



Readings and Assignments: Weeks One to Four

If you miss a class, check here for assignments or handouts.

If you have questions about an assignment after class has adjourned, I prefer that you ask through the *Course Website* Bulletin Board so that all can benefit.

If I make a special arrangement with you for due dates, etc., explain it in a note or e-mail message and ask me to sign or confirm it; show it to me to remind me of our arrangement.

 indicates a handout in class.  indicates material from *Philosophy 240 Coursepack*.

[Titles with a dotted underline](#) are also available at *Course Website*.

"Rowe" refers to the text for the course.

Contents

In deference to our leaf-bearing friends, *Readings and Assignments* is handed out in instalments in case there are revisions as we go along, as there often are.

However, *Readings and Assignments* for the whole course can be viewed at the *Course Website*—just treat it as open to revision. Major due dates are listed below.

What is religion? What are crucial concepts in religion?

The textbook in this course focuses almost exclusively on the Western, monotheistic religious tradition. We will begin with you looking at several religions, including some outside the Western, monotheistic tradition, in order to develop our concept of religion and of concepts in religion.

[1. Friday, September 8](#)

[2. Friday, September 15](#)

[3. Friday, September 22](#)

[4. Friday, September 29](#)

What evidence supports various religious beliefs? What evidence opposes them?

We will use your expertise in various religions as we examine philosophical arguments for and against various religious hypotheses.

[5. Friday, October 6:](#)

[6. Friday, October 13:](#) **DUE: Draft of *First Essay***

[7. Friday, October 20:](#) **DUE: Seminars, *First Essay***

[8. Friday, October 27:](#) **DUE: Seminars, *First Essay***

[9. Friday, November 3](#)

Which religious beliefs are justified?

The course culminates in your explaining how **you** reconcile your religious beliefs (or lack of them) with your reason and philosophy.

[10. Friday, November 10](#)

[11. Friday, November 17:](#) **DUE: *Second Essay***

[12. Friday, November 24](#)

[13. Friday, December 1](#)

December 11: DUE *Third Essay*

1. Friday, September 8

📖 *Introductory Questions*

📖 *Brief Course Description*

📖 *Readings and Assignments: Weeks One to Four* (this handout)

Philosophy and Religion

Co-op work on Nature of Religion

Assignment for next session

Pick up 📖 *Readings on religions* from Faculty Assistant at your Home Campus.

Course Website: I will compile your co-op work on the nature of religion, post it on the *Course Website* and hand it out at the next session..

REVIEW and note any questions you have about:

📖 *Course Description,*

📖 Douglas Todd, “Keeping an open mind can help the spirit move us.”

📖 *Writing without Gender Bias,*

📖 *Methods of Inquiry,*

📖 *Essay Assignment,*

📖 *Seminars on Religious Hypothesis,*

📖 *Course Website.*

READ Rowe, pp. 1-3 and 📖 Plato’s *Republic*, excerpt on The Cave for explanation of the nature of philosophy and how it is related to religion.

READ 📖 Borges, “The Other Death.” Consider whether this story could be true: Is it internally coherent? Testable, *i.e.*, not vacuous?

DUE NEXT SESSION

Religious concepts and your assigned religions: Individual Prep Questions

You are the expert on your assigned religion.

We begin the course by becoming acquainted with a variety of religions.

You will have a reading on one of the religions you indicated on *Introductory Questions* that you would like to learn more about. I have selected these readings because they provide not only explanations of a religion’s belief structure but also of its history and interrelationships with other social, personal, and metaphysical elements.

Several students are assigned to each religion as our class experts to help us see how concepts and issues apply to various religions. (I am no expert on particular religions. My expertise is in philosophy.) You are responsible for replying to questions in class or on-line about your religion and its philosophical concepts and issues. If you do not know the answer to a question, then you will need to research and think about the answer. (Within reason. You will **not** be turned into research gophers on obscure questions.)

You may switch religions with another student only with my permission.

Assignment continued on next page...

On your reading about your assigned religion, there is a number in the upper right hand corner referring to one of the questions below to answer about your assigned religion.

Answer your question in no more than about 250 words.

Cite page numbers from your reading (or from other sources) that support your answers.

1. **Explain** what your assigned religion believes in as the ultimate reality, *e.g.*, some other-worldly entities, some non-human worldly entities, some human aspects such as the soul, or...
2. **Explain** according to your assigned religion, what difference it makes how humans interact with this ultimate reality, *e.g.*, does it matter to the worldly life of individuals or of social groups, or to what happens to individuals when they die, or to...? Does it matter differently to men and to women, to clergy and to laity, to upper and to lower social classes...?
3. **Explain** why your assigned religion believes in this ultimate reality, *e.g.*, as a matter of faith, on the basis of reasonable evidence, on the word of an authority such as a prophet, from each person's first-hand experience, or... Do the reasons differ for men and for women, for clergy and for laity, for upper and for lower social classes...?
4. **Explain** whether your assigned religion views interrelationships between the basic elements of the world (and of the other-worldly) as fundamentally harmonious, as full of conflict, as indifferent to each other, or as...

Many of these questions and concepts are quite difficult, so do not expect to be able to give complete and definitive answers at this point.

You may need to clarify some key concepts in the question or your answers, *e.g.*, "ultimate reality," "faith," "harmonious." See *Methods of Inquiry*, section C for help giving definitions and for using model, contrary, and borderline examples.

2. Friday, September 15

Questions about *Course Description, Methods of Inquiry, Writing without Gender Bias, Essay Assignment, Seminars on Religious Hypothesis, Course Website?*

Questions about Rowe and Todd: Religion and Philosophy?

Results of Nature of Religion co-op work.

Co-op work on religious concepts.

DUE: *Religious concepts and your assigned religions: IPQs*

Introduction: Religion and Reason

Assignment

Course Website: You may want to use the Bulletin Board to carry on discussion from class, *e.g.*, about the definition of religion and whether your religion really is a religion, or about the role of reason in religion.

READ Rowe, Chapter 6.

Assignment continued on next page...

DUE NEXT SESSION**William James, “The Will to Believe”: Individual Prep Questions:**

Using this hypothesis, answer the following questions in no more than about 500 words:

Hypothesis: A devastatingly large meteor will strike the earth by the year 2050.

- 1. Explain** whether you think this hypothesis is *intellectually undecidable* at present.

Avoid making an **Argument from Ignorance**, *i.e.*, concluding that a claim is false because it has not been proved true, or argues that a claim is true because it has not been proved false:

Certainly God exists since no one has ever proved there is no God.

Certainly there is no god since no one has ever proved there is.

However, as Clifford and James agree, this fallacy has **not** been committed by someone who refuses to believe a claim until good evidence has been presented in favour of it:

No, I don't believe there's a god. There may be, but I've never seen any convincing evidence that there is.

- 2. Explain** whether this claim is a *living* hypothesis for you.
Consider: if an hypothesis is not living for you, then would you care whether there was evidence for it?
- 3. Explain** whether this hypothesis is *momentous* for you:
Will you have another chance to decide whether to believe it?
Can your choice to believe it or not be easily reversed?
Does anything of importance hang on your choice?
- 4. Explain** whether your choice to believe this hypothesis is *forced*.

DUE NEXT SESSION**Attributes of God: Individual Prep Questions**

READ Rowe, Chapter 1.

Before we consider evidence for and against the existence of god, we should consider the nature of god. (In some Western monotheistic religions, “God” is the proper name of the deity. So, I will usually use "god" as a more inclusive reference, *e.g.*, including Allah, and will try to use "God" when referring only to the Christian deity.)

- 1. Explain** whether the god(s) of your assigned religion has the attributes of a *theistic* god (as Rowe explains them on pp. 14-15, using a narrow sense of “theism”): omnipotence, perfect goodness, self-existence, separateness and independence from the world, being eternal? (1 pt)

Assignment continued on next page...

2. **Explain** why your assigned religion (Buddhism, etc.) is best classified as polytheistic, henotheistic, or monotheistic; as pantheistic, panentheistic, transcendent or some other category? (1 pt)
Rowe explains polytheism, henotheism, monotheism (pp. 4-5, 14-15), and pantheism (p. 12).
He does not distinguish pantheism (God is identical with everything, i.e., God is completely **immanent**, completely in the world) from panentheism (the world is part of god, but God includes more than just the world, i.e., God is both **immanent** and **transcendent**, both in and outside of the world).
Do not expect to master immediately all these concepts, but they are important to various religions' concepts of god(s). In addition, if a problem arises for one concept of god, they provide ways to revise your concept of god in order to avoid the problem.
3. **Explain** why the god(s) of your assigned religion needs the attributes it has: what does the god(s) accomplish so that it must have these attributes?
For example, what does Christianity's God do so that it **must** be a **personal** god in order to accomplish those tasks? (2 pts)

3. Friday, September 22

Finish: Nature of Religion

Religion and Reason

DUE: *William James, "The Will to Believe": IPQs*

Attributes of god

DUE: *Attributes of God IPQs*

Assignment

DUE NEXT SESSION

Cosmological Argument: Individual Prep Questions

READ Rowe, Chapter 2.

Answer the following question in no more than about 100 words each.

1. **Explain** the Principle of Sufficient Reason (19-20), providing an **example** of its use in everyday life.
2. **Explain** how the cosmological argument rests, finally, on whether the Principle of Sufficient Reason is true (19-20).
3. **Explain** whether you believe the Principle of Sufficient Reason is sufficiently well-justified that we ought to assume its truth (and hence accept the cosmological argument) (26-8)?
4. Since the cosmological argument is flawed according to Rowe, he does not consider whether a self-existent being (that the argument claims to prove the existence of) must have the other attributes of a theistic god (28). Can you think of any good reasons why this self-existent being must have any of these attributes?

Assignment continued on next page...

DUE NEXT SESSION**Seminars on Religious Hypothesis**

See 📖 *Seminars on Religious Hypothesis*: hand in to me a paper with your name on it listing the topics in your order of preference.

See 📖 *Essay Assignment*: Questions about *First Essay* assignment?

4. Friday, September 29

Finish Religion and Reason

Finish Attributes of god

Questions about *First Essay* assignment?

Cosmological argument

DUE: *Cosmological Argument IPQs*

DUE: Hand in preferences for topics for *Seminars on Religious Hypothesis*.

Assignment**DUE NEXT SESSION****Teleological argument: Individual Prep Questions**

READ Rowe, Chapter 4

Answer the following question in no more than about 100 words each.

1. **Explain** what a teleological system (47) is using model cases not from the text of something that is a teleological system and contrary cases of something that is not a teleological system.
(See *Methods of Inquiry*, page 11, for an explanation of model and contrary cases.)
2. Rowe says that it begs the question to assume that the universe is a teleological system (48). What **reasons** does Rowe give for saying this? (See *Methods of Inquiry*, page 15, for an explanation of begging the question.)
3. Rowe says that even if the teleological argument succeeds, it needs to be supplemented by other arguments, e.g., the cosmological argument, for the existence of a god (52-53). Explain how the cosmological and teleological arguments are supposed to work together as evidence for the existence of a monotheistic god?
4. **Explain** whether **you** think the teleological argument provides **any** evidence for the existence of a god?

PREPARE FOR NEXT SESSION (but not to turn in):

1. Suppose that the universe is like a watch and hence requires a designer. Using that analogy, **explain what else** we could then conclude about the nature of the universe and its designer.
2. Consider the arguments in 📖 *Co-op Work: Proofs for God's Existence*: be prepared to explain why do or do not find any of them convincing.

Assignment continued on next page...

PREPARE FOR NEXT SESSION: Seminar Assignments

I will post Seminar assignments on the *Course Website* Bulletin Board.

If you do not have access to the *Course Website*, send me an e-mail message asking for your Seminar assignment, to which I will REPLY.

If all else fails, phone me on Monday!

READ the appropriate chapter in Rowe for your seminar issue.

DUE SESSION 6

Bring two copies of your draft of *First Essay*, parts 1 & 2 for peer review.

In working on the draft of your *First Essay*, you might find the Bulletin Board useful for discussing, *e.g.*, the advantages and disadvantages of various attributes of god or of the cosmological or teleological arguments.

5. Friday, October 6

Finish Cosmological argument.

Teleological argument

DUE: *Teleological Argument IPQs*

Seminar groups meet to assign roles.