

**PI 306: Philosophy of Religion**

Course Syllabus and Calendar

**Section Information**

Section 01

Course Delivery Mode Face-to-Face

Location: HSS 306

**Instructor Information**

Dr. Brett A. Fulkerson-Smith

HSS 120-F

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Office Phone Number: (671) 735-2815

Office Hours: Mondays: 9-11am

Tuesdays &amp; Thursdays: 12:30-2:30pm

Students have the option of reserving an office visit here:



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**COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION**

This course acquaints the student to topics central to the philosophy of religion. This may include issues such as the evidentialist and anti-evidentialist attempts to support or discredit the religious hypothesis; proofs of God's existence; the interrelationship between reason, faith, revelation, and science; God's attributes; the problem of evil; the nature of mysticism and religious experience; reactions to theism; and more.

**COURSE CONTENT**

This course philosophically explores the demonology of various religious traditions. We will begin by addressing and attempting to overcome skeptical objections to belief in demons, considering the implications for our study. We will then proceed with a historical overview of demonology, beginning with a consideration of demons in Judaism, followed by Buddhist perspectives on demons, and a study of ancient Greek pagan beliefs. The course will then linger on Christian demonology, followed by an exploration of demons in Islam. The final part of the course will examine the future of demonology, discussing whether a return to mysticism or the re-enchantment of the world is necessary. We will also explore the contributions of indigenous cultures to modern demonological thought.

## **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ALIGNMENT MATRIX**

<b>Course Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)</b>	<b>Program (PLO)</b>	<b>Institutional (ILO)</b>
Justify positions on problems in the philosophy of religion with reasoned argument in a rigorous way	(A) Justify positions with reasoned argument in a rigorous way	Mastery of critical thinking and problem solving
Express themselves orally and in writing precisely and clearly on problems in the philosophy of religion	(B) Express themselves orally and in writing precisely and clearly	Effective oral and written communication
Understand and engage with perspectives on issues relating to the philosophy of religion different to their own	(C) Understand and engage with perspectives different to their own	Understanding and appreciation of culturally diverse people, ideas, and values in a democratic context
Responsible use of knowledge, natural resources, and technology	(D) Analyze real-world problems using philosophical tools	Analyze real-world problems using the tools of the philosophy of religion
Practice philosophical virtues while discussing the philosophy of religion	(F) Practice philosophical virtues in their interactions with others	An interest in personal development and lifelong learning

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

All course readings are available for free on Moodle.

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**STUDENT SUPPORT:**

The following is a list of resources that students can turn to when they need support:

- Problems with the course instructions or other content?  
Contact your Instructor for clarification and assistance.
- Technical problems with UOG Moodle system?  
Contact the UOG Moodle Help team by email at [moodlehelp@triton.uog.edu](mailto:moodlehelp@triton.uog.edu) or by phone at (671) 735-2620.
- Problems with WebAdvisor or GoTritons student email service?  
Contact the UOG Office of Information Technology (aka: the Computer Center) by email at [helpdesk@uog.edu](mailto:helpdesk@uog.edu) or by phone at (671) 735-2640.
- UOG Library Resources and Services  
Go online to <https://www.uog.edu/student-services/rfk-library/>
- UOG Student Services  
Go online to <https://www.uog.edu/student-services/enrollment-management-student-success/> to contact the Admissions and Records office, Financial Aid office, Student Life office, Housing and Residence, Counseling, Student Health, and other services.

In addition:

**Office hours and outside appointments.** There's only so much that you as a student can get out of the direct instruction and conversation that takes place during classes. At a small university like ours, office hours are a highly important extension of the classroom.

**GRADING INFORMATION****Grading Components and Weights:**

Attendance	10%
Assessments of Active Participation (4)	10%
Film Reflections (5)	30%
Exams (2)	20%
Creative Project	30%
Course Total	100%
Extra Credit	5%

**Attendance:** The *sine qua non* of success in this class is attendance. Please make sure that you come to class regularly, and that you are prepared for the class discussion. Attendance will be taken during each class session.

**Active Participation:** Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. These contributions will be assessed periodically throughout the semester to gauge progress and areas for improvement: at weeks 4, 8, 12, and 16. Self-assessments and assessments by the instructor will follow the following rubric. 60% of each assessment grade will be comprised of the instructor's assessment for the period, while 40% of each assessment grade will be comprised of the student's self-assessment for the same period.

	1	2	3	4	5
Frequency of Contributions	Unsatisfactory: Does not participate, even when prompted.	Needs Improvement: Rarely participates; contributes only when prompted.	Developing: Participates inconsistently; often waits to be prompted.	Proficient: Participates in most sessions; occasionally initiates contributions.	Exemplary: Actively participates in every session; frequently initiates contributions.
Quality of Contributions	Unsatisfactory: Off-topic, disruptive, or no effort shown.	Needs Improvement: Minimal effort; tangential or irrelevant contributions.	Developing: Relevant but surface-level; limited critical thinking.	Proficient: Thoughtful and relevant; sometimes advances discussions.	Exemplary: Insightful, original, highly relevant; significantly advances discussions.
Listening and Engagement	Unsatisfactory: Does not engage; may display disrespectful behavior.	Needs Improvement: Often inattentive; minimal acknowledgment of others.	Developing: Limited engagement; rarely acknowledges others' ideas.	Proficient: Listens and responds respectfully; occasionally builds on ideas.	Exemplary: Actively listens and builds on others' ideas thoughtfully and respectfully.

**Film Reflections:** Students will submit five film reflections throughout the semester, each approximately 1-2 pages long; reflections must consider at least three spiritual traditions. Each reflection should be submitted within a week of watching the respective films. The reflections should be typed and double-spaced, following standard formatting.

The goal of the reflections is to critically engage with the film's portrayal of demons, examining the connection to cultural, religious, and philosophical themes. While students are encouraged to use the following sample prompts, they are free to adapt them to their unique responses to the films:

- **Demonological Themes:** What are the key demonological elements in the film? How are demons portrayed in terms of their nature, appearance, and impact on characters?

Consider the differences or similarities in how demons are depicted compared to traditional beliefs in Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, or Ancient Greece.

- **Cultural and Religious Context:** How does the film engage with or challenge cultural/religious views of demons? How do these portrayals reflect specific philosophical or theological ideas about evil, suffering, or the supernatural?
- **Philosophical Implications:** What epistemological questions about belief in demons arise from the film? Does the film suggest that belief in demons is justified? How does it explore themes of skepticism, morality, or the nature of reality?
- **Comparative Analysis:** Compare the film's portrayal of demons with others in the course. How do the different films treat similar themes? What insights can be drawn about the portrayal of demons across cultures and religious traditions?
- **Personal Reflection:** How did the film affect your personal beliefs or feelings about the existence of demons? Did the film challenge your assumptions or raise new questions about the nature of belief in the supernatural?

Grading will be triaged. The instructor will consider the form and content of each reflection, noting: 1) unsatisfactory work; 2) satisfactory work; 3) exceptional work. The total number of points possible for each film reflection is 2.

**Exams:** Students will complete two essay exams; one at the midterm and one at the end of the term. Exams will focus on comprehension, application, and evaluation. Students will contribute to the formulation of exam questions.

**Creative Project:** Students are required to complete a creative project. Students are tasked with creating an artistic representation that explores the theme of demonology through the lens of multiple religious and philosophical traditions, as represented by the films we watched throughout the semester. Your project should reflect your understanding of how demons are portrayed across cultures (Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Ancient Greece) and the philosophical implications of these portrayals.

Students are encouraged to choose any medium that allows them to express their ideas and engage with the themes of the course. Examples include:

- Visual arts: painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, or digital art
- Performance arts: dramatic scene, monologue, dance, or interactive skit
- Multimedia: short film, animation, stop-motion, or video
- Sound-based: soundscape, music composition, or spoken word performance
- Other: installation art, board game, or an interactive experience

During an exhibition at the end of the term, students will present a brief oral explanation during the class exhibition, in which they:

- Explain the specific cultural or philosophical themes you are addressing in your project (e.g., Jewish demons, Buddhist Mara, Christian exorcism, etc.).
- Discuss how your project draws from the films and other materials in the course, and how it engages with the ideas and reflections on demonology.
- Reflect on what you have learned about demonology, philosophy, and the intersection of culture and belief through this creative process.
- Provide personal insights on how the project challenged you to think differently about the portrayals of demons and their deeper philosophical meanings.

To help students develop their respective project, they are required to meet with the instructor for two individual progress meetings during the course of the semester. These meetings will provide an opportunity for you to:

- Discuss your initial ideas, ask questions, and get feedback on your approach. We'll clarify the cultural, philosophical, or artistic direction you want to explore.
- Present your progress at the second meeting (approximately halfway through the creative process). At this point, you'll have a rough draft, concept, or outline of your project, and we'll discuss your progress and any challenges you're facing.
- Revise and refine your approach based on feedback from the meetings, ensuring your project reflects depth and understanding of the themes and materials.

Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	Percent Grade	Definition
A+	4.00	98-100%	<b>Outstanding</b> Honors-level performance with superior quality and extraordinary distinction.
A	4.00	93-97%	
A-	3.67	90-92%	
B+	3.33	87-89%	<b>Good</b> Solid accomplishment, indicating a substantial mastery of course materials and a good command of skills required by the course.
B	3.00	83-86%	
B-	2.67	80-82%	
C+	2.33	77-79%	<b>Adequate</b> Students have achieved the level of competency needed for advancing to a subsequent course that has this course as prerequisite.
C	2.00	70-76%	
D	1.00	60-69%	<b>Deficient</b> Minimal passing, but not adequate to take a subsequent course that has this course as prerequisite.
F	0.00	<60%	<b>Failure</b> Inadequate to receive credits.

**Extra Credit:** In this course, students will practice the most-fundamental moves that they can use to inform the philosophical conversations in class. The deliberate practice of these discussion should benefit students' participation in class.

At the start of each class session, students will be dealt three cards, each with a particular discussion move. The goal is to play your hand during the course of the class session. Each card played will earn the student one point for the day's extra credit grade.

This activity will be scaffolded. During the first half of the semester, students are expected to play two of the three cards dealt to them each session. Hence, the maximum number of participation points during this time is 2. After spring break, the expectation is that students will play all three cards, where the maximum number of participation points will increase to 3 per class session. 5% of this grade will be added to the final course grade, as determined above.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Academic Misconduct**—Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UOG community, students accept the expectations of the Student Code of Conduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources. See the Student Code of Conduct Policy in the Student Handbook. ([http://www.uog.edu/sites/default/files/student\\_handbook\\_10.7.16.pdf](http://www.uog.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook_10.7.16.pdf)) For this class, any plagiarism will be evaluated by incident. All incidents, at minimum, will automatically receive a failing grade for the assignment. If an incident of plagiarism occurs more than once in the same course, the student may receive a failing grade for the class.

**Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The goal of teaching is to impart a process of gathering, understanding, and synthesizing relevant information, inclusive of critical thinking and project details. Language Learning Models (LLMs) essentially eliminate the need for developing technical writing skills, as they can produce polished prose consistently. This technology is likened to word processors that have made handwriting redundant. LLMs efficiently gather and present information, making the task of accumulating and presenting routine information redundant as well. *With the advent of LLMs, then, a well-informed, competently written piece of prose is now a baseline expectation rather than a goal.* This shifts the question to what value-add teachers and students can bring beyond what an AI model can generate in seconds, potentially requiring a rethinking of teaching approaches and pedagogical institutions. Like other labor-saving devices, LLMs allow us to shift our focus to areas that cannot be mechanized, raising the bar for what constitutes acceptable performance.

There are several implications. This shift could potentially increase the focus on critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, as the basics of information gathering and writing are covered by LLMs. Pedagogical methods may need to evolve to accommodate this new reality. Teachers

might need to redesign curricula and assessments to emphasize the skills that LLMs can't replicate. The definition of student success and accomplishment could be revised to reflect these changes. It might help level the playing field for students with varying writing abilities, as everyone would have access to the same standard of written work through LLMs, allowing them to focus more on content and critical thinking. On a broader level, this development could reshape the landscape of education, leading to increased emphasis on developing soft skills like problem-solving, creativity, and emotional intelligence.

But, there are also worries. Some might suggest that the students themselves are not producing the smoothly written, well informed text. Or that there's no evidence of learning in work created through the use of LLMs. Finally, some might believe that students working at a C level will be demotivated by AI working at a B or A level.

It is true that Language Learning Models (LLMs) may generate the polished prose, but this doesn't negate the value of the learning process. The role of students in this new paradigm shifts from being just scribes to becoming editors, synthesizers, and critical thinkers. They would need to direct the AI, verify its outputs, integrate diverse pieces of information, and ensure that the final product aligns with the task at hand. These are high-level cognitive tasks that contribute significantly to their learning.

The evidence of learning might not be as direct as in traditional assignments, but it is still present. The LLM-generated output will still be guided and refined by students. They will have to engage with the topic at a deep level to guide the model effectively. Evaluating the quality, relevance, and accuracy of the information produced will require understanding the topic. It's a shift from assessing learning based on writing ability to assessing learning based on understanding, critical thinking, and the ability to synthesize and guide an AI to produce quality content.

It's understandable that students may feel demotivated when an AI tool can easily produce work that surpasses theirs. However, this is where it's crucial to redefine success and progress in the classroom. Rather than judging students solely based on the final product, educators can shift towards a model that values the learning process itself. This involves reinforcing the idea that these tools are just that – tools, meant to assist in the learning journey, not replace it. Education must pivot towards fostering skills that AI cannot replicate – empathy, creativity, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, etc. Students should understand that their unique human qualities, ideas, and perspectives hold immense value, and they are not in competition with AI, but instead, learning to leverage it as a resource.

For these reasons, AI Writing tools such as ChatGPT are welcome in this class, provided that you cite when and how you use the tool (see below) or submit a transcript of your interaction with AI.

Here is an example of **Example of attribution language**:

*“The author generated this text in part with GPT-3, OpenAI’s large-scale language-generation model. Upon generating draft language, the author reviewed, edited, and revised the language to their own liking and takes ultimate responsibility for the content of this publication.”*

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For individuals covered under the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), if you are a student with a disability requiring academic accommodation(s), please contact the Student Counseling and Advising Service Accommodations Office to discuss your confidential request. Please provide an accommodation letter from the Disability Support Services/Student Counseling and Advising Service Accommodation counselor. To register for academic accommodations, please contact or visit the Student Center, Rotunda office #6, [disabilitysupport@triton.uog.edu](mailto:disabilitysupport@triton.uog.edu) or telephone/(TOD) 671-735-2460.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Dates	Topic	Assignment
1	1/21 & 1/23	Course Expectations	None
2	1/28 & 1/30	Skepticism about Demons; Introduction	Read Chapter 10
3	2/4 & 2/6	Demons in Judaism	Read Chapter 7
4	2/11 & 2/13	Demons in Buddhism	Read Chapter 9 Participation Self-Assessments due
5	2/18 & 2/20	Screening & Discussion of <i>Incantation</i> (2021)	None
6	2/25 & 2/27	Screening & Discussion of <i>Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons</i> (2013)	None
7	3/4 & 3/6 No Class 3/6	Demons in Ancient Greek Culture	Read Chapter 5 Midterm Examination distributed
8	3/11 & 3/13	Creative Project Assignment introduced	Participation Self-Assessment due
Spring Break	3/18 & 3/20	No Class	None
9	3/25 & 3/27	Classical Demonic Ontology in Christianity	Read Chapter 1 Midterm Examination due Creative Project Concept due

10	4/1 & 4/3	Screening & Discussion of <i>The Prophecy</i> (1995)	Creative Projects Assignment introduced
11	4/8 & 4/10	A New Perspective on Chrisitan Demonology	Read Chapter 3
12	4/15 & 4/17	Screening & Discussion of <i>Sister Death</i> (2023)	Creative Project Check-in  Participation Self- Assessment due
13	4/22 & 4/24	A Feminist Critique of Christian Demonology	Read Chapter 4
14	4/29 & 5/1	Screening & Discussion of <i>The Witch</i> (2015)	Creative Project Check-in
15	5/6 & 5/8	Demons in Islam	Read Chapter 8
16	5/13-5/15	The Future of Demonology  Course Conclusion	Read Chapter 11 <i>or</i> 12  Final Examination distributed  Participation Self- Assessment due
17	5/20 & 5/22	Final Exams	Creative Projects Exhibition  Final Examination due