

**DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE, THE PROBLEM OF EVIL, AND EVERLASTING LIFE:
CONFRONTING THE ISSUES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF WESTERN RELIGION**

PHIL 3500 · Spring 2007 · 1130 to 1245 · Social Science Building Room 233

Instructor: Joe Ulatowski
Email: joeulatowski@weber.edu
Office Phone: (801) 626-6642
Office Hours: TBA

Course Description: There is something about human nature that triggers our interest in questions about the meaning of life, immortality, the existence of a non-corporeal soul, and the existence of divine entities, e.g., God(s), angels, and saints. We are compelled to ask, “is there life after death?” “is there a God or Gods?” and “if there is a God or Gods and that God is omni-benevolent, then why is there so much evil in the world?”

The aim of this course is to introduce you to some of the major philosophical problems in Western religion. The course will consist in four parts. First, we will examine the divine attributes of God, i.e., the nature of God, and a puzzle that arises from one of the traditional attributes: God’s omnipotence. Then, we will survey the arguments for the existence of God. Our survey will include the ontological, teleological, and cosmological arguments for God’s existence. (If there is time and interest, then we will also cover non-evidentialist accounts of God’s existence.) Third, we will review the problem of evil. Basically: why do pain, suffering, injustice, deformity, and catastrophe occur if God is omni-benevolent, omniscient, omnipotent, and omni-present? Finally, we will close the semester by discussing human destiny. Is life after death possible?

Check the course webpage frequently for information about this course: <http://faculty.weber.edu/joeulatowski/pwr.htm>

Required Text: Ulatowski, Joe. 2007. *Divine Transcendence, the Problem of Evil and Life Everlasting*. McGraw-Hill/Primis Course Reader.

Suggested Text: Vaughn, Lewis. 2006. *Writing Philosophy: A Student’s Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.

More suggested texts citations are available on the course website.

Requirements:

Actually doing philosophy involves class discussion, in which students dialogue back and forth with the instructor and with each other. This class will be a seminar style course that places a premium on class discussion. Since this is the case, attendance is vital for success in the course.

Participation (15%). You should come to class prepared to talk about the article(s) you have read for that day. By raising a question, a comment, or criticism of the reading, you earn participation points. The participation grade will be based on the extent to which you participate in discussion and the quality of your comments.

Presentation (15%). You will be expected to present one/two articles to the class. A presentation consists in outlining at least the main argument of the reading. You may also include some of the auxiliary arguments if they are important components of the main argument of the paper. An exceptional presentation will include a few criticisms of the main argument. You need to demonstrate that you have command of the argument. If you are too confused by the argument, then summarize what you think the main argument of the reading is and present a few questions. (It is a requirement that students meet with me at least one week prior to their in-class presentation. Come to the meeting prepared to discuss the material in the assigned readings for your presentation.)

Bloggng (15%). You will be expected to contribute to a class weblog. Weblogs are ubiquitous creatures of the internet-age. Each of you will be expected to contribute a major blog posting over the course of the semester. (In reality, you will probably publish more than one major blog posting.) When a student posts a major blog contribution, the other members of the class should comment on it. A comment should be a critical analysis of the posting. One may point out the positive attributes of the post, but this should be kept to a minimum. Use the blog to exercise your thoughts about the topics we cover in class.

Here are some logistics about the blog component of the course. I will write the first few blog posts. You will post comments on my post. All of your comments will be critical of my position. No positive feedback is allowed. Once I feel you have a grip on the assignment, I will assign students to publish their own major posts. And dialogue will continue spontaneously.

Finally, I may invite guest bloggers to publish their own thoughts on some topic. These guest bloggers will be experts in the philosophy of religion. You should be cautious when you criticize these blogger's posts because they are experts in the field, but there is no reason to be overly timid.

Mini-paper (15%). You will be responsible for completing one mini-paper of no more than 5 pages (strict limit). The paper is due February 2, 2007. You will submit the paper to me or you will place a copy of the paper in my box by 5:00pm on the date they are due. Two weeks prior to the due date, I will prepare a few questions for you to use as a guide for writing the paper. If you want to create your own topic to write about, then please make an appointment with me to discuss it before you complete the paper.

Final Paper (40%). The non-philosophy major student will be required to complete one 10-12 page paper, and students majoring in philosophy will be required to complete one 15-20 page paper. The final paper is due in my mailbox no later than 5:00 pm on May 4, 2007. More information, i.e., suggested topics, will be distributed sometime toward the middle of the semester. The student must submit a brief prospectus of the paper by March 9, 2007.

Failure to complete any of these requirements will severely effect your grade.

Policies:

Cheating. Cheating on any course requirement shall not be tolerated. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying from one's own clandestine notes, from someone else's paper, or quoting or paraphrasing an author without crediting the source (plagiarism). If the student is caught cheating, then s/he will receive a 0 on the work and will be subject to disciplinary action.

Students with Disabilities Act. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, cognitive, systemic, learning, and psychiatric impairments. Please contact the instructor at the beginning of the course to discuss any such accommodations that you may require for this course. For more information, the student should contact the Center for Disability Services.

Notice. The student is advised. All material contained herein, including course design, content, lectures, correspondence, Internet content, and written material, is the intellectual property of the instructor. In addition, the instructor reserves the right to change, revise, or alter any portion of this syllabus at any time, at his sole discretion, for any reason, without further notification to the student. This syllabus is in accordance with the Weber State University Catalog.

Grading:

There are no averages in this class, so put your calculators away. Grades will be determined according to a linear point scale. The more points you accumulate the higher your grade. In-class participation is worth a total of 100 points, each presentation is worth 50 points (100 total points available), blogging is worth 100 points, the mini paper is worth 100 points, and the final paper is worth a total of 250 points. The total number of points available equals 650.

The grading scale is as follows: 585 for an A-, 520 for a B-, 455 for a C-, 390 for a D-. Anyone who fails to earn 390 points fails the class.

**Course
Schedule &
Assignments:**

The course schedule is available online at the class website. Since this is an advanced philosophy class that emphasizes discussion in the classroom (and outside the classroom) the schedule may change frequently. The class website and blog will be the primary forms of communication with the student, and the student should check these website regularly.