

Faith, Doubt, and Reason

Fall 2015

Mark W. Roche
College Seminar 23101-09

Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00-3:15
108 DeBartolo Hall

Course Description

The College Seminar on “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, Büchner, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. We will analyze the role of faith, doubt, and reason in identity and identity crises and study the sociological 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 some of the 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 the great questions are not taken for granted, and thus doubt about one’s previous beliefs and traditions can easily arise. 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.

College Seminar

The College Seminar is a required course for all sophomores majoring in Arts and Letters. Each College Seminar has four essential components: (1) a focus on great questions and topics; (2) an introduction to the College and its diverse ways of approaching issues by including material from the arts, humanities, and social sciences; (3) an introduction to a selection of major works, including at least some works from earlier eras; and (4) an emphasis on discussion and other activities that help students develop their capacities for oral expression and intellectual agility.

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 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, a paper topic 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 year in Berlin, German history and politics become far more important to you. To that end and because of its 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 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 seminar you will want to spend more than six hours per week preparing. An advantage you have in this course is that the works are challenging and fun, so your study can be work and pleasure simultaneously.
- *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 provide interesting antidotes to some of the cliches of the present.
- *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

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) 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 arguments.

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) Independent Thinking: Students will develop their own positions on faith, doubt, and reason, and they will be able to describe them and defend them in the light of alternative positions. They will become more articulate in speaking about their own faith and the complexities of faith, doubt, and reason. At the same time, they will become more conscious of the mysterious and inexhaustible nature of these categories. In relating to these issues in a personal way, they will also recognize a strong relationship between their academic work and their personal lives.

6) Intellectual Virtues: In pursuing other course goals, including developing their own ideas in engagement with others, students will develop various intellectual virtues essential to a flourishing community of learning—among them, modesty, justice, intellectual hospitality, diplomacy, courage, honesty, perseverance, patience, curiosity, and wonder.

Student Contributions to Learning and Assessment Guidelines

Prerequisites: at least sophomore year status in the College of Arts and Letters 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:** 40%;

Students will be expected to contribute regularly to discussion and to adopt various informal facilitative roles during the semester, including leading or co-leading class discussions. Class contribution is not equivalent with the quantity of class participation; instead both quantity and quality will be considered. Feedback, including suggestions for improvement, will be given to students during the semester. 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 every class, beginning with Plato, you 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 250 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, 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 eight hours before class time, so Monday mornings by 6:00 and Wednesday mornings by 6:00. If you do not post by the deadline but do post before class, you must, if you wish to receive any credit, send your post not only to Sakai but also to my e-mail. It is unlikely that I will check Sakai after the deadline.

When you lead the class, you will not be expected to post a comment. However, you will likely want to participate in Sakai by assigning study questions to your colleagues.

A few assignments will be given in which students practice their capacity for oral expression, for example, by winding the telling of a parable into a conversation and reporting on its success; by conducting an oral interview; or by analyzing a videotape of their own capacity for oral performance. At one point well into the semester I will ask you to share some peer evaluations with one another. I will ask you to identify one strength and one recommendation for each student in the class besides yourself. These assignments will be submitted directly to me. The peer reviews, which I will then share with you anonymously, will be very useful for your own development.

3) Mid-term Oral Examination: 10%;

Each student will have a mid-term 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. Because each examination will be individualized, it should be an excellent opportunity for you to develop your ideas in conversation and for me to assess your learning.

4) Final Oral Examination: 20%;

Each student will also have a final oral examination of no more than 45 minutes.

5) One 3-5 Page Paper (approximately 1,000 to 1,500 words): 10%.

This written assignment will allow students to engage some aspect of faith, doubt, or reason in greater depth.

The paper should have a title and pagination. It should be double-spaced and in Times New Roman or a similar standard font, 12 point.

You will submit your papers to me by e-mail (mroche@nd.edu).

Late submissions of all papers will be downgraded a partial grade, 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.

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.

Logistical Information

Class: Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 2:00 to 3:15; 108 DeBartolo Hall

Office: 349 Decio Hall.

Office Hours: Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:00 and Fridays from 2:00 to 3:30 as well as by appointment. Impromptu meetings can also often be arranged before or after class.

Phone: (574) 631-8142 (office); (574) 302-1813 (cell).

E-mail: mroche@nd.edu; **Web:** <http://mroche.nd.edu/>

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.
Büchner, Georg. *Lenz*. In *Complete Plays, Lenz, and Other Writings*. Trans. John Reddick. New York: Penguin, 1994: 141-164.
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 three films we will be viewing has also been placed on reserve.

Recommended Reading

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

Two copies have been placed on reserve in the Library, but this is also an affordable little book that you may want to keep for many years.

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.

Sakai

Some course materials will be placed on Sakai. You will use the “Forum” function to engage in reading and posting comments before each discussion except our first and second classes. 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.

Calendar of Classes and Readings

Please note that I have built into the syllabus four 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.

August 26, 2015	Orientation
August 31, 2015	Syllabus discussion (as needed), student-selected Bible passages, and Simone Weil (9 pages)
September 2, 2015	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (20 pages)
September 7, 2015	Plato, reread <i>Euthyphro</i> (20 pages)
September 9, 2015	Lessing, Introduction and Acts I and II (58 pages)

September 14, 2015 Lessing, Act III (16 pages)

Optional practice oral examinations will begin September 14. These will include three or four students in a group for up to 30 minutes; they will not be graded, but will instead be sessions solely for your experience and development.

September 16, 2015 Lessing, Acts IV and V (37 pages)

September 21, 2015 Class at the Snite Museum with Bridget Hoyt, Curator of Education

September 23, 2015 Kierkegaard, pp. 41 to 72 (31 pages)

September 28, 2015 Kierkegaard, pp. 72-113 (41 pages)

September 30, 2015 Kierkegaard, pp. 113-147 (34 pages)

Please note that mid-term oral examinations will begin the week of October 5 and conclude before the start of Fall Break (October 17). You will be offered a choice of individual 30-minute slots.

October 5, 2015 Roland Joffé, *The Mission* (126 minutes)

October 7, 2015 Benedict XVI (42 pages)

October 12, 2015 Hösle (17 pages)

October 14, 2015 Büchner (23 pages)

October 19, 2015 Fall Break (no class)

October 21, 2015 Fall Break (no class)

October 26, 2015 Alfred Hitchcock, *Shadow of a Doubt* (108 minutes)

October 28, 2015 Nietzsche, pp. 3-49 (46 pages)

November 2, 2015 Nietzsche, pp. 49-100 (51 pages)

November 4, 2015 Nietzsche, pp. 101-145 (44 pages)

November 9, 2015 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (66 pages)

November 11, 2015 Woody Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (107 minutes)

November 16, 2015 Christian Smith (53 pages)

November 18, 2015 John Paul II, pp. 7-65 (58 pages)

November 23, 2015 John Paul II, pp. 66-131 (65 pages)

Optional: If you wish to submit a draft version of your paper by November 23, 2015, it will be returned with comments during the following week. More advanced papers will receive more sophisticated comments. Any submitted draft should include a cover sheet in which you briefly answer the following question: What would I do to improve this paper if I had more time?

November 25, 2015 Thanksgiving Break (no class)

November 30, 2015 Student Preference

December 2, 2015 Student Preference

December 7, 2015 Student Preference

December 9, 2015 Student Preference

Papers are due via email by midnight on December 9.

Final oral examinations will be scheduled between Wednesday, December 9 and Friday, December 18. These will be individual 45-minute slots. Everyone seeking an examination time before the scheduled date for our final examination will receive one.

Student Preference

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 most powerful proof of God's existence, the ontological proof); the second of Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers* (a famous address on behalf of a Romantic concept of religion by one of the greatest Protestant theologians); the German-Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas's fascinating essay on *The Concept of God after Auschwitz*; an excellent essay by the contemporary 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”); an attack on religion by one of the so-called New Atheists; 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 the Pope’s 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

Literature: a play by the great French dramatist Molière, either *The Misanthrope* or *Tartuffe*; and an essay by the great Russian novelist Turgenev on “Hamlet and Don Quixote,” paradigmatic figures of doubt and of faith.

The Arts: Leni Riefensthal’s disturbing film of the 1934 Nazi party rally, *Triumph of the Will*; another film by Hitchcock that explores our themes; an award-winning and moving German film about individual and collective identity, *The Lives of Others*; some great European paintings, both older and newer, that address our topic; and a visit to the Basilica.

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*; some recent empirical essays in the field of religion and psychology, such as on what motivates our attraction to religion or what health benefits seem to be correlated with religious beliefs and practices; and unfiltered immersion in a recent data set concerning some aspect of religion today, either in the U.S. or in the world.

Science: Although our official province encompasses arts and letters, we could also easily do a unit on science and religion.

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 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;
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 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 the argument, and it effectively captures the content. 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 evidence 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, 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, plot summary, simplicity, repetition, false assumptions, 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 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. Evidence is given for most of the points made in the essay. The argument is sustained but not imaginative or complex. The language is pedestrian, but nonetheless 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. 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 may 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 standards in several areas.
C-	1.667	Acceptable: Meets Some Basic Standards	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.

Academic Code of Honor

This course will be conducted in accordance with Notre Dame’s *Academic Code of Honor*, which stipulates: “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty ... The pledge to uphold the *Academic Code of Honor* includes an understanding that a student’s submitted work, graded or ungraded – examinations, draft copies, papers, homework assignments, extra credit work, etc. – must be his or her own.” The code is

available at <http://honorcode.nd.edu/>. Information on citing sources and avoiding plagiarism is available at <https://library.nd.edu/help/plagiarism.shtml>

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 oral examinations 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.

Co-Leading Discussions

You will be asked to co-lead two discussions together with classmates. Normally the two of you will lead the discussion for the entire class. A standard situation would be that I interject only a few comments or questions here and there. I am likely to be much quieter than when I lead the discussion. However, I do reserve the right, which is also an obligation, to help steer the discussion or offer comments when it would be advantageous for all.

You will want to keep in mind that a good discussion is determined by at least three factors: your pre-class preparation; your attentiveness and dexterity during the discussion; and the activity of the participants themselves, including their advance preparation and active contributions.

Study Questions

Preparing a few pre-reading or study questions to help students focus their reflections is almost always useful. If you intend to offer study questions, please keep the following in mind. If you will be leading a Monday discussion, you should post or send questions by Sunday afternoon at 4:00, preferably earlier. If you will be leading a Wednesday discussion, you should post or send questions by Tuesday evening at 7:00, preferably earlier. You can post on Sakai, you can send an e-mail, or you can distribute a hand-out. In addition to study questions, you should feel free to provide, where helpful, brief background information. You may not distribute more than ten study questions for any session. You should feel free to visit me to discuss possible study questions in advance. Students tend to be more successful, the earlier they post their questions, as that helps to ensure greater continuity between questions, posts, and class discussion. The above times are thus the latest possible times, not the recommended times.

You will see some of the kinds of study questions one can ask from my early sets of pre-reading questions. Questions tend to fit various parameters: description; analysis; evaluation; comparison and contrast; identification of central passages or difficult passages; tensions and contradiction; reflections on formal aspects, such as images, genre, and rhetorical strategies; existential significance or contemporary relevance. You can also offer creative questions, such as inviting students to complete a sentence: “What struck me the most about today’s reading was ...” or “The question I would most like to ask today’s author is ...”

Discussion Format

You could base the discussion on your study questions, the Sakai contributions, or both. If you prepare study questions, they can substitute for your Sakai contribution. However, you may also want to engage the other students before class via Sakai. In either case, your tasks will be to ask questions of the group; get them speaking, ideally to one another and not only through you; probe with appropriate follow-up questions or offer appropriate synthetic reflections; and help move the discussion forward.

However, multiple other strategies are possible.

You may wish to break the class into small groups for intensive discussion before opening the conversation to the wider group. These could be groups of two, three, four or even larger. Small groups allow everyone to speak and also sharpen the contributions of students. If you have small groups, you can weigh whether the groups should address the same or different questions. At times you may wish to base the groups on students’ Sakai contributions. You might even want to announce the group topics and have the students choose their own groups, with a certain cap on the number of persons per group.

Although a very successful option tends to be small group discussions of three or four, followed by large group discussion, you might weigh occasional innovations in the format, for example, students speaking with one another in groups of two and then reporting in a more formal symposium style.

You may wish to consider orchestrating a debate. In such a case, your study questions should help students prepare for the debate. You may want to structure the debate so that if, say, two questions are debated, one group defends the author or work on one question and criticizes the author or work on a different question. Debates can also be more interpretive than evaluative.

One of you might lead the discussion, and the other might play a special role, such as devil’s advocate (the partner listens carefully for any emerging consensus and then formulates and expresses a contrary view the group needs to counter, or the person listens carefully to challenge the group on its hidden assumptions, which need to be defended).

You could form a panel of two who present your ideas for about five to seven minutes each, followed by questions to the panelists, and then a wider discussion.

You could consider some role-playing, in which you play a character or an author, and students must develop questions for you.

You could direct questions to individual students, much like in an oral examination, after which other students could add additional responses; then you might move on to another question and another student.

You could ask everyone to name a topic from the Sakai posts that interests them, but excluding their own posts, and then pursue the most-named topics.

Please don't hesitate to draw on your creativity in trying to craft a meaningful format. The above are simply examples.

Some Tips

Unless you are building from basic to more complex questions, you will want to formulate open-ended questions that encourage perception and analysis, not questions that lead to a one-word response or a simple right or wrong answer. However, a simple query of the whole class (for example, does the work define piety?) could easily lead to meaningful follow-up questions.

Speak clearly and loudly.

Keep your eyes open for volunteers who would like to speak.

Be willing to wait for a response. Give your colleagues time to think.

Call on colleagues by their names.

Be attentive to time. After 15 minutes, you might invite small discussion groups to continue their discussion or to pursue further topics. Be sure to allow sufficient time for a large group discussion.

Don't hesitate to use the blackboard or have other students use the blackboard.

One interesting technique is to use the board or have other students use the board, for example, by having small group discussants write key insights and questions on the board during class.

Show through your body language that you are listening and that you do not intend to speak until the person is finished speaking. Encourage speakers through your body language, such as, when relevant, by nodding in agreement.

If many persons want to speak, be alert to hands that are raised and the order in which they have been raised as well as the amount of speaking individual students have done thus far, both in your individual class and during the semester. You are free to move some persons forward on

your list. Do not hesitate to say at a given point that now the floor is open only to those who have not yet spoken.

Try to build on the comments of students, or have other students build on the comments of others. Make comments, for example, that underscore links between two contributions. Make summary observations that take into account several contributions and touch on a recurring theme in the discussion. One of your goals is to try to create a coherent discussion instead of isolated comments that simply follow one another without an organic connection.

One way to prepare is to anticipate in advance at least some of the comments that you might expect to hear. Come to class with a bag of ideas and dip into the bag, as needed, depending on what kinds of responses you receive. You will also need to come to class that day in an alert mode, as much of what you will need to do is think on your feet.

Try to get different views on the table and try to delve into supporting arguments, including specific references to the work in question. Often a discussion is enhanced by references to the work.

If a student, you or another, wishes to read a passage from the work, make sure that the passage has been appropriately identified, with pagination and location, before the student begins reading, so that everyone has located the relevant passage.

Ask follow-up questions: To seek clarification, ask: What exactly do you mean when you say ... ? To push for supporting evidence, ask: Why do you think that is so? Where in the text do you find support for that view? Can anyone else find evidence for that view? To encourage connections, ask: How does what you just said relate to ... ? To encourage more complex analysis, ask: Are there any counter-arguments to this position?

In encouraging students to talk to one another and not direct all responses to you, you might ask, who wants to respond to that point?

Do not hesitate to call on classmates, especially if you can build on statements they made earlier (in the semester) or in their Sakai contribution.

Try to pay some attention to equitable distribution of workload. It is better if both of you, at least over time, actively lead the discussion instead of having one person defer constantly to the other.

Your questions need not be restricted to the texts themselves. You should feel free also, at times, to use the texts to develop overarching or existential reflections.

You might also review the “Criteria for Grading Oral Performance,” which have some implicit suggestions for what characterizes good contributions and good discussions.

Consider strategies for closing the discussion. Do you want to summarize some major points? Do you want to connect what has been discussed with earlier issues? Do you want to link the day's discussion with future topics yet to be explored?

If you want to discuss strategies for leading the discussion, feel free to contact me. Besides my office hours, I almost always have a few minutes before or after class.

Enjoy your time leading the discussion. You won't have this learning opportunity in every class.

Speaking in Class: Informal Tips

Some students may not be accustomed to such a student-centered classroom or may be naturally shy. Below are a few suggestions to help you feel more comfortable in contributing to classroom discussions. Although the tips were initially prepared for quieter students, all students may find them helpful.

Before Class and Outside of Class

Talk about the texts and themes with another student from the class.

Tell your friends outside of class what you are reading and in what ways the texts are interesting.

Work on reducing filler words in everyday speech and not simply in the more formal atmosphere of a class discussion.

Make a note or two before class about important points you'd like to make or questions you'd like to ask, via your own preparation or via your response to Sakai comments.

During Class

Remember that the small group discussions serve multiple purposes, one of which is to provide you with a more comfortable forum for exchanging ideas, which might also help you collect thoughts for the plenary discussions and provide you with a way of warming up, as it were.

Speak early. Consider in particular answering a first question.

Consider volunteering to present the results of your group discussions.

If you do not speak early, don't hesitate still to speak. Everyone will be pulling for you.

Consider asking a follow-up question of someone else.

Jot down a note or two about what you want to say, so you can hold on to the thought. A few key words might well suffice.

Atmosphere and Confidence

Know that we are collectively searching for the truth and trying to help each other learn. The atmosphere of this class will be positive and supportive. Others will want to hear your contributions.

Advice for Paper

The paper should develop an aspect of the course, perhaps a puzzle that interests you. It can be as much a thought paper as a research paper.

Sample questions to help you focus your ideas, as you select a topic:

What are the various ways in which faith manifests itself?

What are the objects of faith besides simply the existence of God?

How does the encounter with alternative religious traditions affect one's own faith?

By which criteria might we seek to determine the validity of conflicting faith traditions?

If faith is lost, what tends to fill the void?

Why is it so difficult to speak about faith?

How does a church effectively motivate faith? Through vision? custom? incentives? penalties?

Other strategies? How might we find out what works? Is what works the same as what should be done?

What are the diverse causes of doubt?

What are the diverse ways in which one can deal with doubt?

What triggers the movement from doubt to despair and meaninglessness?

What is the relationship between doubt and anxiety?

In which historical ages and under what historical circumstances have faith or doubt been viewed as forces dominating the spirit of the age?

What value might there be in understanding doubt, even if one has not personally experienced doubt?

What various kinds of reason exist?

How is it that reason seems to be able both to ground legitimate values and to help us achieve unworthy ends?

How do faith or doubt or reason relate to one or more of the specific disciplines in the College of Arts and Letters? For example, what are the respective roles of faith and reason in the discipline of theology? What are some of the visual strategies for conveying faith? What aesthetic genres successfully convey doubt? How does the architecture of a church orient one religiously? What is the place of doubt in the social sciences? How does faith influence political behavior? When did the place of religion in public life begin to become controversial in the United States and how did this controversy manifest itself?

What have been the stages along this path and what possible solutions exist to our current difficulties and tensions?

What role does faith, doubt, or reason or a combination of the three play in meaningful dialogue? Does reason alone suffice for persuasion?

What is the relationship between faith and doubt? Can doubt, for example, ultimately strengthen faith? Is doubt in any sense a necessary condition of spiritual striving? And can it be more supportive of meaningful spiritual seeking than certitude?

What is the relationship between faith and reason? What happens, for example, when they conflict, or seem to conflict? Precisely what kind of support does faith give to the intellectual search for God?

What is the relationship between doubt and reason? Do they presuppose one another, or are they in conflict with one another? Could doubt be viewed as a necessary tool of knowledge?

How would you evaluate the three religious virtues—faith, hope, and charity—in relation to one another?

What is the connection between faith and works?

What role does faith or doubt or reason or a combination of the two play in one of the works we are discussing this semester? How might a comparison of two works enrich our understanding of one of these categories as well as the works themselves?

What is the role of faith or doubt or reason in analyzing a particular (ethical, social, political, or psychological) problem? For example, what role does doubt play in the environmental debate?

How might different cultures, including developing and developed countries, respond differently to faith and doubt?

Why are Americans more religiously oriented today than Europeans?

How might gender play a role in our understanding of these three categories?

How might age play a role?

What can social scientific data tell us about faith and politics? How might one use such data to advance a campaign strategically?

What is the role of faith in politics?

What should be the role of faith-based initiatives?

What roles do faith and doubt play in psychological difficulties and in psychological flourishing?

What roles do faith, doubt, and reason play in the economic marketplace?

Students are encouraged to discuss their ideas with me at an early date. Students should not hesitate to think out loud with me about various topics before settling on one. Given the structure and learning goals of the class, the paper need not be a focused research paper; it could instead be the articulate statement of a complex problem that invites still further study.

Guides to Writing

Achtert, Walter S., and Joseph Gibaldi. *The MLA Style Manual*. New York: MLA, 1985.

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

Ross-Larson, Bruce. *Edit Yourself: A Manual for Everyone Who Works with Words*. New York: Norton, 1982.

See also the reference above to *The Elements of Style*, which is available at the campus bookstore and is recommended for purchase.

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

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

Toastmasters International