

Faith, Doubt, and Reason

Fall 2019 or Spring 2020

Mark W. Roche

CAD 3xx; GE 3xx

Logistical Information

Class: Mondays and Wednesdays

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Course Description

“Faith, Doubt, and Reason” explores scholarly questions of great existential interest. What various forms of faith exist? What obstacles exist to faith? What thoughts and experiences trigger doubt? In what ways do doubt and reason undermine or reinforce faith? How might we distinguish and evaluate different forms of reason? The seminar explores faith and doubt not only in relation to God and religious questions, but also in relation to one’s sense of self, trust in other persons, belief in institutions, and identification with values and ideas.

Readings will be taken from classic authors and works, among them, Plato, the Bible, Lessing, Feuerbach, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Jonas, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. We will analyze the role of faith, doubt, and reason in identity and identity crises and study the beliefs of young Americans. We will analyze films by Alfred Hitchcock, Roland Joffé, and Woody Allen, and we will visit the Snite Museum. Further, toward the end of the semester students will have the freedom to choose the final readings or assignments.

The course will be student-centered, with considerable focus on discussion. In addition to various writing assignments, the course will include student-led discussions, classroom debates, oral interviews, and oral exams, all of which will be designed to help students develop the capacities to formulate clear questions, listen carefully and attentively, explore ideas through dialogue, argue for and against differing positions, and express their thoughts eloquently and persuasively. If the seminar brings as many questions as answers, another course goal, helping students recognize nuance and complexity, will have been met.

When students leave home for college and begin college-level study, questions about the relation of faith and reason arise naturally. As students gain new knowledge, they are confronted with

challenges to the unity of faith and reason. Exploring this unity requires tremendous effort and deep thought. At a research university the search is by definition never ending; while some discoveries help us discern that elusive unity, others bring forward new challenges. Also college is a setting where answers to the great questions are not taken for granted, but are subject to reason. Doubt about one's previous beliefs and traditions easily arises. William Torrey Harris, co-founder of the St. Louis Hegelians and the U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906, a position that later became what we know as the Secretary of Education, viewed "self-estrangement" as "perhaps the most important idea in the philosophy of education" (27). Doubt is as essential to education as the harmony of faith and reason is to Catholicism.

This course seeks to provide a context where students can explore these existential puzzles in an atmosphere of honesty and openness, trust and support, maturity and mutual respect. The link between the student's search for meaning and intellectual refinement will be a guiding principle.

Catholicism and the Disciplines

"Faith, Doubt, and Reason" satisfies the University requirement for Catholicism and the Disciplines (CAD). The CAD option for University requirements is inspired by the University Mission Statement, which maintains that a Catholic university has a special obligation and a distinctive opportunity "to pursue the religious dimensions of all human learning." CAD courses are designed to bring ideas from the Christian and specifically Catholic tradition into conversation with one or more disciplines. That engagement helps students come to a deeper understanding of both the discipline(s) and Catholicism.

In CAD courses students do not simply process the material. They must think for themselves and articulate and defend their own positions. Students develop their own arguments informed by the material and the learning goals of the course. They engage faith issues and normative questions both critically and constructively.

The courses have been developed with the following aspiration in mind: a Notre Dame graduate should have the capacity to speak with intelligence and nuance about his or her faith orientation (or none) in a pluralistic world. In a 2015 survey, undertaken as part of the University's most recent core curriculum review, Notre Dame students ranked "learn to talk intelligently about your faith in a pluralistic world" as the highest of all theology-related goals. CAD courses should help students develop greater resources, including from the Christian and Catholic intellectual traditions, to engage persons of other faiths and people without faith.

This particular CAD course involves a wide range of material primarily from philosophy, literature, and film. Because more than half of the material engages the German(ic) tradition, which is especially strong in literature, philosophy, and theology, the course also counts for students enrolled in German as an elective toward the German major or minor. Some of the sessions move modestly beyond those areas to help students realize another principle prominent at a Catholic university, the unity of knowledge across disciplines. The course helps students envision their studies and courses fitting together in a less compartmentalized way.

We will read works from the Catholic and Christian intellectual traditions, and we will consider criticisms of those traditions. Students will gain insight into distinctively Catholic ideas, such as sacramental vision, as well as enduring debates within the Catholic tradition, such as the precise ways in which we should relate faith and reason to one another.

Principles of Student Learning

The course will be organized in accordance with several common-sense pedagogical principles, most of which were embodied already by Socrates and which have been given empirical verification in our age:

- *Active Learning:* Students are not passive minds into whose heads content is to be poured. Students learn by becoming involved, asking questions, engaging in discussions, solving problems, defending positions, writing and rewriting papers, in short, by energetically devoting themselves to the learning process. Educators speak of active or student-centered learning. Students learn most effectively when they are actively engaged, not simply listening or absorbing material. In fact simply taking an exam, even when you perform poorly, helps you to learn the material. Accordingly, this course will be student-centered, with considerable focus on student-student discussion, written contributions to a peer sounding board, paper topics chosen by students, and one-on-one oral examinations. When you have the opportunity to help teach a work, you will see that your learning is deepened.
- *Peer Learning:* Students learn greatly from their peers. You are influenced by the people with whom you spend your time, for good or for ill. Who among your friends awakens your most noble intellectual passions and helps you become a better interlocutor and person? The research shows that the student's peer group is the single greatest source of influence on cognitive and affective development in college. We will enjoy many student-student discussions in which the teacher simply plays a guiding role. You are also encouraged to discuss our various texts and questions with one another and with others beyond the classroom.
- *Existential Engagement:* Students learn more when they are existentially engaged in the subject, when they care about the questions under discussion and recognize their significance. If you volunteer in a soup kitchen, your course on the economics of poverty takes on a different meaning. If you spend a semester in Berlin, German history and politics become far more important to you. To that end and because of their intrinsic value, we will read these works not only to understand them in their own context, as interesting as that is, but also to ask, to what extent they speak to us today. Can we learn not only *about* these works, but also *from* them? That means relating these works to your past experiences, daily lives, and future aspirations, without falling into a purely subjective interpretation of the meaning.

- *Intrinsic Motivation*: Motivation plays a large role in learning. The best learning comes not from external motivation, seeking external approbation and praise, but from intrinsic motivation, from identification with a vision of wanting to learn.
- *High Expectations and Feedback*: Students learn the most when their teachers have high academic expectations of them and when students receive helpful feedback that supports them in their quest to meet those high expectations. To know what you don't know is to help focus your learning. A combination of being challenged and being supported helps learning immensely. You can be sure that if the coach of an athletic team is nonchalant about physical fitness, discipline, timing, teamwork, and the like, the team will not win many games. So, too, an easy A will not help you in the long run, as you interview for highly competitive postgraduate fellowships or positions at the best graduate schools or with the leading firms. The best way to learn is to shoot very high and to recognize what might still be needed to meet those high aspirations. Detailed feedback and discriminating grades are ways of pointing out strengths and weaknesses to students, challenging them to stretch, so that they are not lulled into thinking that their current capacities cannot be improved, and they needn't learn more.
- *Effortful Learning*: Many think that easier paths to learning make for better learning. In truth, the evidence shows that easier learning is often superficial and quickly forgotten, whereas effortful learning leads to deeper and more durable learning as well as greater mastery and better applications. For example, trying to solve a problem before being taught a solution leads to better learning. Hard learning, making mistakes and correcting them, is not wasted effort but important work; it improves your intelligence. Striving to surpass your current abilities and experiencing setbacks are part of true learning, which, unlike superficial learning, develops and changes the brain, building new connections and increasing intellectual capacities. For better learning, difficulties are desirable: the harder the effort, the greater the benefit. For example, instead of simply reviewing notes on our readings, you might reflect on the reading: What are the key ideas? What ideas are new to me? How would I explain them to someone else? How does what I read relate to what I already know? What questions do I have? What arguments speak for and against a given position?
- *Breadth of Context*: If you put what you are learning into a larger context and connect it with what you already know and are learning in your other courses, your learning will be deeper and more stable. If you can connect a story, an idea, or a principle as you uncover it to other stories, ideas, and principles or to what you yourself think, then the stories, ideas, and principles will more likely resonate for you in the future. In our class, seeing connections across works as well as seeing connections between our discussions and discussions and works in other classes as well as your own life will help give you that larger context. The more you know, the more you can learn. Ask yourself, what larger lessons can be drawn from what I am exploring.

- *Faculty-Student Contact.* The greatest predictor of student satisfaction with college is frequent interaction with faculty members. Students are more motivated, more committed, and more involved and seem to learn more when they have a connection to faculty members. So take advantage of opportunities to connect with your teachers. Drop in during my office hours (come when you have a need or a question or simply when you would like to chat). Take advantage as well of other opportunities we will find for informal conversations. And don't hesitate to ask for help.
- *Meaningful Investment of Time:* Students who major in disciplines that are less demanding of students' time tend to make fewer cognitive gains in college. Everyone who wants to learn a complex and demanding subject must make a substantial effort. Learning occurs not only during class time. It derives also from the investment you make in learning, the quality of the time you spend reading, thinking, writing, and speaking with others outside of class. For this three-credit course you will want to spend at least six hours per week preparing. An advantage you have in this course is that the works are both challenging and engaging.
- *Diversity:* Another learning principle is diversity. When you discover that your roommate is Muslim, you suddenly become more curious about Islam. That is not especially likely at Notre Dame, so we need to cultivate intellectual diversity, engaging works from other cultures and in languages other than English, even if our access to them in this particular class is via translation. We want to hear different perspectives from one another, even the most unusual, since thinking outside the box can help us see more clearly. Do not be shy about asking off-the-wall questions or making unusual comments. And don't let contrary views bother you emotionally. All such contributions can be useful, as the process of discovering truth involves listening to various perspectives. In addition, many of the works we will study introduce us to radically different world-views from our own, but precisely in their difference, they may aid learning.
- *Self-Reflection:* Students learn more when they are aware of how they best learn (so that they can focus their energies), what they most lack, and how they can learn more. How can I become a better student? How can I learn to guide myself? We may occasionally have meta-discussions in which we reflect on our discussion at a higher level. Around what central interpretive question did the debate we were just having revolve? Why did we relinquish one interpretation and adopt another? How would we describe the evidence that spoke for and against the various positions? Why was today's discussion particularly successful or less successful? What is helping us learn? The latter question underscores why I have just placed these principles before you.

Learning Goals

This course will help students develop their capacities to think critically and to speak and write effectively about matters of faith, doubt, and reason in a pluralistic world. More specific learning goals include the following:

1) Engagement with Great Questions and Great Works: Students will gain familiarity with a great question appropriate for emerging intellectuals, especially at a Catholic university: what in principle are the complex relationships among faith, doubt, and reason and how do these relationships affect you personally? Students will gain insight into a selection of works that have enduring value. Students will grow in their appreciation of the value of reading great works and asking great questions as part of a life-long process of continual learning. In so doing, they will cultivate their enjoyment of the life of the mind, building resources for the continued development of their inner world, and they will learn to value complexity and ambiguity.

2) Hermeneutic Capacities: Students will gain insight into a selection of classical works and will improve their skills in interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating all kinds of works. They will develop their capacity to ask pertinent and interesting questions and, applying the value of prolepsis, to argue for and against various interpretations. They will recognize the extent to which the parts and wholes of great works relate to one another and will advance their skills in interpreting cultural documents, e.g., in asking pertinent and interesting questions of works and arguing for and against various interpretations.

3) Christian and Catholic Intellectual Tradition: Students will engage aspects of the Catholic intellectual tradition and be able to identify and explicate central Catholic ideas, such as the unity of faith and reason and the unity of knowledge. As students explore Christian and Catholic positions (as well as challenges to these positions), they will become increasingly adept at critically examining faith questions and normative questions. They will develop an awareness of the distinctive components of Christianity and Catholicism and the most prominent challenges to Catholicism in a pluralistic world.

4) Independence: Students will develop their own positions on faith, doubt, and reason, and they will be able to describe and defend them in the light of alternative positions. They will become more articulate in speaking and writing about their own faith or non-faith and the complexities and nuances of faith, doubt, and reason. In relating to these issues in a personal way, they will also recognize a strong relationship between their academic work and their personal lives.

5) Formal Skills: Students will learn to become more adept in intellectual discussion, improving their capacity for empathetic and thoughtful listening as well as for articulate precision; they will also discover how much they are able to learn from one another. Students will advance in their mastery of the English language, both spoken and written, and they will improve their communication skills. Students will develop their capacities to formulate clear questions, listen carefully and attentively, explore ideas through dialogue, argue for and against differing positions, and express their thoughts eloquently and persuasively.

6) Breadth: Students will be able to discuss the diverse ways in which various disciplines within the arts, humanities, and social sciences approach a challenging issue, and they will advance their skills in evaluating the tenability of various kinds of disciplinary arguments.

7) Intellectual Virtues: In developing their capacities for processing difficult materials, engaging in empathetic and thoughtful listening, and developing their own ideas in engagement with others, students will develop various intellectual virtues essential to a flourishing community of learning--virtues such as justice, hospitality, diplomacy, humility, courage, perseverance, patience, curiosity, and wonder.

Student Contributions to Learning and Assessment Guidelines

Prerequisites: at least one philosophy course or one theology course, ideally both, and a willingness to carry out the assignments below in order to engage deeply the meaningful and profound questions of the course and to meet or exceed the learning goals.

1) Class Contribution: 20%;

Students will be expected to contribute regularly to discussion and to adopt various informal facilitative roles during the semester. Class contribution is not equivalent with the quantity of class participation; instead both quantity and quality will be considered. Because student learning is aided by active student participation in the classroom, students will want to prepare well and contribute regularly and meaningfully to group discussions.

2) Regular Assignments: 20%;

In advance of 12 classes, beginning with Plato, each student will submit an entry, observation, analytical point, or question, to our online discussion group (via Sakai). An entry need not be especially long; indeed it should not exceed 275 words. A few sentences or a paragraph will be fine; more words are not always better. You might respond to a study question, comment on a particular passage, address a formal or literary element, discuss an observation from another student, argue for a particular position, relate a relevant personal experience, or ask a question or set of questions that would be productive for the Sakai discussion or our classroom discussion. (Asking good questions is a very important skill.) The Sakai posts will aid understanding and help initiate and facilitate discussion. Some of the study questions will be focused on the texts; others will go beyond the texts and invite students to develop their own thinking on the subject.

All posts must be submitted by 7:00 AM on the day of our class. All students are then expected to review the posts in advance of class.

A few assignments will be given in which students practice their capacity for oral expression, for example, by winding the telling of a religious parable into a conversation and reporting on its success; by conducting an oral interview with another person on his or her faith journey; and by analyzing and evaluating a digital tape of a practice oral examination.

3) Final Oral Examination: 20%;

Each student will take a final oral examination of no more than 30 minutes, during which questions specific to the works discussed in class as well as related questions of a broader interest will be engaged. The questions will be oriented to the works and to the learning goals above. The examination should be an excellent opportunity for you to articulate your ideas and arguments in conversation and for me to assess your learning.

4) **Two 5-Page Papers:** 20% each.

These written assignments require students to engage some aspect of faith, doubt, or reason in greater depth. Students will develop their own positions on a particular topic, question, or puzzle and will describe and defend their positions in the light of alternative positions.

Each paper should have a title and pagination. You will want to use MLA style <<http://www.mla.org/style>>. (MLA stands for the Modern Language Association.) This style is widespread in the humanities and relatively simple and user-friendly. The library has reference materials that spell out MLA style, such as the *MLA Handbook* or the *MLA Style Manual*, and there are short versions available on the Web. I have a few copies students may borrow upon request. If you have a compelling reason for using a different style, we can discuss options.

All papers should be Times New Roman or a similar standard font, 12 point, and double spaced.

Late submissions of all papers will be downgraded a partial grade (for example, from a B to a B-), with a further drop of a partial grade for each subsequent day that passes beyond the due date.

Please note that technology is no excuse for not submitting work or not submitting work on time. Please save your drafts regularly and back them up to remote devices on a regular basis.

You will submit your papers to me by e-mail (mroche@nd.edu). All papers are due by 8:00 pm on their respective due dates.

The goals of each assignment and of all evaluation are to improve understanding and performance. For more detailed comments on these assignments and on assessment guidelines, see below.

Essential Reading

Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Hackett) 978-0872206335
Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* (Bedford / St. Martin's) 978-0312442439
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Penguin Classics) 978-0140444490
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* (Penguin Classics) 978-0-141-19537-7
Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (Norton) 978-0393008319
John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Pauline) 978-0819826695

E-Reserve

The following materials have been placed on electronic reserve in the Library. You can access the material also via Sakai.

Weil, Simone. "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God."

Waiting for God. Trans. Emma Craufu. New York: Perennial, 2001: 57-65

Benedict XVI. "Belief in the World of Today." *Introduction to Christianity*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004: 39-81.

Hösle, Vittorio. "Crises of Identity: Individual and Collective." *Objective Idealism, Ethics, and Politics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998: 83-100.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. "Preface," "The Essence of the Human Being in General," and "The Essence of Religion in General" from *The Essence of Christianity*.

Marx, Karl. "Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*."

Smith, Christian, with Melinda Lundquist Denton. "God, Religion, Whatever: On Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005: 118-171.

Each of the films we will be viewing has also been placed on reserve.

Recommended Reading

Cook, Claire. *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing*. New York: MLA, 1985.

Strunk, William, Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Longman, 2000.

Two copies of each have been placed on reserve in the Library. Strunk and White is a basic writing manual that many students read already in high school. Cook is more advanced, but superb and ideal for undergraduate writing or writing beyond college.

Calendar of Classes and Readings

Please note that I have built into the syllabus three open sessions. The main goal is to allow students to choose topics from among a set of options below. If, however, we develop a strong desire to linger with one work and spend an extra session on it, we can do so, thus limiting the later options for student choice. In other words, we can be flexible in whatever way we choose so as to advance learning most effectively. As a result, you will need to be attentive to any shifts in the calendar.

- Orientation
- Syllabus discussion (as needed), student-selected Bible passages, and Simone Weil (9 pages)
- Plato, *Euthyphro* (20 pages)

- Plato, reread *Euthyphro* (20 pages)
- Lessing, Introduction and Acts I and II (58 pages)
- Lessing, Act III (16 pages)
- Lessing, Acts IV and V (37 pages)
- Class at the Snite Museum with Bridget Hoyt, Curator of Education
- Kierkegaard, pp. 41 to 72 (31 pages)
- Kierkegaard, pp. 72-113 (41 pages)
- Kierkegaard, pp. 113-147 (34 pages)
- Roland Joffé, *The Mission* (126 minutes)
- Benedict XVI (42 pages)
- Hösle (17 pages)
- Alfred Hitchcock, *Shadow of a Doubt* (108 minutes)
- Break (no class)
- Break (no class)
- Feuerbach and Marx (ca. 50 pages)
- Nietzsche, pp. 3-49 (46 pages)
- Nietzsche, pp. 49-100 (51 pages)
- Nietzsche, pp. 101-145 (44 pages)
- Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (66 pages)
- Woody Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (107 minutes)
- Hans Jonas, *The Concept of God after Auschwitz* (13 pages)
- Christian Smith (53 pages)

- Thanksgiving Break (no class)
- John Paul II, pp. 7-65 (58 pages)
- John Paul II, pp. 66-131 (65 pages)
- Student or Faculty Preference
- Student Preference
- Student Preference

Final oral examinations will be scheduled between Wednesday, December 9 and Friday, December 18. These will be individual 30-minute slots. Everyone seeking an examination time before the scheduled date for our final examination will receive one.

If we stay on schedule, you will be asked to indicate preferences for topics. In order to ensure lead time for texts, we would do so shortly after fall break.

Here are the topics I have to this point imagined. Others may be added. Students will be permitted to nominate works or activities from the list below, and if the nomination receives a second, it will make the cut for voting purposes, so spend some time thinking about your preferences.

Philosophy/Theology: Anselm's *Proslogion* (the most important short work of medieval philosophy/theology, containing the first version of the important ontological proof of God's existence); the second of Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers* (a famous address on behalf of an expansive, Romantic concept of religion by one of the greatest Protestant theologians); an excerpt from Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, one of the most ambitious attempts to offer a rational account of Christianity, including its most distinctive ideas, the Incarnation and the Trinity; an excellent essay by the contemporary Catholic philosopher Vittorio Hösle from his *God as Reason* (either "The Idea of a Rationalistic Philosophy of Religion and its Challenges" or "Philosophy and the Interpretation of the Bible"); a combination of my little book on the idea of a Catholic university, *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism and the Idea of a Catholic University*, and Fr. Jenkins' inaugural address; and Pope Francis' *Lumen Fidei*.

Literature: a play by the great French dramatist Molière, either *The Misanthrope* or *Tartuffe*; *Lenz*, a moving story of doubt and crisis by the German writer Georg Büchner; an essay by the great Russian novelist Turgenev on "Hamlet and Don Quixote," paradigmatic figures of doubt and of faith, respectively; and Erich Maria Remarque's war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

The Arts: Leni Riefenstahl's documentary film of the Nazi party rally of 1934, *The Triumph of the Will*, which interweaves faith, politics, and religion in haunting ways; another film by Hitchcock that explores themes of faith and doubt; an award-winning and moving German film about individual and collective identity crises, *The Lives of Others*; and some great European paintings, both older and newer, that address our topic.

Social Sciences: an essay by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons on "The Religiosity of American College and University Professors"; a chapter from a book by Alexander Astin called *Cultivating the Spiritual: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*; a chapter from Robert Putnam's and David Campbell's well-received book on the landscape of religion in contemporary America, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*; a chapter in Chris Smith's book on beliefs among emerging adults who are Catholic, *Young Catholic America*; and unfiltered immersion in a recent data set concerning some aspect of religion today, either in the U.S. or in the world.

Sakai

Some course materials will be placed on Sakai. You will use the "Forum" function to engage in reading and posting comments before 12 of our discussions. Sakai fora will begin with Plato.

All of the films we will be viewing as a class are currently available on Sakai, via "Library Reserves." Once you click the title and accept the terms, the video will play in your web browser. You need to ensure that you have the Quicktime Video plugin installed. OIT recommends that you use Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox to ensure compatibility. In the unlikely event that you have issues with streaming videos, you can always use a computer in one of the labs on campus.

I have bought at least one extra copy of each DVD (or Blu-ray). If you wish, I can hand out a copy in class, and you can view the film at a time or at times you agree upon among yourselves. Students in previous semesters have sometimes enjoyed the collective screenings, in some cases multiple viewing sessions with different groups of students.

Background Materials

The course will focus on primary works. Before spending too much time on secondary literature, students might consider rereading the texts in question or exploring additional works by the various authors. However, students often benefit from an introductory or contextual orientation. This is especially valuable in a context where almost all of class time is devoted to discussion as opposed to lecture. Fortunately, most of our works have introductions with basic background information.

If you would like to review secondary works, there are three options: recommended reading is listed in many of our works; a library search will bring you other works; and you should feel free to ask me for recommendations.

Policy on Attendance

You should attend every class. Up to two unexcused absences will be integrated into the class contribution grade. Three unexcused absences will lead to the reduction of the final grade by one partial unit, for example, from a B to a B-. Four unexcused absences will lead to the reduction of the final grade by two partial units. Five or more unexcused absences will lead to failure of the course. Personal absences and non-acute medical conditions (such as an ordinary cold or a mild headache) do not represent excused absences; however, acute medical conditions or contagious medical conditions are excused but require documentation, as is spelled out in the Academic Articles. Excused absences for medical or other reasons will not affect your grade in any way.

In the unlikely event that a student misses a scheduled oral examination without having a legitimate excuse, a make-up examination will be arranged, but the student's oral examination grade will be dropped by one partial unit.

Grading

Criteria for Grading Class Contribution

Criteria for a Grade of B

The student ...

prepares well for each class by completing all assignments; rereading or reviewing, when appropriate; making appropriate notes; and discussing the works outside the class with students from the class and students and others not from the class;

does not miss classes for any unexcused reasons and comes to each class on time;

makes contributions that show thorough familiarity with the assigned material and thoughtful reflection on it;

asks good, searching questions that spark discussion;

listens well and exhibits by facial expressions and body posture the active art of listening;

participates in the give-and-take of discussion, for example, by asking clarifying questions of other students, offering evidence to support positions, or proposing alternative perspectives;

is willing to engage an issue from multiple points of view;

is able to make connections across works;

can draw interesting comparisons;

is willing to integrate real-world observation and personal experience as well as scholarly information, including relevant introductions;

can recognize strengths and weaknesses in an argument;

demonstrates the capacity to think on his or her feet;

is willing to think through an idea even when it is in the end abandoned;

is willing to recognize, investigate, and, where appropriate, question his or her own assumptions and accepted ideas and develop alternative positions;

shows the humility to withdraw an idea from discussion in the face of decisive counter-arguments;
exhibits the confidence to retain a position when counter-arguments fail;
speaks with clarity and engagement;
is able to marshal evidence in favor of a position;
is more interested in the group dynamic of truth seeking through dialogue than in demonstrating his or her own intelligence;
exhibits respect, tact, and diplomacy in debate with others.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The student does all of the above and ...

ensures that the group discussion flourishes at the most demanding, and yet also most enjoyable level, and helps the entire group find the balance between being alert and being relaxed;
finds and develops meaningful threads, so that the discussion, instead of being haphazard, reaches previously unexplored heights;
exhibits intellectual hospitality and generosity of spirit, effectively encouraging the participation of others and successfully drawing good ideas out of others;
gives unusually deep and rich responses to interpretive and searching questions;
consistently links the discussion to earlier works and themes as well as issues of existential interest;
helps guide the discussion through occasional summaries and substantial, thoughtful queries that build on earlier comments;
keeps the discussion on track while also encouraging creative leaps and risk-taking, including the development of new insights and perspectives;
asks fascinating and unexpected questions;
exhibits substantial curiosity and creativity and a love of the life of the mind;
brings forth deep insights without dominating the discussion;
exhibits a searching mind, the mind of a developing intellectual;
uses increasingly eloquent and elegant language.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The student ...

comes prepared to class;
occasionally contributes isolated, but thoughtful, comments to the discussion;
makes comments that are backed with evidence;
discerns the difference between more relevant and less relevant comments;
understands his or her own assumptions and is willing to question them;
exhibits respect for others and treats all persons with dignity;
seeks truth through dialogue.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The student ...

comes to class, but rarely contributes to the discussion;
makes comments that exhibit a partial lack of preparation;
makes observations without evidence;
has difficulties contributing to the flow of the conversation;
has little, if any, awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The student ...

misses a number of classes;
rarely speaks;
makes comments that exhibit a lack of preparation;
makes observations without evidence;
has difficulties contributing to the flow of the conversation;
has no awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions;
exhibits little or no respect for the class and its search for truth.

Criteria for Grading Sakai Contributions

Criteria for a Grade of B

The student ...

contributes in advance of every class session and before the deadline;
makes contributions that show thorough familiarity with the assigned material and thoughtful reflection on it;
makes insightful observations on the works;
participates in the give-and-take of discussion, for example, by asking clarifying questions of other students, offering evidence to support positions, proposing alternative perspectives, or inaugurating new trains of thought;
is willing to engage an issue from multiple points of view;
is able to make connections across the works of the semester;
asks good, searching questions and draws interesting comparisons;
is willing to integrate real-world observation and personal experience as well as scholarly information, including relevant introductions;
can recognize strengths and weaknesses in an argument;
is able to marshal evidence in favor of a position;
writes with engagement as well as in a language that is understandable to peers and without grammatical and stylistic errors;

exhibits respect, tact, and diplomacy in debate with others.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The student does all of the above and ...

develops and initiates meaningful threads, so that the discussion, instead of being haphazard, reaches previously unexplored heights;
offers unusually rich and intelligent observations;
consistently links the discussion to earlier works and themes as well as issues of existential interest;
asks fascinating and unexpected questions;
exhibits a searching mind, the mind of a developing intellectual;
uses increasingly clear, precise, and elegant language.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The student ...

contributes regularly and conscientiously, but consistently offers observations that fall below the criteria for a B grade.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The student ...

contributes most of the time but still misses a number of sessions;
exhibits some knowledge of the material;
makes comments for which evidence is modest or lacking;
makes uninformed, irrelevant, or contradictory comments;
has only slight awareness of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The student ...

frequently fails to contribute to the discussions;
contributes comments that show a lack of knowledge of the material;
makes observations that are clearly recognizable as unhelpful;
is unaware of his or her biases, prejudices, and assumptions;
exhibits little or no respect for the class and its search for truth.

Criteria for Grading Papers

Criteria for a Grade of B

Clarity

The paper presents a clear thesis, and the arguments are accessible to the reader.

Complexity

Though clear, the thesis is also complex and challenging, not simplistic. Multiple points of view are engaged, and the limits of one's own interpretation are acknowledged, either through the avoidance of overreaching or through the refutation of alternative arguments. The essay integrates a variety of connected themes and exhibits a curious mind at work.

Structure

The title is effective, revealing something substantial and appealing about your argument. The introduction is inviting and compelling, appropriate and succinct. The essay is structured logically and coherently. The overall outline or organization makes sense, and the paragraphs flow appropriately, one to the other. The conclusion is powerful.

Evidence

Appropriate support is given for the paper's claims, for example, a chain of abstract arguments or evidence from the work being interpreted.

Style

The essay is on the whole well-written, the language is well-chosen, and the paper reads smoothly. There is an appropriate variety and maturity of sentence structure. The writer avoids grammatical errors, awkward or wordy stylistic constructions, and spelling and proofreading errors. Bibliographical and other information is presented in an appropriate style.

Independence

The paper does not simply restate the obvious or repeat what others have said, but builds on what is known to exhibit the student's own thinking about the topic. The writer avoids simply repeating plot structures or paraphrasing the ideas of others. The student exhibits some level of independence and a new perspective.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The paper integrates the expectations of a B grade, but is in addition unusually thoughtful, deep, nuanced, and far-reaching in its analysis and evidence. The paper is ambitious, creative, and engaging. The language is elegant.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The thesis of the paper is clear, and the paper takes a stand on a complex issue. The writer exhibits some competence in exploring the subject but exhibits some weaknesses; these might include, for example, a thesis that lacks clarity, insufficient or unconvincing evidence, plot summary, repetition, spurious assumptions, simplicity, surface-level deliberations as opposed to depth, a derivative quality, or avoidance of alternative perspectives that should be considered. Common with a C paper are instances of awkward expression as well as avoidable stylistic issues, such as cumbersome prose, strings of prepositional phrases, and lack of parallelism. Most of the essay is well-organized, and the logic is for the most part clear and coherent. Some evidence is given for the points made in the essay. The argument is sustained but not especially imaginative or complex. It may read in stretches as highly derivative of class discussion without going beyond it. The language tends to be pedestrian, even if it is understandable and free of extraneous material. The paper is without basic grammatical errors. While some of the criteria for a B grade may have been fulfilled, a majority has not.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The thesis of the paper is missing, unclear, or overly simple. The paper includes some arguments, but counter-arguments are not considered in any serious way or are misconstrued. The essay's structure is not readily apparent. Ideas are present but are not developed with details or examples or depth. Paragraphs are poorly constructed and contain little supporting detail. Problems in grammar, spelling, or punctuation are frequent and interfere with the writer's capacity to communicate. The writer tends toward paraphrase.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The assignment is not completed or is completed in a format that is clearly substandard. The essay exhibits little, if any, preparatory reflection or study. It contains few, if any, serious ideas and lacks an argument as well as supporting evidence. The essay is difficult to read or comprehend. No meaningful structure is discernible. Sentences are poorly written and riddled with grammatical mistakes.

Criteria for Grading Oral Examinations

Criteria for a Grade of B

The student knows the works and is able to handle most questions, including questions that ask for analysis, comparison, and evaluation. The student exhibits the ability to handle unexpected and unpredictable questions. The student is able to link the meaning of the works to his or her own personal perspectives. The student is articulate and forthcoming in his or her responses and exhibits the ability to develop nuanced and detailed perspectives. The student avoids filler words.

Criteria for a Grade of A

The student satisfies the expectations for a B grade. In addition, the student offers responses that are unusually thoughtful, deep, creative, and far-reaching in their analysis. The student speaks with eloquence and responds to even the most complex questions with knowledge, nuance, and sophistication.

Criteria for a Grade of C

The student is able to handle most questions, offering basic analyses, comparisons, and evaluations. The responses, while accurate, tend not to be as full or on target as would be desirable. A few of the more difficult questions present difficulties. Filler words occasionally interfere with the responses. Summaries sometimes replace analytical answers.

Criteria for a Grade of D

The student handles some questions well, but struggles with others. The student tends to do well with simple informational questions, but struggles when analysis, comparison, and evaluation are involved. Filler words are common.

Criteria for a Grade of F

The student exhibits responses that manifest a lack of preparation or knowledge. In some cases, the student cannot answer questions in even a rudimentary way.

Grading System of the University of Notre Dame

See <http://registrar.nd.edu/gradingsystems.pdf>

Letter Grade	Point Value	Description	Explanatory Comments
A	4	Truly Exceptional	Work meets or exceeds the highest expectations for the course.
A-	3.667	Outstanding	Superior work in all areas of the course.
B+	3.333	Very Good	Superior work in most areas of the course.
B	3.000	Good	Solid work across the board.
B-	2.667	More than Acceptable	More than acceptable, but falls short of solid work.
C+	2.333	Acceptable: Meets All Basic Standards	Work meets all the basic requirements and standards for the course.
C	2.000	Acceptable: Meets Most Basic Standards	Work meets most of the basic requirements and

C-	1.667	Acceptable: Meets Some Basic Standards	standards in several areas. While acceptable, work falls short of meeting basic standards in several areas.
D	1.000	Minimally Passing	Work just over the threshold of acceptability.
F	0	Failure	Unacceptable performance.

Undergraduate Academic Code of Honor

This course will be conducted in accordance with Notre Dame's *Academic Code of Honor*, which is available at <https://honorcode.nd.edu/>. Information on citing sources and avoiding plagiarism is available at <http://libguides.library.nd.edu/scholarly-publishing/plagiarism>

Students are encouraged to discuss readings and films with one another outside of class and should feel free to discuss assignments (including papers) with one another, but the source of all ideas must be revealed fully and honestly. Whenever information or insights are obtained from secondary works or Web sources, students should cite their sources. If drafts are shared with others, for example, for peer-editing in terms of grammar and style, you must note this and describe the extent of the assistance. Also, if you talk about the material with a friend, and that person suggests an idea, you should formally acknowledge that person's idea if you use it in your presentation or paper. If an idea is presented in class discussion, and you wish to reuse it in your paper, you should also acknowledge the source of this idea. Any unacknowledged help will be considered a violation of the honor code.

Students are encouraged to prepare for the final oral examination collectively. However, students who have taken their examination may not discuss the exam in any way with other students until all examinations have been given.

Useful Web Sites

<http://www.thearda.com/Archive/browse.asp>

The Association of Religion Data Archives

<http://youthandreligion.nd.edu/>

National Study of Youth and Religion

<http://www.pewforum.org/>

The Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life

<http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/>

Spirituality in Higher Education

<http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/about.html>

National Public Radio: This I Believe