

PHILO 615: Philosophy of Religion: Conversion & Radicalization

Professor: Josh DiPaolo

Office: Dickens 308A

Office Hours: M 2:30-3:30pm, Th 10:30-11:30am & By appointment.

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Course Description: In light of deep divisions over questions in religion, politics, and morality, it can seem like people are hopelessly trapped in their own ways of thinking. But people *do* change their minds about these fundamental issues. This class will be devoted to advancing our understanding of two “big” changes of mind: conversion and radicalization. After a brief introduction to traditional issues in the philosophy of religion, we will investigate classic and contemporary models of conversion. In light of some puzzles about the nature of religious attitudes, we will then consider whether conversions should be understood as changes of *belief*. Next we’ll briefly investigate some social practices that impede conversion efforts from outside of one’s social group. Finally, we’ll attempt to understand and clarify the notion of radicalization.

Note: This course is exploratory in two respects. First, as a “seminar,” this type of course asks students to explore philosophical questions *as philosophers*, rather than merely learning what people have had to say about those questions. In this class, **you are truth-seekers**. Second, we are doing a bit of trailblazing in this course, as I know of no other course that has been taught in philosophy on these two topics. Unlike other philosophy classes you may have taken – where it’s clear which questions are of interest and where various debates have been clearly circumscribed – *we* will be identifying, formulating, and attempting to make progress in answering the relevant philosophical questions. Students are therefore expected to contribute greatly to class discussions by raising questions and discussing possible answers.

tl;dr: This is a brand new class. How good it is will depend on how much work you put into it.

Comfort: This course will deal with difficult, uncomfortable, and personally challenging ideas. Enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance of the right of students and the professor to discuss these ideas in an open manner.

Course Ideals: I expect every student to be respectful and charitable in their interactions with one another. The course topic might lead to confusion: our goal in this course is absolutely *not* to try to convert each other. As in any other philosophy class, we will discuss and debate. But at the end of the day, this is a college class devoted to advancing each student’s philosophical understanding of course questions.

Texts: All texts will be provided on Canvas in the Readings folder.

- There will be around **40 pages of very difficult reading per week**. Please plan accordingly.

Photographic, video, and audio recording in class are strictly prohibited.

Grading Policy

Paper 1	100 Points
Paper 2	100 Points
5 Reading Memos	100 Points
<u>5 Reading Question Sets</u>	<u>100 Points</u>
	400 Points

A	> 90%	360-400 Points
B	> 80%	320-359 Points
C	> 70%	280-319 Points
D	> 60%	240-279 Points
F	< 60%	0-239 Points

Other Required Assignments

1. Philosophy in Life Post 1 and Comments
2. Philosophy in Life Post 2 and Comments

To earn a C or better, you must complete **both** of these assignments.

Grade Changers

- Participation: 25 points will be deducted from your final grade if you do not participate regularly or you are regularly distracting in class.
- Attendance: You have 3 free absences. 3 points will be deducted from your final grade for any unexcused absences. Attendance will be recorded starting in the 3rd week of classes.

Please ask questions about these policies if you're not sure you understand them!

Coursework Descriptions

Paper 1: This paper will be a research paper on a traditional issue in philosophy of religion. You will present two sides of a debate, and then you will defend your own philosophical stance. **Potential topics:** the concept of God; cosmological, design, or religious experience arguments for God's exists; divine hiddenness; the problem of evil; skeptical theism and its challenges. **Due Date: 3/7**

Paper 2: This paper will be a research paper on an issue related to conversion and/or radicalization. You will identify a philosophical question related to these issues, engage with some literature on them, and then defend your own philosophical stance. **Due Date: Final Day**

Each week during weeks 4-14, you will either write a Reading Memo or devise Reading Question Sets.

Reading Memos: 5 memos/20 points each. To help you reflect on the readings, you will write a reading memo every other week. On weeks when there is more than one reading assignment, you may choose which reading to write on. The memos are to be turned in on Canvas before the beginning of class on the first day we are scheduled to discuss that reading.

What you do: You'll reflect philosophically on some component of the article. This might mean raising an objection, or summarizing and clarifying some point that seemed obscure, or providing some additional argument in support of a claim you take the author to be making. The idea is for you to engage philosophically with the texts before you come to class.

How the Memos will be Scored: If your memo clearly shows me that you made a good-faith effort to carefully read and understand the article, then you will get at least 15 points. If your explanation of the point you discuss is fully accurate, you will get at least 16 points. Scores of 18 to 20 will be reserved for those who offer a cogent critical contribution—who raise some objection or offer some support of their own that challenges or reinforces the author's argument. At the end of the semester, I will replace your lowest **completed** Memo score with a 20.

Reading Question Sets: 5 sets/20 points each. On weeks when you are not completing a reading memo, you will be responsible for generating discussion questions on the assigned readings. For each reading assigned during that week you are to come up with one discussion question that you are willing to use as the basis of discussion in class. These must be submitted on Canvas at least 30 minutes before class. In class, I will often ask you to use these questions to initiate discussion.

What you do: As you read, you will have questions about a concept, argument, or idea as it relates to something else. Something may seem unclear, or an important claim may seem false or open to counterexample. A good discussion question will be the basis of an important discussion on some important philosophical aspect of the paper.

How Question Sets will be Scored: If you submit the correct number of discussion questions and I can tell you made a good-faith effort to carefully read and understand the articles, then you will get at least 16 points. Scores of 18-20 will be reserved for question sets that contribute greatly to discussions (or would if we had had time to answer them). Even if you are going to be absent, you should submit your questions. 1 point will be deducted for each absence on a day when your discussion question would be discussed. At the end of the semester, I will replace your lowest **completed** Questions Set score with a 20.

Philosophy in Life Posts: To help you get in the habit of approaching your life philosophically, you will complete two “philosophy in life” posts in the discussion forums on Canvas. For these assignments, you will write about connections between your life and what you’ve learned or thought about in this course. You will also read and comment on some of your peers’ posts. **Due Dates: 3/21; 4/25**

Participation: Participating in class benefits you and others. We often learn while we attempt to express our thoughts. And since you have a unique perspective, everyone else in the class learns when you share that perspective. Here are **some ways to participate:**

1. Ask questions about the readings or lectures.
2. Answer questions when asked.
3. Contribute your perspective to a discussion.
4. Raise objections to arguments.
5. Mention a relevant life experience at an appropriate time.
6. Discuss course material with me outside of class.
7. Participate during small group activities.
8. Complete in-class writing assignments.

Communication

Office Hours: I will have regular office hours throughout the semester. This means I will be available in my office to discuss course material (or other issues). If my scheduled office hours aren’t convenient, feel free to schedule a different time to meet.

“I wish I had come to office hours all semester!”

You can benefit from discussing course material outside of class. **True story:** One semester, a student of mine who never came to office hours earned one of the lowest grades on the midterm. Then he started regularly attending office hours. Right before the final, he told me, “I wish I had come to office hours all semester.” He ended up getting one of the highest grades on the final. Don’t wait! The course material is difficult. Come discuss it with me.¹

I would like each student to visit my office once during the 5th - 7th weeks of the semester.

Contact Policy: You can reach me at the email address above. If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please talk to me in class or send another email as a reminder.

Your Responsibilities: I expect you to regularly check your email and Canvas for announcements. Seriously. If I send you an email that warrants a response, I expect a response in a timely manner.

¹ Why should you go to office hours? <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/11/28/office-hours/> What are some things you might say in office hours? <https://studentlife.uoregon.edu/node/381050>

Electronics

Electronic devices are permitted in class, but must be used solely for class purposes. Browsing Facebook, catching all of the Pokemon, and captioning animal pictures are not class purposes. I will prohibit devices if they are not being used appropriately.

Cheating and Plagiarism

If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing in this course, you will receive an XF as your final grade for the course. You'll also be required to take the K-State Development and Integrity Course.

Completing this course will remove the X from your record, but not the F. Here is the university's official statement on Academic Honesty:

Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance that, in academic matters, one's work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor and Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses on-campus, off-campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System website can be reached via the following URL: www.k-state.edu/honor. A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is implied, whether or not it is stated: "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation.

Feel free to ask before completing assignments whether some behavior counts as cheating or plagiarism.

Disabilities

I will do my best to help students with disabilities or learning challenges succeed in this course. Students with disabilities who need classroom accommodations, access to technology, or information about emergency building/campus evacuation processes should contact the Student Access Center and/or their instructor. Services are available to students with a wide range of disabilities including, but not limited to, physical disabilities, medical conditions, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, depression, and anxiety. If you are a student enrolled in campus/online courses through the Manhattan or Olathe campuses, contact the Student Access Center at accesscenter@k-state.edu, 785-532-6441; for K-State Polytechnic campus, contact Academic and Student Services at polytechnicadvising@ksu.edu or call 785-826-2974.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction

Jan. 23

Jan. 25

Week 2: Background

Jan. 28 The Concept of God

Jan. 30 Arguments for the Existence of God

Feb. 1 Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Faith

Week 3: Background

Feb. 4 Problem of Evil

Recommended: C. S. Lewis *Problem of Pain*

Feb. 6 Catch-Up

Feb. 8 - NO CLASS (Start working on Paper 1)

Week 4: William James on Conversion

Feb. 11 - NO CLASS (Work on Paper 1)

Feb. 13 James Conversion IX

Feb. 15 James Conversion X

Recommended: *The Bible* Acts 9: 1-19, Acts 22: 6-21, Acts 26: 12-18;

Recommended: Ehrman "The Conversion and Mission of Paul"

Week 4 Assignments

Group A Reading Memo

Group B Reading Question Set

Week 5: Classic and Contemporary Examples of Conversion

Feb. 18 Augustine *Confessions* Book 8, Pascal Pensees

Feb. 20 Chen Conversion via Twitter, Saslow The White Flight of Derek Black

- Podcast: Waking Up w/ Sam Harris: Leaving the Church
- Podcast: Fresh Air: How a rising star of white nationalism broke free of the movement

Feb. 22 - NO CLASS (Work on Paper 1)

Week 5 Assignments

Group B Reading Memo

Group A Reading Question Set

Week 6: Psychological Models of Conversion

Feb. 25 Lofland & Skonovd Conversion Motifs

Feb. 27 Rambo & Bauman Psychology of Conversion and Spiritual Transformation

Mar. 1 Catch-Up

Week 6 Assignments

Group A Reading Memo

Group B Reading Question Set

Week 7: Philosophical Models of Conversion

Mar. 4 Van Fraassen How is Scientific Revolution/Conversion Possible?

- Background: Okasha Scientific Change and Scientific Revolutions

Mar. 6 Paul Transformative Experience

Mar. 8 Catch-Up

Week 7 Assignments

Group B Reading Memo

Group A Reading Question Set

Paper 1 Due 3/7

Week 8: Spring Break

Mar. 11 - NO CLASS

Mar. 13 - NO CLASS

Mar. 15 - NO CLASS

Week 9: Conversion as a change of belief?

Mar. 18 Podcast: Hi-Phi Nation: Creed & Credences, Rey Meta-atheism

Mar. 20 Van Leuwen Religious Credence is not Factual Belief

Mar. 22 Catch-Up

Week 9 Assignments

Group A Reading Memo

Group B Reading Question Set

Philosophy in Life Post 1 Due 3/21

Week 10: Conversion as a change of belief?

Mar. 25 Haidt Religion as a Team Sport

Mar. 27 Adler Faith and Fanaticism

Mar. 29 Catch-Up

Week 10 Assignments

Group B Reading Memo

Group A Reading Question Set

Week 11: Social Structures Preventing Conversion

Apr. 1 Nguyen Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles;

Recommended: Wired: Online Conspiracy Groups are a lot like Cults

Optional: Baurmann Rational Fundamentalism

Apr. 3 Virtual Guest: Thi Nguyen

Apr. 5 Catch-Up

Week 11 Assignments

Group A Reading Memo

Group B Reading Question Set

Week 12: Radicalization

Apr. 8 Popular pieces:

Washington Post: Youth Radicalization is on the rise: here's what we know

Vox: The Radicalization of White America

Rolling Stone: Everything you've been told about radicalization is wrong

Wood: What ISIS Really Wants

Apr. 10 Catch-Up

Apr. 12 Sageman Radicalization in the Diaspora

Week 12 Assignments

Group B Reading Memo

Group A Reading Question Set

Week 13: Radicalization

Apr. 15 Catch-Up

Apr. 17 Sedgwick The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion

Apr. 19 Neumann The Trouble with Radicalization

Week 13 Assignments

Group A Reading Memo

Group B Reading Question Set

Week 14: Radicalization

Apr. 22 Hafez & Mullins The Radicalization Puzzle

Apr. 24 Sunstein Extremism: When and Why

Apr. 26 Catch-Up

Assignments

Group B Reading Memo

Group A Reading Question Set

Philosophy in Life Post 2 Due 4/25

Week 15: Radicalization

Apr. 29 Sunstein Movements

May 1 Catch-Up

May 3 Catch-Up

Week 16: Dead Week Catch-Up/New Topic?

May 6 ???

May 8 ???

May 10 ???

Week 17 Finals

Assignments

Paper 2 Due Day of Final

This syllabus is tentative (and ambitious!). I reserve the right to change any of it at any time.