

Howard University School of Divinity
Philosophy of Religion
Dr. Frederick L. Ware, Associate Professor of Theology
3 Credits

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the discipline and method of philosophy and the relationship of philosophy to the study of religion. Through a reading of classical and contemporary sources, the course examines definitions of religion and issues such as God's existence, attributes, and relationship to and action in the physical world, the nature and significance of religious experience and its potential as a medium for truth and knowledge, the problem of evil, humans as persons having minds and souls, life after death, the relation of religion to morality, and the relationship of religion to science.

Required Texts

There is no required text for the course. However, there are several required and recommended readings in the form of articles and excerpts from books. These readings and other learning materials listed in the syllabus are either located in the Reserve or Periodicals Section of the Howard Divinity Library or posted online at the HU blackboard website for this course.

Course Goals

The purposes of this course are:

1. To employ philosophy, its literature and methods, and science in the study of basic concepts and questions raised by religious beliefs.
2. To reflect critically on the ideas and arguments found in selected classical and contemporary writings in the philosophy of religion.
3. To contextualize the study of philosophy, using African American writings as an example of underrepresented intellectual perspectives that may be contrasted with and supplement the canon of literature that characterizes the philosophy of religion

Student Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

1. Know basic concepts, questions, and problems in the philosophy of religion (MA 2.1).
2. Read and assess philosophical writings with regard to both their liberative and oppressive aspects in light of African, African Diasporan, and African

- American religious history, intellectual perspectives, and church/ministry traditions (MDiv 2.0, 3.0).
3. Develop a thoughtful critical response to an issue or argument in the form of a researched and well written philosophical paper (MA 2.2, 3.4).

Teaching Methodology

While the instructor will present lectures, it is expected that students will take an active role in the class. Assigned readings and instructor's lectures and questions provide common points of reference for group discussion. We will learn and practice philosophy not only through our reading and writing exercises but also through our classroom conversations.

Course Requirements

Your academic performance in the course will be graded in the following areas:

1. **Class attendance and participation.**

You should be present, on-time, prepared, and fully attentive for each class session. So, please adjust your personal schedule so that you can be present and on-time for class as well as meet the announced deadlines for course assignments. Your full cooperation in maintaining the etiquette of the classroom is expected. Communication devices (i.e., cell phones, smartphones, pagers, Skype, etc.) should be turned off during class. You should not be making or receiving calls during the class. Use the break periods for taking and returning calls as well as for eating and drinking. If wireless internet is available, you should not use your computer, tablet, or smartphone to surf the internet, check email, or conduct other business. Any use of the internet should be restricted to and synchronous with the class discussion.

2. **Journal.**

For each class session, you will post to the Blackboard Discussion Forum your response to a question related to the topic for that class session. The instructor will formulate these questions which are designed to aid your integration and application of the reading materials and philosophical concepts into your social context, faith/ministry tradition, and intellectual perspective. Via email through blackboard, you will be notified of the question and the time period for you to make your posting. In every case, your posting should be done before the beginning of class. During the class, some of the postings will be reviewed and discussed in the class.

3. **Philosophical Paper.**

You will write a "philosophical" paper on a topic either covered in or related to the subject matter of this course. A philosophical paper is characterized mainly by a well-reasoned perspective achieved by critical analysis of the

issue and pertinent information and logical argument leading to a plausible conclusion.

Your philosophical paper should be in the range of about 12 to 15 pages, typed and double-spaced, not including your footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliography. To ensure that you receive sufficient guidance and feedback from the instructor, please submit a written proposal for your paper on or before **February 29**. The proposal should be 1 page, typed, single-spaced, consisting of 200 - 400 words, describing the topic of the paper, your interest in this topic, what you foresee as your paper's contribution towards a better understanding about this topic, and a list of sources (i.e., articles and/or books) that you will use for writing the paper. After comments and suggestions from the Instructor, you will be asked to submit a revised proposal along with an outline on **March 28**. The final draft of the paper is due on **May 2**. Prospective graduates are required to submit the final draft of their papers on April 25. The paper will be graded using the Writing Rubric of the Howard University School of Divinity. The Writing Rubric is published in the *Howard University School of Divinity Student Handbook*, which is posted at the divinity school's website. This document and a simplified version of the same are posted on the blackboard website for this course.

Submission of papers should be in hardcopy, that is, on 8 ½" x 11" white bond paper with Times New Roman 12 font printed in black ink. The pages should be numbered and adhere to 1 inch margins on top, bottom, and sides of each page. Papers will not be accepted via e-mail, fax or in any other electronic form unless the instructor gives you permission beforehand to do so. Moderately late papers will incur a reduction in grade. Excessively late papers will not be accepted.

Students are advised to communicate with the instructor about any unusual circumstances or physical challenges that may adversely affect their ability of meet any course requirement. *Students in need of accommodations due to disability should contact the Office of the Dean for Special Student Services for verification and determination of reasonable accommodations as soon as possible after admission to Howard University, or at the beginning of each semester.* The Office of Special Student Services is located at the Howard Center, 2225 Georgia Avenue N.W., Suite 725. The telephone number of the office is (202) 238-2420. The fax number is (202) 588-9755.

Course Requirements in Percentages

Journal (9 postings to Discussion Forums @ 5 % each)	45%
Class Attendance and Participation	15%
Proposal (5%) and Outline (5%) of Philosophical Paper	10%
Final draft of Philosophical Paper	30%

Grading Scale

A = 90 – 100, B = 80 – 89, C = 70 – 79, D = 60 – 69, Below 60 = F.

For consortium students, your final grade will be converted into your theological school's plus (+) and minus (-) system, if your school uses this type of grading system.

Writing Matters

Writing is an essential tool for thinking and communicating in every profession. Therefore, in this course it is expected that you produce writing that is not only thoughtful and accurate, but also organized, clear, and consistent with the rules of Standard American English. If your writing does not meet these standards, you may lose points or be asked to revise your written work. For assistance with your writing, you can schedule consultations with the instructor and utilize resources at the Writing Across the Curriculum program and the Center for Academic Reinforcement.

Course Calendar: *During the semester, check weekly for changes in the course calendar.*

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

January 11	Mapping Our Worldviews Sire, "Questions Every Worldview Must Answer."
January 15	Last day to drop without grade of "W," change from one section to another, change from credit to audit or audit to credit
January 18 classes)	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S BIRTHDAY observed (no

PHILOSOPHY AS PATHWAY TO KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

How do we know what we know and then discern that it is true?

January 25	I. Definition of philosophy of religion and its distinction from philosophical theology, systematic theology, and natural theology Reading: Wilkinson & Campbell, <u>Philosophy of Religion</u> , Chapter 2. II. Critical Thinking, Logic, and Argument in Philosophy
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Reading: Murphy, Reason and Rhetoric in Religion, Chapters 1-3.

Handout: "How to Write a Philosophical Paper" (See also Wilkinson & Campbell, Philosophy of Religion, Appendix, pp. 382-385.)

THE NATURE OF REALITY AND ITS EXPLANATION

Is there a single, comprehensive, and ultimate explanation of everything?

February 1 The Distinction between Appearance and Reality and the Quest for Ultimate Explanation of Everything

Readings: Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave," in The Republic (Book 7); Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, Chapter 1.

Reading & Handout: "Greek Philosophers in Search of the Arche"

Video Recording: "The Elegant Universe, Part 1; Einstein's Dream: A Theory of Everything" (NOVA).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9quWzjtgc>

RELIGION

What is religion?

February 8 Defining Religion

Reading: Hurston, "Religion;" Pinn, What is African American Religion, Chapters 4-5; Peterson, "Religion as Orienting Worldview."

February 15 PRESIDENTS' DAY observed (no classes)

February 22 The Relation of Religion to Philosophy and Science

Reading: Barbour, Religion and Science, Chapter 4; Ware, African American Theology, Chapter 12.

GOD

Does God exist and act within our world?

February 29 Cosmology, Creation, and Divine Action

Reading: Hawking, A Brief History of Time, Chapter 8; Coleman, Making a Way out of No Way, Chapter 2; Wilkinson & Campbell, Philosophy of Religion, Chapter 29; Johnson, God's Trombones (The Creation).

Due today (February 29) is your paper proposal which should be 1 page, single-spaced, 200-400 words, describing the topic of the paper, your interest in this topic, what you foresee as your paper's contribution towards a better understanding about this topic, and a list of sources (i.e., articles and/or books) that you will use for writing the paper.

March 7 God's Existence and Attributes

Reading: Wilkinson & Campbell, Philosophy of Religion, Chapters 10-14; Mays, The Negro's God, pp. 218-255.

Video Recording: Pinn, "Writing God's Obituary"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhvHouuqcmk>

March 14 SPRING BREAK (no classes)

BODY, SOUL, AND THE AFTERLIFE

Are we our bodies only or are we something more?

Is it possible or desirable (or morally permissible) to alter or transcend bodily and mental capacities?

March 21 Body, Soul, and Life after Death

Reading: Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditations 1 & 2; Earl, Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs, Chapter 1; Johnson, God's Trombones (Go Down Death— A Funeral Sermon); Ishii, "Germline Genome-Editing Research and Its Socio-ethical Implications."

March 28 **Genomic Science for Seminarians**

Guest Lecturer: Dr. Georgia Dunston

Due on today (March 28) is your revised paper proposal along with a rough outline of your paper.

April 1 Last day to withdraw from a course or for total withdrawal from the University

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND EXPERIENCE

Does religious experience convey reliable knowledge and verifiable belief?

April 4 Religious Experience and Divine Revelation

Reading: Wilkinson & Campbell, Philosophy of Religion, Chapter 27; Sernett, African American Religious History, documents 3, 8 & 16; Allen, African American Humanism, document 9;

Religious Language and Speaking Truthfully

Reading: Wilkinson & Campbell, Philosophy of Religion, Chapters 21-24; Cone, God of the Oppressed, pp. 191-194.

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Why does a perfectly good God create a world with evil and suffering?

April 11 **Suffering, Evil, and Evolution**

Guest Lecturer: Dr. Daryl Domning

Readings: Domning, "Evolution, Evil, and Original Sin;" Ware, African American Theology, Chapter 8.

MORALITY

What is morality and its relationship to religion?

April 18 The Nature of Morality and Its Relationship to Religion

Reading: Plato, Euthyphro; Wilkinson & Campbell, Philosophy of Religion, Chapter 30.

Video Recording: de Waal, "Morality without Religion"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le-74R9C6Bc>

April 25 STUDY DAY (no classes)

Deadline (of April 25) for Final Paper for Prospective Graduates

May 2
Students

Due today (May 2) is the Final Paper for Continuing

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