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# PH 501 Philosophy of Religion

Joseph B. Onyango Okello

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**PH 501: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion**  
**ExL Course**  
**Spring 2005**  
**Instructor: Joseph B. O. Okello**

**Introductory Remarks**

Greetings! I consider it a great honor and privilege to know that you will be taking this course. Think of it as a philosophical journey in which you will have an opportunity to explore some fundamental issues in the area of Philosophy of Religion, and think of me as your “tour guide” in this journey.

We will focus, *specifically* on the Philosophy of Christian Religion rather than the Philosophy of Religions in general. Some of the issues we will explore from a philosophical stand-point include: different views (theological) of human freedom, the problem of evil, arguments for the existence of God, the relationship between faith and reason, the justification of religious beliefs, and so on. Of course we will go beyond this list, but for the sake of whetting your appetite, I thought of listing some of these here.

As you might have guessed by now, the electronic method of learning can be quite depersonalized. This need not be the case in this course. It would be a good idea for us to get to know each other through some specified frameworks. For instance, take some time to fill out your resume in FirstClass. You will also find my resume there. In this way, we can gain better knowledge of each other, and hopefully, form a community of believers desiring to love God with all our minds.

Meanwhile, let me tell you something about me. I am a Kenyan by nationality, and a PhD student at the University of Kentucky, majoring in philosophy. I am almost done with my course-work, and at the very initial stage of putting my dissertation committee together. Doing philosophy has always been my passion right from my undergraduate days. And since I come from a continent that knows, in a very real way, the nature of tragedy, I am particularly interested in the problem of evil, and how it can best be addressed in an African setting. I am also a licensed pastor with Africa Inland Church, Nairobi, Kenya. Upon completion of my studies, I intend to return to my home-country to “contend for the faith” from that region.

It is from this perspective that I come to you as your guide in this course. I hope the course will provide some life-changing experience for you, as you seek to be better equipped for God’s work of service.

**Course Description**

Our philosophical journey will comprise a survey of the philosophical method; a study of the mutual impact of the Christian faith and philosophical discourse upon each other; a reflection upon the overlap between Christian and philosophical ethics; and a critical

assessment of the relationship between the Christian understanding of reality and other ways of perceiving it.

## **General Learning Objectives**

What we are aiming at here is not only a firm establishment in the philosophy of our theology, but also a clear articulation of the reasons for the hope that we have in us. But most importantly, we aim at developing a deeper and personal relationship with God through the act of loving Him with all our minds. Needless to say, we will find ourselves entering the arena of Christian Apologetics. In fact, “Philosophy of Christian Religion” and “Christian Apologetics” are quite similar in many ways. It is my hope, therefore, that whether we are doing Philosophy of Religion as defined above, or Christian Apologetics, we will be firmly established in our faith as we allow the Cross of our Risen Lord to be seen clearly.

## **Specific Course Objectives**

It is my hope that by the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Explain the different accounts of human freedom found within the Christian tradition.
2. Explain your understanding of the attributes of God, and their implications for your life.
3. Articulate the different traditional arguments for the existence of God.
4. Provide your understanding of the relationship between reason and the Christian faith.
5. Provide an epistemological justification for holding religious beliefs.
6. Provide arguments for and against examined religious experiences, and give a philosophical justification for the Christian vantage point.
7. Explain what miracles are in light of the agnostic’s rejection of miracles, and providing a rational justification for the Christian position.
8. Explain the key issues surrounding the problem of evil, namely, “If God is good, loving and just, why does he allow evil.”
9. Argue for or against the answer to the following question: “Is there a relationship between science and religion.”
10. Explain how finite human language can be used in describing an infinite God.
11. Explain the mind-body problem, and how this problem bears on personal identity, as well as the question of eschatology.
12. Articulate a Theological-cum-Philosophical account of the exclusive claims of Christianity in light of those who have never heard the Gospel.

## **Required Course Texts**

1. Hasker, William. *Metaphysics*. (Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983).
2. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Reason and Religious Belief*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
3. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

These books can be ordered from Asbury's Bookstore. The toll-free telephone number is 1-866-855-8252. The email address is [exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu)

**Recommended Text: Do your best to own a Dictionary of Philosophy of some Kind. Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries are probably the better ones, since they are readily available and at reasonable prices.**

## **Course Schedule**

This course will have seven modules, and each module has two lessons, and each lesson has one assignment. The due dates for the required readings are also given. Also, I will post complete module assignments in the course center at least two weeks prior to assignment due dates. These assignments will involve study questions to guide you through the reading, and enable you to flesh out the claims of the different authors.

### **MODULE 01 to be completed by February 18 2005**

**Lesson 01:** Introducing Philosophy of Religion

*Reading: Hasker p. 13 – 28; Reason and Religious Belief, p. 5 – 14*

**Complete the reading for lesson 01 by February 11 2005.**

**Lesson 02:** Freedom and Responsibility

*Reading: Hasker p. 29 – 55*

**Complete the reading for lesson 02 by February 18**

### **MODULE 02 Due March 4 2005**

**Lesson 03 –** God's Attributes

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 58 – 76; Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings p. 124 – 129, 139 – 148*

**Complete the reading for lesson 03 by February 25 2005**

**Lesson 04:** Arguments for the Existence of God

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 77 – 106; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 165 – 169, 170 – 218, 241–246).*

**Complete the reading for lesson 04 by March 4 2005**

### **MODULE 03 Due March 18 2005**

**Lesson 05:** Faith and Reason.

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 39 – 57; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 67 – 70, 77 – 108)*

**Complete the reading for lesson 05 by March 11 2005**

**Lesson 06:** Justification for Religious Belief

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 107 – 127. Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 355 – 365)*

**Complete the reading for lesson 06 by March 18 2005**

**1<sup>st</sup> PAPER DUE March 18 2005:**

**Assigned Paper topic:**

You may write your assignment on *one and only one* of the following topics:

1. Is it rational to believe in the existence of God? Answer this question in light of the arguments for God's existence presented by at least one of the authors you read.
2. What is the relationship between faith and reason? Do they undermine each other? Or do they complement each other? In light of the assigned readings, state and justify your opinion.
3. Identify and critique the account of freedom implicit in the Westminster Confession of Faith. State whether or not you think it is an appropriate system of philosophy.

**SPRING READING WEEK: MARCH 21 – 27 2005: No Assignments Due**

**MODULE 04 Due April 8 2005**

**Lesson 07:** Religious experience.

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief, p. 15 – 38, Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 5 – 55)*

**Complete the reading for lesson 07 by April 1 2005**

**Lesson 08:** Miracles

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief, p. 173 – 193; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 415 – 444)*

**Complete the reading for lesson 08 by April 8 2005**

**MODULE 05 Due April 22 2005**

**Lesson 09:** The Problem of Evil

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 128 – 153; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (249-314)*

**Complete the reading for lesson 09 by April 15 2005**

**Lesson 10:** Science and Religion

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 246 – 266; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 497 – 530).*

**Complete the reading for lesson 10 by April 22 2005**

**2<sup>nd</sup> PAPER DUE April 22 2005:**

**Assigned Paper Topics:**

Choose *one and only one* of the following topics.

1. Compare two opposing views on Miracles (Hume's *and* Swinburne's, or Mackie's *and* Swinburne's). State your view, in light of the reading, and give reasons for your position.
2. Formulate a philosophical critique of Michael Martin's "Critique of Religious Experience."

3. State the problem of evil as forcefully as you can, and then respond to it. (Hint: The readings will be of help here.)
4. Is there a relationship between science and religion? Answer this question in light of Nancy Murphy's "Theology and Scientific Methodology."

### **MODULE 06 Due May 6 2005**

#### **Lesson 11: Religious Language**

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief p. 220 – 245; Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 369 – 413)*

**Complete the readings for lesson 11 by April 29 2005**

#### **Lesson 12: Mind-Body Issues**

*Reading: Hasker p. 57 – 80; Reason and Religious Belief (p. 194 – 219); Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (445 – 488).*

**Complete the readings for lesson 12 by May 6 2005**

### **MODULE 07 Due May 20 2005**

#### **Lesson 13: Religious Diversity**

*Reading: Reason and Religious Belief (p.267 – 288); Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 539 – 570)*

**Complete the readings for lesson 13 by May 14 2004**

#### **Lesson 14: Philosophy and Theological Doctrines**

*Reading: Philosophy of Religion: Sel. Rdgs (p. 597 – 630)*

**Complete the Readings for lesson 14 by May 20 2005**

### **3<sup>rd</sup> PAPER DUE May 20 2005:**

#### **Assigned Paper topics:**

You may choose *one and only one* of the of the following assignments:

1. Select two opposing world-views in at least one of the lessons from Module 06 and Module 07. Using your own words, Identify what, in your opinion, is the central claim made by each author. Also, show how both support their claim (in other words, what reason do they give to support their claim?). Evaluate their positions, and formulate your own.
2. Does Philosophy support or undermine theological doctrines? Present your view, in light of the assigned readings

For the anthology (*Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*), the editors usually provide helpful introductory remarks that would assist you in knowing the main point of each article.

## **Means of Communication**

### **General Discussion Center**

The entire class has access to this center. It is a center for you to send particular questions that, in your opinion, require my specific response. This includes general questions about

assignments, readings and so on. **Also, your response(s) to the questions for each lesson should be sent to this center.** I will read all the responses posted to this center. I will also do my best to interact with your answers to the questions you raise in these sections.

During each lesson, I will provide a structural outline of the readings that we will encounter. By structural outline, I mean something like the contents-page usually found at the beginning of a book. This should give you an idea of how each author develops a specific argument. In addition to this outline, I will provide you with information equivalent to a class-lecture for your personal notes and philosophical enrichment. This will not be the case for every lesson. However, **at the end of every lecture or reading outline, be sure to look out for the reading questions that will guide you in your reading assignments for each lesson.**

Meanwhile, please feel free to send your concerns and prayer requests here at the General Discussion Center. But this will be available only to your classmates. However, if you wish to have the entire Asbury Community pray for your specific need, then you might want to consider sending the requests to Asbury's general "**Prayer News**" folder.

#### Archive Center

The discussion summaries will stay in the General Discussion center for about 10 days. After this period, I will move them to the Archive center. Happily, you will be able to read any of the material in the Archive Center at any time during the semester. However, you will not be able to send any messages there.

#### My Office

If you have personal messages for me, then send them to "my office" by simply clicking on the "office" icon. Note that this is a Private forum. This means that I will be the only one capable of seeing the sent personal messages. Also, my replies to these messages will go to your private mailbox. The personal messages include your specific personal concerns about the assignments, inability to submit a given assignment on time, and so on. **Also, you will submit the assigned papers through "my office" as an attachment.** I am sure most of you know how to do this. But for those who do not know, here is the process: Go to your inbox, and type my email address and then click on the "attachment" link. You will be prompted to provide the file name of your saved document. Once you have typed in the file name, click "OK" or hit "enter" on your keyboard. Then click the "send" button.

#### Telephone Number

My telephone number is 858-859-9183.

#### Chat Room

The chat room is probably the cheapest way to get in touch with me. Simply send me an email so we can plan for a chat. Also, let me encourage you to invite any of your PH 501xl classmates for a chat, if both of you happen to be online at the same time. Remember, though, that chat room messages are not retained. An end of your chat means

a termination of the messages, unless, of course, you highlight the message and paste it onto another file.

## Course Requirements

1. You will be expected to read the material assigned for each of the fourteen lessons. Quite a number of the readings are difficult to understand, and may require a “re-read” before you grasp the main thread of argument. It happens to me all the time!
2. No more than four questions will be provided for each reading assignment. You will then send your answers to the General discussion center. In 1 and 2, you will get credit for participation, irrespective of whether your answers were right or wrong. And if you have a challenging question for your classmates, please feel free to ask. Additionally, be free to answer one or more of the questions your classmates might have.
3. Three papers have been assigned, and all three will be graded. Each paper is to have no more than 1200 words (i.e. about five pages of regular font). In grading your paper, I will expect you to do the following:
  - When presenting another author’s view, identify the main claim of the author’s argument, and the reason the author gives to support that position.
  - When presenting your own view on a specific topic, state your position clearly, and support your position with equal clarity.
  - Be sure to hand your paper on time. An “A” quality paper submitted a day late will, at most, receive a B+ grade. Penalties will be waived only under extenuating circumstances (like, sickness, death, etc).

## Grading Procedure

1. Participation in team discussion: 10%
2. Paper 1: 30 %. Due March 18 2005 anytime before Midnight!
3. Paper 2: 30 %. April 22 2005 anytime before Midnight!
4. Paper 3: 30 %. Due May 20 2005 anytime before Midnight!

I sincerely hope you will enjoy this philosophical journey. *Bon Voyage!!!*

## Available ExL Support

### I. ExL Contact Information:

1. For **general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program**, contact Dale Hale:
  - a. [ExL\\_Office@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu)
  - b. Phone: (859) 858-2393
2. For **technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media** contact Information Commons:
  - a. [Info\\_Commons@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu)
  - b. Phone: (859) 858-2233



c. Toll-free:(866) 454-2733

## II. Accessing Information Commons Materials:

### 1. General Questions:

- a. § The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs.
- b. The Information Commons hours are posted here:  
<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/hours.shtml>.

### 2. Materials Requests:

- a. § To search the library catalog for available materials, click here: <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml>
- b. § ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library.
- c. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.
- d. § ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

### 3. Research Questions: § ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including:

- a. Help choosing a paper topic,
- b. Determining the best sources to use for a paper,
- c. Finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

### 4. Online Databases:

- a. § To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml>
- b. Second, enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box.
- c. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage.
- d. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).