal to A, HP to B, etc.*

An **H** paper is excellent in the following respects: the paper is clear and well-organized, with a clearly articulated thesis that focuses the paper; it indicates that the student has a mastery of the class readings that bear on the topic of the paper (note: this does not mean that you need to discuss all of the readings, but that when you do it is clear that you understand the readings); it is well-argued, and does not only make obvious points but shows a high degree of insight and originality in its approach; it is stylistically strong and enjoyable to read; the objections it responds to are (plausibly) the *strongest* objections; it is almost entirely free of mistakes in grammar and spelling; and it is not needlessly technical or esoteric.

An **H minus** paper comes very close meeting the H standard, but falls short in some small and avoidable way.

An **HP+** paper is a very good paper. This means that it possesses many of the merits used to describe an H paper, though it possesses these to a lesser degree or perhaps falls significantly short with respect to one criterion. For example, an HP+ paper may be one that is well-argued, creative, and insightful, but that spends too much time addressing a largely tangential question and as a consequence not enough time responding to a worrying objection. Or perhaps an HP+ paper is well-argued and tightly focused, but the points it makes and the approaches it takes are ones that for the most part are fairly obvious, rendering the paper less original and less enjoyable to read. An HP+ paper is *not* crippled by any serious misunderstandings, but demonstrates a very good grasp of the philosophical issues that are the focus of the paper. Note: there is not necessarily something “wrong” with

an HP+ paper; a paper that is accurate, clear, focused, and well-written can still be an HP+ paper if it is not sufficiently creative, interesting, and engaging.

An **HP** paper is a good paper, but is one that suffers from some serious flaw. Perhaps it is creative and insightful, but misses a rather obvious and pressing objection. Or perhaps it suffers from a number of grammatical mistakes or from poor organization. A paper that is strong in many respects but that makes a critical mistake in argumentation might be an HP paper (unless the mistake indicates a poor grasp of the material). An HP paper will still have significant merits, and will be indicative of a serious effort, but it is not a *very* good paper.

An **HP-** paper is satisfactory. It is a thoughtful discussion indicating sincere effort, but it is flawed in one or more serious ways that clearly demonstrates some shortcomings in the understanding of the issues being discussed.

An **LP** paper is marginally acceptable. It is a passable effort and is a paper that does genuinely grapple with a pertinent question, but it suffers from some combination of significant disorganization, grammatical mistakes, obvious mistakes in philosophical argumentation, or from a seriously mistaken understanding of the relevant issues.

A **failing** paper is an unacceptable paper that fails to meet the standard for LP described above. It is not indicative of any kind of serious effort, or is off topic, or suffers from crippling weaknesses on a number of fronts (e.g., grammatical mistakes, lack of clear focus, assertions without support, obvious objections ignored, etc.). Plagiarism is also grounds for failure.

## **Accessibility and Accommodations**

Yale's [Student Accessibility Services](#) facilitates individual accommodations for students with disabilities; students should therefore contact that office at the start of the term in order to register with that office, obtain testing and/or obtain appropriate accommodations. Faculty members are provided with a confidential Letter of Accommodation authorizing accommodations for particular students. Faculty members are expected to provide the accommodation(s) indicated but are not required to alter the essential elements of the course requirements.

Non-native speakers of English: Note the following from the *Divinity Bulletin*: “At the discretion of the instructor, students who are non-native speakers of English may be granted additional time, to a maximum of time-and-a-half, to complete written examinations.”