

## MEANING AND RELIGION, aka *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion: PHI 224*

Professor: Dr. Larry J. Waggle

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Section:

8:00 MWF: 208 TUR

9:00 MWF: 208 TUR

Catalog Description: Interdisciplinary examination of religion, emphasizing the character and evaluation of religious world views and their connection to mythologies, ethics and ethos.

This is the short version of my syllabus. Some of the policies set forth herein are more fully elaborated on my website. The version of these policies that will be enforced throughout the semester are to be found there. During the first week of the semester, you should read the extended versions of these policies. My website is [www.philosophy.ilstu.edu/ljwaggl/](http://www.philosophy.ilstu.edu/ljwaggl/) All university policies will be enforced. The following additional policies apply in my classes.

Attendance	You are expected to be in class, prepared to work, every scheduled class period. Excessive absences will dramatically affect your performance in class. Should you want an absence excused, I will need written documentation from your program (a letter informing me what the activity is and the dates and times you will be unable to attend class) or a letter from the Office of Student Affairs. Should you use the Office of Student Affairs, please follow their policies. I will not orally waive attendance.
Homework	You are expected to have all of the assigned readings done prior to the class period in which we discuss them. Do not fall behind in your readings. You will not be able to take full advantage of the lectures or the discussions if you are not prepared. This includes checking the class website and WebCt for changes to the schedule, additional materials you are expected to utilize, as well as any and all online quizzes.
Student Learning	You are expected to set aside at least two hours of out of class time for every hour you are in class. I, then, will expect that you have spent at least <b>six</b> hours per week with this material.
Class Participation	You are expected to participate in class discussion. 100 points of your overall grade depends on class discussion and your contribution thereto.
Grading Policy	I use a 10% gradation scale for evaluating all of your work. Your grade is based on the <b>total number of points you receive, not the letters assigned to the work</b> . The online, secure grade book on my website is available 24 hours a day. <i>Do not rely on the gradebook in WebCt.</i>

Office Hours	Office hours are not replacement class periods. It is impossible to “reteach” extensive portions of this class. If we cannot find a mutual time for an appointment, communicate with me via email. Some matters will require office visits and cannot be done by email. I cannot discuss grades by phone or via email. It is illegal.
Incompletes	A grade of incomplete may be granted only when justified by extreme circumstances where there is a reasonable expectation of completing the course.
Extra Credit	Should circumstances merit extra credit, you should be prepared to discuss the matter extensively with me in my office. Extra credit is <i>not</i> available any time after the last two weeks of class. I very rarely offer extra credit.
Late Work	Any assignment, without a written extension, not turned in on time, on paper, will receive a zero.
Cellular Phones	Cellular phones, and other such devices, are to be turned off in the class room. Period. Please do not test my patience with this.
Professional Conduct	Success in this course depends on consistent attendance and active participation, both in and out of the class room. Students are expected to attend class regularly, since there is no practical way to make up for missed class discussions, group work, or other in-class activities. Coming to class unprepared seriously distracts from the group effort. Mere attendance in class is not enough. Students are expected to prepare for class by completing the assignments prior to class. Active participation includes informed and constructive contributions to classroom discussions, positive contributions to collaborative learning projects, active listening, taking notes, etc. Some of the materials and topics we will be discussing may be of a sensitive nature. You are expected to conduct yourself with maturity. Be respectful of other’s views and others will be respectful of your’s.

You are expected to use standard English grammar and spelling on all written work. If you need assistance with this, please consult the University Center for Learning Assistance (UCLA) at Stevenson 133. If you have trouble understanding how to construct a coherent essay, then I expect that you will take the initiative to seek help.

The university policies on cheating on exams, plagiarism of written work or disruption of class will be enforced. The penalties range from censure to expulsion. Please familiarize yourself with these policies. These can be found in the Student Handbook. I take a dim view of these activities, and usually ask for the offender’s expulsion.

Your degree of success in this class depends on your willingness to explore these topics with an

open mind, being respectful of one another's views, and the intensity of work you put into this class. I am committed to your learning and these policies are designed to create a positive learning environment.

Check, prior to class, [www.philosophy.ilstu.edu](http://www.philosophy.ilstu.edu) for information concerning class cancellations.

If you have special needs, please either contact Student Services and/or discuss the matter with me, and bring your special needs documentation with you. Any arrangements for alternative testing must be pre-arranged through me and Student Services. **No Exceptions.**

Grades: The work in this class will consist in a number of WebCt quizzes, 2 to 3 in class exams, group discussion and participation, some short "projecty" sort of assignments, a midterm exam and a final exam. Some assignments may be posted on my website. If you miss class for any reason and miss an assignment, check there first before asking me about this. **WebCt quizzes cannot be taken after the class period in which we discuss them for any reason.** The purpose of these quizzes is to verify that you are reading the materials and staying current in the class. **If you are absent for any reason, you are expected to take these quizzes prior to the date in which we discuss them in class.** Since these quizzes are online, you do not have to be physically present at ISU in order to take them. Access to any computer with internet capabilities will enable you to access the quizzes. It is your responsibility to check WebCt one day prior to class to verify whether there will be or will not be a quiz. These are announced in class and on WebCt under the quiz link. These quizzes are not listed on the reading assignment sheet.

**Group discussion and participation, likewise, cannot be made up if you are absent for any reason.** These discussions are in class activities which require your presence in order to engage in them. If, for some reason, you are not able to attend a particular discussion day, then there frankly is nothing that can be done about this.

**Expectations:** You are expected to bring your text book or copies of the web materials to class on the day in which we discuss them. You are expected to explore these topics with an open mind and to listen to others (me included). If you are not convinced by something that I or someone else says, you are expected to demonstrate the error by using data and facts, not opinions. This is a learning experience. As such, we are all part of the learning. If you disagree with someone, be polite about it. If not, then others might not be so polite when they disagree with you. You are learning how to use philosophical reasoning in the domain of religion. This is not a talk show nor is it a debate.

You are expected to check the class website and the class WebCt site prior to each class. You are expected to check your university email and the WebCt mail. This is the means by which I will make you aware of upcoming events, dates, postings, etc. Should you decide not to check your e-mail or WebCt mail, then the onus is on you. You are expected to try to understand the readings even if you do not get it the first time. Trying and not succeeding is as important as trying and succeeding.

Any and all email communications from and to you are made part of the official record of the

class. Please take note of the formatting requests on my website concerning email. You should think of email as regular mail for the purposes of this class. I print and file all emails sent to me by students, and hence this is taken as part of the official class record. Keep this in mind when you email me. I need to remind you that email cannot and will not take the place of regular mail for the purpose of communication about grades or other private records. This is illegal. I will refuse any requests at this sort of communication. Set an appointment with me in my office should you desire to discuss matters related to grades.

Remember, this is an introductory level course on Philosophy of Religion. I do not expect that you will have either a background in philosophy or in religious studies in order to take this course. I will expect that you have some curiosity in these subjects and a willingness to explore these topics in ways other than what you may have experienced in Religion class or at Church Sunday School. There are many ways to approach this material, some academic, some not so. We are taking an academic, philosophical approach to the study of religion. Since this course was intended to be interdisciplinary, we will use various approaches (religious studies, philosophy, literary criticism, etc.) to the subject matter. I do not expect that you will all agree with me at the end of the day. In fact, that would be very boring. I also do not expect that you are a practitioner of any religious tradition at all. You do not have to be a “believer” in order to understand or be interested in the study of religion. What I do expect is that we can agree to take a fresh look at things that we may or may not have ever looked at before. My approach to this subject matter is to take that of someone who has never experienced the phenomena of religion and is trying to figure out what all of the excitement is all about.

I should also remind that this is a course in philosophy, not simply a course in religion. The notion of “philosophy of religion” does not privilege religion or religious understanding. Religion is being examined from the perspective of and with the tools of philosophical reasoning. We are not looking at the reasons or statements made by believers for why believers believe what they do. Socrates was known for saying that the unexamined life is not worth living. I think there is a corollary to this: the unexamined belief is not worth having. So, we need to keep the religious prejudices on hold. What I mean by a prejudice is simply that: a pre-judgment, or thinking that we already know what the answers are before we begin. We are also using philosophical reasoning to examine the claims made by religion to statements of truth. As such, philosophical methods are privileged, not religious ones.