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# PH 501 X Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

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# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION SPRING 2000

**Chuck Gutenson, Professor**

(Please note that this syllabus may be amended prior to the beginning of class. Syllabus amended 1/7/2000)

## **I. GREETING**

Hello, my name is Chuck Gutenson, and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Asbury Theological Seminary extended learning program. I am very excited about the tremendous opportunity that this technology provides us as we seek to be faithful to the call God has placed upon our lives for Christian ministries of one sort or another. More specifically, I welcome you to PH501X—An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion. I am assistant professor at Asbury with the responsibility for teaching courses in both philosophy and theology, and I look forward to working with you this semester as we jointly seek to expand our grasp of the field of the philosophy of religion.

Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, "Philosophy of Religion? Isn't that something of a contradiction in terms?" In light of the fact that one might argue that philosophy represents the extreme in our use of reason to understand the world of shared human experience and that religion represents the extreme in our use of faith to make sense of that same world, this is a reasonable question. However, as we shall see, a better argument would be one that argues that both reason and faith must function jointly if we are to best understand our world. In many ways, the interaction between faith and reason is exemplary of the sorts of issues that we will examine in this course.

It is my hope that the various topics we will examine this semester under the rubric of the philosophy of religion will not only help each of us to grow in our knowledge of a range of philosophical issues, but that it will also contribute to our growth as Christian disciples. There is a sense in which the biblical injunction to "Be always prepared to give an account of the hope that lies within you" is most fundamentally enabled through a thorough philosophical examination of our faith commitments. Let us proceed, then, using as our motto that old expression: "Faith seeking understanding."

For more information about me, please see my personal profile. Additionally, I encourage each of you to provide a similar profile in your "Resume" on First Class which I and your classmates may access in order to get to know you better.

## **II. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

As a graduate course, PH501X, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, assumes that the participant is somewhat beyond the novice level in academic pursuits. At the same time as an introductory level course, we do not assume any in-depth knowledge of the themes to be studied for this semester. Since this course is designed as an introductory course, it is focused more broadly than narrowly--i.e., the intent is to introduce a wide range of issues of concern to the philosopher of religion rather than to examine in great detail a more restrictive list of topics.

Consequently, this course consists of 14 modules which, to a certain extent, can be viewed as stand-alone modules dealing with one theme of particular interest to the study of the philosophy of religion. That is not to say that there is no building upon earlier modules by later modules, but rather that each of these modules deals with at least one issue that is the subject of substantial discussion within the trade. For example, module nine deals with the problem of evil, while module five deals with the faith/reason debate. Also, while one might pursue the philosophy of religion in the abstract, i.e., separate from any particular religious tradition, we shall proceed, as one might expect, clearly recognizing our firm commitment to the Christian religion.

There has rarely been a time in recent history when the human race seems so hungry for spiritual insight, while at the same time desiring to maintain intellectual integrity. As Michael Peterson notes in the introduction to his work, Reason and Religious Belief,

Philosophy of religion is receiving more attention in recent years than it has for many decades. Professional philosophers are bringing new techniques to bear on traditional problems and are pioneering important new territory as well. In 1980 Time reported this resurgence of interest in the philosophical examination of religion, stating that "God is making a comeback." It is becoming increasingly obvious to more and more people that the issues surrounding belief in God are extremely significant. (Peterson, 1991, p. xi)

We are positioned to make a unique contribution to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is my hope that this course will equip you with the means to answer some of the questions facing individuals in our world which is largely destitute of spiritual truth.

### **III. COURSE RATIONALE**

At this point, some of you may be asking how this course fits into Asbury's overall plan for equipping students for Christian ministry. There are at least four (4) different ways in which one might go about answering this question. First, consider that John Wesley frequently indicated the importance of studying logic and metaphysics. Further, he saw logic, more narrowly, and philosophy, more broadly, as tools that allowed him to discover the fallacies and inconsistencies in the arguments of his opponents. As you can see, Wesley clearly saw philosophy as aids in the task of clarifying and demonstrating the validity of Christian truth claims. In a sense, then, to use Luther's phrase, philosophy is the hand-maiden of theology.

Second, we live in an age which, perhaps more than any other single historical period, reverences the utilization of rational methods. It may be common in conservative theological circles to claim that it is the liberals who are overly committed to the rational structure of inquiry, one only need examine closely the sorts of arguments advanced by conservatives to defend their truth claims (in fact, one only need note that such arguments are even made) to see the extent to which they are committed to the canons of reason. Consequently, one can hardly even enter the public marketplace of ideas without being adequately schooled in certain aspects of philosophy method.

Third, when engaging what many consider to be a largely post-Christian culture, the ability to clearly and articulately layout and assess our own as well as competitive positions is extremely important. After this course of study, you will be better equipped to describe and defend the fundamental truth claims of the Christian faith.

Fourth, over the last 400 years, a remarkable number of important transitions in the way that people look at the world have occurred. The truth of God's existence, taken utterly for granted by Jesus in the New Testament, has been questioned in a number of ways--some scientific and some philosophical, for example. The very foundations of moral theory have been attacked from a number of perspectives. In short, numerous challenges to the Christian faith have arisen. And, if we are to be able to respond effectively to those challenges, we must understand not only their weaknesses, but also their strengths and attractiveness.

In summary, a common theme underlying the various rationale for this course is the desire to equip you to be able to respond to the challenges to Christian faith which are being advanced by those hostile to Christian belief.

### **IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Through our work together this semester, we will accomplish a number of important course objectives.

1. We will learn to evaluate a variety of arguments for their soundness and validity, and to apply certain of the basic logical forms of arguments.
2. We will develop our own response to the problem of evil by drawing upon the resources contained within the Christian tradition.
3. We will analyze the alleged conflicts between faith and reason, and then develop our own, more holistic account.
4. We will develop the ability to explain the impacts that theology and philosophy have upon each other.

5. We will examine the nature of explanation in order to discover the best way to think of Christianity as relates to its explanatory power.
6. We will analyze the classical arguments for God's existence, and we shall learn to outline them and place them within their broader historical context.
7. We will develop an adequate theory of the nature of language in order to understand the how finite human language can be used to describe an infinite God.
8. We will develop an adequate account of the manner in which science and religion are inter-related.
9. We will develop an adequate account of human knowledge from a Christian perspective.
10. We will examine the critique of miracles provided by David Hume, and others, and develop an adequate response to those challenges.

## **V. LEARNING STRATEGIES**

During the course of this semester, we will use at least four (4) different learning strategies. Allow me to describe each briefly.

1. The central aspect of each module will be a combination of the reading assignments and supplementary presentations included in the module which are intended to clarify and expand upon the information available in the assigned readings. Please note that this syllabus contains a glossary of common terms that we will be using in this course. Keep this list handy, as you will probably reference it from time to time.
2. In several modules, I will include an interactive assignment which will provide you (and in some cases, groups of you) the opportunity to interact with the material that we are studying in that module. These interactions will take a variety of forms, but they will be aimed at helping to understand the practical application of this material studied.
3. We will schedule at least three group "chat" sessions during the course of the semester. Although we are calling these "chats", they will be held in the Discussion Center. The tentative dates for these three (3) "chats" are during the weeks of: February 21, March 27, and May 1. This will give all of us an opportunity to work our way through some of the finer details of the modules that we have studied. Come to these sessions prepared with your own list of questions as well as prepared to offer your insights on the topics to be discussed. I will post reminders to you prior to the date of our scheduled group chat, and, on occasion, I may include questions for you to consider prior to our meeting.
4. Those of you aiming for the grade of "A" or "B" will enhance your learning of the material by interacting with it in a written project. You are encouraged to consult the bibliography and to research beyond the scope of the materials covered directly in the given modules. This is not required for a higher score; however, such additional research will assuredly further your ability to grasp the topics.
5. You are encouraged, as groups of two or more, to take advantage of the "Chat Center" for interacting with each other. It is not unusual for on-campus students to get together over lunch, etc. in order to discuss the topics presented in class. It is intended that the "Chat Center" provide you with these sorts of opportunity for inter-student discussion. Feel free to use this, not only for academic-related discussions, but also for the purpose of spiritual support--pray together, share meditations, etc.

## **VI. ONLINE GUIDELINES**

While I am sure many of you are aware of the intended use of each of the items which show up in the PH501X folder, let me summarize the manner in which I intend to use them for this semester.

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules. Modules will be posted three days prior to the close of the preceding module, and may be accessed from then until the course is closed at the end of the semester.

The Discussion Center will be used for all public communications. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else which would be of interest to your classmates as well, these questions or comments should be posted in the Discussion Center. I will check at least once daily (generally, more frequently) for your questions or comments, and I will post my responses here so that all of you may access the responses provided.

The PH501 Office is for private correspondence between you and I. If you have some private concern or if you have a question or comment concerning your specific assignment, please use the PH501 Office to communicate these to me. I will also check the Office at least once daily. For either Office or Discussion Center correspondence, if I do not respond within 48 hours (or sooner, if an emergency), please do not hesitate to call me either at ATS(859-858-2364) or at my home (859-858-5455).

The Archives Center will be used for the purpose of storing correspondence which has already been responded to during the course of the semester. Consequently, if you or one of your classmates should raise an issue that, at the time, you are not interested in, but which you later find yourself concerned about, you need only refer to the Archives Center to review that past correspondence.

The Discussion Center is intended primarily for interaction among the class members. I may monitor that activity in the Discussion Center from time to time, but you should not let this intimidate you--I am only looking to see if the resource is being used, not to see if there are any heretics among you. :) The Chat Center will be used for the purposes of our three group chat sessions scheduled for this semester. Please note, while there are a whole host of forms of speech, abbreviations, :)’s, etc. which are acceptable in on-line communication avenues, these are not to be used in any written assignments. Please be more cautious in use of language in other communication avenues for this course.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific resources available to all ExL students. These include, for example, access to the B.L. Fisher Library and to the chapel services in Estes Chapel. I encourage you to take advantage of all these resources, and particularly to utilize the chapel access in order to connect with the seminary’s on-campus opportunities for spiritual growth.

Additionally, you will notice a folder entitled "Resources for PH501X". This folder will contain specific supplemental resources for this course. This includes, for example, an on-line version of the glossary contained in the syllabus as well as sample papers dealing with a variety of topics. If you can think of specific additional resources that would be of help to you, let me know. There is a good chance that your classmates will also benefit from adding those resources. Please note that as the semester passes, I will undoubtedly discover new resources that may be of use to you. Consequently, I would recommend a frequent visit to this folder for any updates.

OFFICE HOURS: I will be available with on-line office hours on Wednesday and Friday, from 10:00am to 11:00am (ET). In addition to being available on-line during those times, I will be available by phone in my office as well. While you should use the PH501 Office for contacting me, should you need my email address, it is [chuck\\_gutenson@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:chuck_gutenson@asburyseminary.edu) .

CHAT GUIDELINES: I do not intend to establish detailed guidelines in advance for our chat times. Though I reserve the privilege of implementing them later should our interaction be less than satisfactory. Let the dictum to "value others above ourselves" be our guide as we proceed.

## **VII. AVAILABLE SUPPORT**

From time to time, special resource material, explicitly intended for this class, will be added to the "Course Resources" folder in the "Course Center". Generally, individual modules will reference this material where appropriate.

The resources of our B.L. Fisher Library are available to you through the internet. Please click on the "Resource Center" icon in the PH501X folder, and then click on the B.L. Fisher line item. Once you arrive at the B.L. Fisher Library "Lobby for ExL Students", you will find other resources available through web links. If you have any questions about additional resources of this type, do not hesitate to contact me.

Contact Jeremy Lucas at [exl\\_support@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:exl_support@asburyseminary.edu) for technical difficulties.

Contact Hannah Kirsch at [hannah\\_kirsch@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:hannah_kirsch@asburyseminary.edu) for library reference information.

Contact Dot James at [dorothy\\_james@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:dorothy_james@asburyseminary.edu) for interlibrary loan information.

Contact Kevin Osborn at [exl\\_counselor@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:exl_counselor@asburyseminary.edu) or Zoe Payne at [exlcoord@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:exlcoord@asburyseminary.edu) for general information.

## **VIII. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

All class members will be expected to complete the reading assignments, review supplemental materials provided, and participate in the interactive learning exercise for each module. Each module contains the specific details for each of these components for that particular module as well as the schedule by which the work is to be completed. Please look under section "X. Assigned Readings and Schedule" for the texts assigned for this course. Additionally, review the following section "IX. Agreement for Assessment" in order to determine the specific requirements for the grade you hope to earn for this course.

## **IX. AGREEMENT FOR ASSESSMENT**

Your grade assignment in this course will be a result of two things: 1) the amount of work that you undertake and 2) the quality of the work attempted. Sometimes this is referenced as "contracting for a grade", which means that you and I will agree in advance as to what quantity of work you will undertake and as to the corresponding potential grade. All that will remain, then, for the final determination of the grade assigned is my assessment of the quality of the appropriate work products.

The requirements for a grade of "C" include: completing the required readings, viewing the appropriate videos and/or listening to the appropriate audio components, and completing all interactive learning exercises. The requirements for a grade of "B" include: completing all of the components for earning a grade of "C" plus undertaking three of the five possible writing projects (see "XII. Assessments and Assignments"). The requirements for a grade of "A" include: completing all of the components for earning a grade of "C" plus undertaking the five possible writing projects (see "XII. Assessments and Assignments").

By the completion date for module two, please indicate which level of work you commit to undertake for this semester.

## **X. ASSIGNED READINGS AND SCHEDULE**

The required texts for this course are:

1. Mike Peterson et al text Reason and Religious Belief (referenced in the modules as RRB)
2. Peterson et al text Philosophy of Religion Selected Readings (referenced in the modules as SR)
3. William Hasker's Metaphysics. For bibliographic detail, see the bibliography.

You may order these books by contacting Dottie at Asbury's Bookstore by email at [exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu) or by phone at 859-858-4242. Please give Dottie your mailing address, name and Credit Card number and expiration date so she can get the books to you as soon as possible.

In addition to the required readings, some modules contain optional readings for those of you who are particularly interested in the theme of that module. If you undertake any of these additional readings, please let me know. I would be particularly interested in your comments as to the helpfulness of these collateral readings in grasping the material covered in that module.

Finally, the schedule for the various readings assignments are to correspond to the beginning and completion dates for the individual modules. Consequently, consult the overview of the modules in section "XI. Module Outline and Schedule" to determine when specific readings are to be completed.

## **XI. MODULE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE**

Please note that the following description of the individual modules contained here are only intended to provide a high-level overview. Additional details concerning the video/audio components of each module, as well as the specific reading assignments for each module, are contained in the module folders posted in the Course Center. If you have any questions after reviewing the detailed modules, please contact me via the PH501 Office.

Module One (Beginning date: 2-8-00, Closing date: 2-22-00)

Readings: Hasker 13-28,119-123, Peterson (RRB=Reason and Religious Belief) 7-17.

The theme of module one is an introduction to the philosophical study of religion. Here we will consider such questions as: what does it mean to analyze something philosophically? What is philosophy? What would constitute an acceptable definition of religion? What methodologies do philosophers of religion use? In addition, this module will examine the nature of explanation. Issues include: what constitutes an acceptable argument form? What is a cumulative case argument and how should it be deployed?

Module Two (Beginning date: 2-8-00, Closing date: 2-22-00)

Readings: Hasker 29-55.

The theme of module two is the conflicting claims of those who embrace freewill over those who embrace determinism. The debate over freewill and determinism is one of the defining debates in the relationship between the Wesleyan tradition and the Reformed tradition. We will consider both positions and assess them for their philosophical and theological adequacy.

Module Three (Beginning date: 2-19-00, Closing date: 3-4-00)

Readings: Hasker 57-80.

The theme of module three is the inter-relation of the physical and spiritual/mental aspect of human existence, sometimes called the mind/body problem. We shall consider such questions as: Are the mind and body separate realities (is dualism true)? Or, are the mind and body united in some way? How do our Christian commitments influence our position on this matter?

Module Four (Beginning date: 2-19-00, Closing date: 3-4-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 166-189; Peterson (SR=Selected Readings) 351-365

The theme of module four is the religious use of language. In this module, we will consider such questions as: how can finite language be applied to an infinite God? What role does metaphor and analogy play in our articulation of God's nature and attributes? How is religious language justified?

Module Five (Beginning date: 3-1-00, Closing date: 3-18-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 43-61; Peterson SR 59-94

The theme of module five is the relationship between faith and reason. In this module, we will consider such questions as: What is the fundamental nature of faith? Reason? How are the two related in an adequate theology? We will consider such views as critical realism, naive realism, and anti-realism, evaluating each for its adequacy.

Module Six (Beginning date: 3-1-00, Closing date: 3-18-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 146-165; Peterson SR 309-46

The theme of module six is religious epistemology. In this module, we will consider the justification of religious belief. This will involve the evaluation of classical foundationalism as well as Reformed Epistemology. We will consider such questions as: What warrants are necessary for Christian belief? Must one have adequate evidences before one is justified in believing?

Module Seven (Beginning date: 3-15-00, Closing date: 4-1-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 85-115; Peterson SR 145-150, 163-210, 221-27

The theme of module seven are the so-called arguments (sometimes called proofs) for the existence of God. In this module, we will examine the three primary arguments for God's existence: the cosmological, the ontological, and the teleological arguments.

Module Eight (Beginning date: 3-15-00, Closing date: 4-1-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 18-42; Peterson SR 10-54

The theme of module eight is religious experience. In this module, we shall consider such questions as: What is a religious experience? What is the evidential force of a religious experience? How do religious experiences which happen to one person come to bear in the beliefs held by another? What role do the religious experiences of other religious traditions play in Christian faith?

Module Nine (Beginning date: 3-29-00 Closing date: 4-15-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 116-145; Peterson SR 231-305

The theme of module nine is the problem of evil. As this problem represents the atheist's strongest against belief in God, we shall examine both critical responses raised to atheistic challenges (often referred to as "defenses") as well as the primary theodicies which have been develop from within the Christian tradition. These will include the Irenaean theodicy, the Augustinian theodicy, and the process theodicy.

Module Ten (Beginning date: 3-29-00, Closing date: 4-15-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 190-211; Peterson SR 389-416

The theme of module ten is miracles. In this module, we will examine the critique of the possibility of miracles as raised by David Hume. We will also consider modern day arguments against miracles advanced by theists as well as atheists. We will develop an adequate response to these objections.

Module Eleven (Beginning date: 4-12-00, Closing date: 4-29-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 212-236; Peterson SR 421-62

The theme of module eleven is the question of human immortality. Many of the different world religions affirm that this physical world is not all that there is, even though the manner in which they understand the next life varies considerably. We shall consider different understandings of human immortality with the objective of developing an understanding of an adequate doctrine from a Christian perspective.

Module Twelve (Beginning date: 4-12-00, Closing date: 4-29-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 237-258; Peterson SR 467-86

The theme of module twelve is the inter-relation of science and religion. Since we live in a culture which generally takes the sciences, particularly the natural sciences, as paradigmatic of the proper inquiry into truth, it is of significant importance that we understand the similarities and differences between scientific and theological methods of inquiry. Further, we will defend theological inquiry as not inherently inferior to scientific inquiry.

Module Thirteen (Beginning date: 4-26-00, Closing date: 5-13-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 259-278; Peterson SR 495-523

The theme of module thirteen is religious diversity. We live in an ever-increasingly pluralistic society in which a wide variety of religious communities live in close proximity to each other. In many cases, these religious traditions make conflicting truth claims--more precisely, these truth claims are often of a nature such that not more than one set of them can be true. We will examine the appropriate manner for assessing these competing claims.

Module Fourteen (Beginning date: 4-26-00, Closing date: 5-13-00)

Readings: Peterson RRB 302-323; Peterson SR 551-76

The theme of module fourteen is the inter-relation between philosophy and theology. It is without question that one's philosophical commitments has an impact on one's theological position on a wide variety of matters. In this module, we will consider the manners in which this interaction occurs, and we will seek to become intentional about our commitments in light of this interaction.

## **XII. ASSIGNMENTS/ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

The assignments and the assessment tools to be used for evaluation in this class, as well as the modules to which they correspond, are to be as follows:

1. A variety of interactive learning exercises are utilized in the various modules. These are intended to accommodate a variety of learning styles.
2. Each module indicates the assigned readings, as well as optional collateral readings, for that particular topic.

3. Under section "VI. Online Guidelines", you will note that I have scheduled three periods where I will be available for on-line discussion with you as a group. Please arrange your schedule to participate if possible. If you will need to miss one or more of these sessions, please obtain an excused absence from me in advance.

4. Those of you contracting for a grade of "B" or "A" will be undertaking the appropriate number of writing projects (format requirements listed below). The subjects for these writing projects and their due dates are as follows:

a. Examine and critique an argument dealing with the freedom/determinism issue. The argument will be provided. Our study of this topic occurs in module two. The paper is due by 3-01-00.

b. Consider the relation between faith and reason, and propose a synthesis of the two. Our study of this topic is in module five. A question that you might ask yourself by way of access to this issue might be: what roles do reason and faith play in my embrace of Christianity? The paper is due by 3-18-00.

c. Write a paper on the argument for God's existence that you find most persuasive. You should indicate why you find it persuasive, and you should also indicate the reasonable criticisms which you realize may be raised. You may also write a paper which uses the concept of a cumulative case argument. If you choose to do this, please let me know for additional resources. Our discussion of this topic occurs in module seven. This paper is due by 4-1-00.

d. This paper deals with the problem of evil, and it has two components. The scenario is: You are pastor of a local congregation. This last weekend, one of your most faithful members suffered a terrible tragedy. Their 8 year old was killed in a biking accident in the community. Part one of your assignment: at the funeral, or shortly thereafter, the parents ask you why God allowed this to happen. What do you say? Part two of your assignment: it is now a year later, and the parents schedule a meeting with you in which they say: We are working through the loss of our child, but we are curious about the reasons why God allows evil to occur. What insights can you give them. Of course, the first part of your assignment deals with the pastoral problem of evil while the second deals with the philosophical problem of evil. Our discussion of this problem occurs in module nine. This paper is due by 4-15-00.

e. Develop an adequate understanding of the relationship between science and religion from a Christian perspective. In so doing, you may critically examine the alternatives we examined in class, accepting one of them or a combination of them as your own. Or, you may develop your own position. Our discussion of this topic occurs in module twelve. This paper is due by 5-13-00.

Detailed requirements for assigned papers.

All writing assignments for this class are to be not less than four full pages and not more than six full pages. Text is to be double spaced. Please include a cover page (not part of the four to six pages) which indicates the course number, the topic, the date and the due date (listed as "date"/"due date"), and your name. Please email it to me as an attachment to the PH501 Office.

Please leave approximately one inch margins at top, bottom, and sides. You may use any font you desire (as long as it is English and readable). I prefer left and right justification, but this is not required. As indenting of quotations, footnotes, etc., you may use any accepted style. Please be sure to carefully cite all of your sources, as plagiarism, by seminary policy, is to be taken most seriously. If you are in doubt, it is better to cite than not.

Please pay particular attention to spelling and grammar. Here I get on my soapbox a bit. We are, by virtue of God's calling, to serve the kingdom of Christ in a variety of capacities. However, almost all of those capacities include the need to be able to communicate clearly.

Using good grammar and spelling correctly are central aspects of that responsibility. Remind yourself that you are "Ambassadors for Christ" (as Paul puts it), and consider the care you put into your writing a reflection upon the seriousness with which you take that calling.

## **GRADING PROCEDURES**

I am including this document with the class syllabus in order to provide clarification regarding the manner in which grades for this class will be determined, including the level of work which corresponds to various grades.

First, in accordance with the seminary catalog, please note that a grade of B is given for work which satisfactorily meets the parameters of a given assignment. More specifically, let us assume that in response to a particular assignment a paper is handed in which satisfactorily answers the questions raised by the assignment and which does so in a clear and articulate fashion and which, further, has relatively few errors in spelling or grammar. Such a paper would receive a grade of B. Please note that this means that I might return a paper with a letter of B assigned which has few or no errors marked and which has an ending comment such as "good, solid work". In other words, the starting point for a relatively error-free paper is a grade of B.

Obviously, in the course of examining the response to a particular assignment, there are specific aspects of the work which I consider in determining whether a higher or lower grade is appropriate. First, I consider the standards identified by the seminary for the relationship between assignments and their responses. Those standards are summarized below:

- A - Exceptional work; outstanding or surpassing achievement of course objectives.
- B - Good work; substantial achievement of course objectives.
- C - Acceptable work; essential achievement of course objectives.
- D - Marginal work; minimal or inadequate achievement of course objectives.
- F - Unacceptable work; failure of course objectives.

(Specific descriptions of "-" and "+" grades are not given, but may be judged to fall appropriately between the descriptions given above.)

While I cannot, for a number of reasons, give a precise indication of the number of points that would be deducted for specific ways in which a paper might be lacking, the following list summarizes certain things which might potentially result in a reduction in total score.

- +Misspellings
- + "Stream of consciousness" writing
- +Incomplete sentences
- +Answering a different question
- +Grammatical errors
- +Presentation of a weak conclusion
- +Punctuation errors
- +Presentation of a weak argument
- +Poor overall structure
- +Faulty logic
- +Awkward constructions
- +Failure to interact critically with the material (if part of the assignment)

Similarly, I cannot give a precise indication of the number of points that would be added to a paper for going beyond "good, solid work". However, following is a list of the sorts of things that would evidence going beyond the basic assignment and would, therefore, warrant a higher total score for the response.

- +Writing that is particularly articulate and/or worded with exceptional clarity and concision.
- +Particularly insightful interaction with the material, including exceptional criticisms or the recognition of the more profound implications of certain positions.

- +Presentation which moves beyond mere repetition of the arguments of others.
- +Evidence of research that goes beyond what is required for the assignment.
- +Conclusions which effectively summarize criticisms and which proposes solutions.
- +Critical interaction which probes deeply into the arguments at hand.

Some assignments lend themselves better to scoring by numerical assessment rather than by assigning a letter grade initially. Of course, these numerical scorings must be converted to letter grades for recording at the end of the semester. I offer the following breakdown of my numerical scoring system to allow you to track their correspondence to letter grades as you wish.

A = 95-100  
 A- = 90-94.9  
 B+ = 86.7-89.9  
 B = 83.4-86.6  
 B- = 80-83.3  
 C+ = 76.6-79.9  
 C = 73.4-76.6  
 C- = 70-73.3  
 D = 60-69.9  
 F = less than 60

With these guidelines in place, I commit to give my best effort to assessing your work in accordance with these standards and in a fair and impartial fashion. In the course of the semester, if you should have any questions about the grade assigned for any particular assignment, please do not hesitate to contact me for further discussion.

As always, if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

### **XIII. GLOSSARY**

agency theory: in the freewill/determinism debate, the position that agents may begin causal chains

analogy: the comparison of two terms so that one more ambiguous is understood by reference to one more clear in its meaning

a priori: prior to experience

a posteriori: following experience

apologetics: the task of providing a defense for one's beliefs

causal relation: a relation between two events such that one can be understood as the cause of the other, i.e., the connection is not merely accidental

compatibilism: the belief that freedom and determinism

cosmological argument: an a posteriori argument for God's existence which is based upon our experience of the world (why is there anything at all rather than nothing?)

cumulative case argument: an argument which proceeds from several separate pieces of evidence to a conclusion which best explains those evidences

deductive argument: an argument which necessarily follows from true premises to a certain conclusion

determinism: the belief that humans are not free with regard to actualization of various states of affairs.

Determination may be by God (as in theological determinism) or by the law-like mechanisms in the world (as in the universal law of causality)

epistemology: the study of human knowing

equivocal: the use of one term for more than one meaning

general revelation: the revelation of God that comes from observation of the world or of human existence

inductive argument: an argument which proceeds from true premises to a conclusion which is only probable

law of universal causality: the claim that all events stand in a very long series of causal relations

libertarian freedom: the belief that humans are significantly free in their actualization of various states of affairs

metaphysics: the study of that which is beyond the physical/natural world

mind/body problem: the attempt to make sense of the fact that humans exhibit physical characteristics (a body) and spiritual characteristics (mental, for example)

miracle: a notoriously difficult term to define, which we shall take to mean a violation of a known law of nature

modus ponens: one of the general arguments, of the form: 1) if p, then q. 2) p. 3) Therefore, q.

modus tollens: one of the general arguments, of the form: 1) if p, then q. 2) not q. 3) Therefore, not p.

natural theology: the study of God apart from special revelation (that is, primarily apart from Scripture)

necessary cause: some cause, C, the occurrence of which is necessary for the occurrence of some effect, E

ontological argument: an a priori argument for God's existence which is based upon the concept of the greatest possible being

ontology: the study of being in its most general terms

philosophy: technically, the love of wisdom. This implies that the main task of the philosopher's inquiry is to gain wisdom about some aspect of human existence

problem of evil: the atheist's strongest argument for their position. It arises from the seeming incongruity between the claims that God is perfectly good, all-knowing, all-powerful, and yet, evil exists

Reformed epistemology: the theory of knowing as espoused particularly by Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and Alston

religion: an exceedingly difficult term to define which includes both theistic and non-theistic belief sets, such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

special revelation: information about God which comes from God's special revelatory acts, generally taken to be primarily embodied in the Scriptures

sufficient cause: some cause, C, which, if it occurs, is sufficient to assure the occurrence of some effect, E

theodicy: explanations for the problem of evil intending to justify God's allowing evil occurrences

theory to the best explanation: an argument which attempts to provide the best explanation for a set of data

teleological argument: an a posteriori argument for God's existence which is based upon our experience of the orderliness of the world

univocal: the use of one term to convey only one meaning

#### **XIV. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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