

Faith, Doubt, and Reason

Spring 2024

Mark W. Roche

CSEM 23102

Logistical Information

Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30 to 4:45 in 202 O'Shaughnessy Hall.

Office: 300 Decio Hall.

Advising Hours: Tuesdays from 10:00 to 10:45 and Thursdays from 2:00 to 3:15 in 300 Decio via [Google calendar](#). Appointments beyond these hours are available upon (email or in-person) request. On most teaching days, even without notice, I will also be happy to meet with you right after class. Several times during the semester I have a conflict on Tuesday mornings, so on those days I have shifted the advising hours to the stretch from 1:00 to 1:45, which you can see on Google Calendar. All students are encouraged to make use of advising hours, early and often. Come with course puzzles on which you would like think out loud or broader questions about how to make the most of your time at college. Advising hours are also an opportunity for me to better understand you and your aspirations, so come with a spirit of curiosity and expect generosity in return.

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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 far can reason take us? What is the relation of faith and reason?

The seminar explores faith, doubt, and reason in relation not only to God and religious questions but also to one’s sense of self, trust in other persons, belief in institutions, and identification with values and ideas. Readings will be taken from, among others, Plato, the Bible, Lessing, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. The course integrates literary and artistic works (including artworks and films) as well as sociological data. 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 occasional 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 course brings as many questions as answers, another course goal, helping students recognize nuance and complexity, will have been met.

The course seeks to provide a context where students can explore religious and existential puzzles in an atmosphere of trust and support, maturity and mutual respect. The student's search for meaning will be enhanced by intellectual refinement and rigor.

College Seminar

The College Seminar is a required course for all students majoring in Arts and Letters. Each College Seminar has four essential components: (1) a focus on great questions; (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 in Plato's Socratic dialogues and 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 reflections, 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, reflection topics chosen by students, and one-on-one oral examinations. When you have the opportunity to help teach a work, which you will do, 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 organizations and 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 analyze 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 and eristic abilities. 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 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, civility, hospitality, diplomacy, humility, courage, 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) Canvas Contributions: 20%;

In advance of each class, beginning with Plato, you will submit an entry, observation, analytical point, or question, to our online discussion group (via Canvas). Any exceptions will be clearly noted. For example, there will be no submissions for our Consolidation of Learning Sessions and no submissions for Freud. *In addition, students are free to choose three sessions when they do not post.*

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 thematic 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 Canvas discussion or our classroom discussion. (Asking good questions is a very important skill.) The Canvas 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 Tuesday mornings by 10:00 and Thursday mornings by 10:00. All students are then encouraged to review the posts in advance of class. 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 to my e-mail (mroche@nd.edu).

When you lead the class, you are not required to post a comment, since you will be busy thinking through how to run the class. However, you are welcome, but not at all required, to participate in Canvas by giving your classmates pre-class guidance on how best to prepare for your class discussion.

3) Obligatory and Non-obligatory Submissions: 10%

A few assignments are being given in which students practice, or assess 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.

In advance of spring break, 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 and to an assistant. The peer reviews, which we will then share with you anonymously, will be very useful for your own development.

Here is the breakdown on these submissions, all of which are designed to help you with your oral skills and with the content of the course.

Obligatory

Self-Reflection Exercise (due February 29)

Video Exercise (due March 2)

Peer Feedback Exercise (due March 7)

Please note that there are no written exams and no formal papers for this course. However, the three obligatory short submissions are all due during the two weeks before midterm break, so **I recommend you start early, especially as midterm oral exams will also take place the week before midterm break.** I would happily stretch these out, but earlier deadlines will not give you sufficient material for the exercises, and later deadlines will be too late for you to receive meaningful feedback and advice early enough to make a significant difference in your development this semester.

Non-Obligatory

Choose one of three exercises, though additional exercises can be chosen for extra credit. All of these have recommended submission dates, but may be submitted through the last day of classes.

Ring Parable Exercise (ideally submitted not long after our discussion of *Nathan*)

Faith Interview Exercise (ideally submitted after you get an initial handle on some of our puzzles)

Devil's Advocate Exercise (ideally submitted either after Kierkegaard or after Nietzsche/Freud/Allen)

All of these assignments are to be e-mailed to me (mroche@nd.edu) as Word attachments or, if you prefer, given to me as printouts. You will send the peer feedback exercise also to the person who sifts those comments in order to provide anonymous feedback, but that person will be identified at a later date.

For more details, please view the Canvas modules on Obligatory Submissions and Non-obligatory Submissions.

4) **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.

5) **Final Oral Examination:** 20%;

Each student will also have a final oral examination of no more than 30 minutes.

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 the syllabus supplement and appropriate modules on Canvas.

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. 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. As a result, you will need to be attentive to any shifts in the calendar. Around mid-semester we can make choices about the final sessions, which will give me time to ensure you have access to readings or films.

Please note that there will be study questions on Canvas for virtually every reading or session.

The syllabus includes your short written exercises (in blue and in italics). Note that three of these are obligatory (two of which have firm deadlines) and three are non-obligatory. You are free to choose any one of the three non-obligatory exercises. If you do more than one, you will receive extra credit.

January 16	Orientation
January 18	Read the syllabus and syllabus supplement; read Weil (9 pages); and select a Biblical passage or a joke that addresses some aspect of faith, doubt, and/or reason and be prepared to present/discuss it in class.
January 23	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (20 pages)
January 25	Plato, reread <i>Euthyphro</i> (20 pages)
January 30	Lessing, Acts I and II (29 pages)
February 1	Lessing, Act III (16 pages)

Think of doing the non-obligatory ring parable exercise at this time (there is no formal due date, but it is best done while the parable is fresh in your mind).

February 6 Lessing, Acts IV and V (37 pages)

Begin thinking about your peer comments, if you have not already begun making preparatory notes. The peer comments, which are obligatory, are due at the end of the day on March 7, the last class day before break.

February 8 Kierkegaard, pp. 41 to 72 (31 pages)

February 13 Kierkegaard, pp. 72-113 (41 pages)

Begin thinking of scheduling the obligatory video exercise, which is due on March 3.

February 15 Kierkegaard, pp. 113-147 (34 pages)

February 20 Roland Joffé, *The Mission* (126 minutes)

February 22 Hösle (17 pages)

Begin thinking of your obligatory self-reflection (strengths and weaknesses), which is due a week from today, on February 29.

February 27 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *The Lives of Others* (2 hours, 17 minutes)

Your obligatory self-reflection (strengths and weaknesses) is due at the end of the day on February 29 (so that you are not busy with it over spring break and so that I can integrate your reflections into the second iteration of your feedback); however, if you fall behind, your self-reflection may be submitted as late as March 15). Any later submissions will be severely downgraded.

February 29 Consolidation of Learning I

The obligatory video analysis is due on March 3. This way the exercise will be useful for you in advance of midterm exams. You may submit the exercise late, but a late submission will modestly affect your grade.

March 5 Data from the [Pew Research Center](#) and/or the [Association of Religion Data Archives](#)

March 7 Museum Visit (we will meet today in the Raclin Murphy Museum, so please plan ahead for the extra time it will take to get there)

*The obligatory peer comment exercise is due by the end of the day on March 7. You may submit your comments late, **but not later than March 14**. A submission between March 7 and March 14 will modestly affect your grade. Any submission after March 14 could impact your course grade.*

March 12 Spring Break

The non-obligatory faith interview might conveniently be scheduled during break when you have access to an array of persons beyond those on campus.

March 14 Spring Break

March 19 Benedict XVI (42 pages)

March 21 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 565-602, through §30 (37 pages)

March 26 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 602-656 (54 pages)

March 28 Woody Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (107 minutes)

April 2 Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (66 pages)

The non-obligatory devil's advocate conversation is best undertaken either during or after our discussion of Kierkegaard or during or after our discussions of Nietzsche, Allen, and Freud.

April 4 John Paul II, pp. 7-65 (58 pages)

April 9 John Paul II, pp. 66-131 (65 pages)

April 11 Student Preference

April 16 Student Preference

April 18 Peer Work Day

April 23 Consolidation of Learning II

April 25 Student Preference

April 30 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 midterm.

Here are the topics I have to this point imagined. Others may be added. Students will be invited to nominate works or activities from the list below or from their own range of ideas and preferences, and if the nomination receives a second, it will make the cut for voting purposes, so

spend some time thinking about your preferences. I list the options by division, but we can also discuss choices via their focus, for example, we could devote four sessions to reason and devote all of them to Hegel or perhaps Hegel and Höle, or we could focus more on faith and explore, say, Schleiermacher, some artworks, and Emily Dickinson, etc.

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 concept of religion and faith by one of the greatest Protestant theologians); excerpts 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 essay on the theodicy by the Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz"; another essay by the contemporary Catholic philosopher Vittorio Höle from his *God as Reason*; a document from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*; and Francis's encyclical *Lumen fidei* (The Light of Faith) or an earlier encyclical of interest to students, such as *Nostra aetate*, which explores Christianity in relation to other religions.

Literature: a comedy by the French dramatist Molière, either *The Misanthrope* or *Tartuffe*; Lenz, a moving story of doubt and crisis by the German writer Georg Büchner (when I once taught it, student voted to use an extra session to spend two classes on this fascinating work); an essay by the Russian novelist Turgenev on two paradigmatic figures of doubt and of faith, "Hamlet and Don Quixote"; selected poems by the greatest American female poet, Emily Dickinson; 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; some great paintings, both older and newer, that address our topic; a film by Alfred Hitchcock that addresses either Catholic topics (Hitchcock was a Catholic director) or uncertainty (that is, simultaneously faith and doubt) toward other human beings, which is one of his major themes; Clint Eastwood's film *Gran Torino*, which effectively interweaves moments of faith, doubt, and reason; and an exploration of the Basilica of Sacred Heart.

History and the Social Sciences: a selection of readings from two classic critics of religion, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx; 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*; an excerpt from a 2021 book by David Campbell, Geoffrey Layman, and John Green entitled *Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics*. Empty churches; a chapter from John McGreevy's 2022 book *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis*; or a chapter or two from any number of recent books on why contemporaries are leaving their churches.

Required Reading

Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* (Bedford / St. Martin's) 978-0312442439
Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Penguin Classics) 978-0140444490

Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (Norton) 978-0393008319
John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Pauline) 978-0819826695

In addition to the books above, we will also read some essays and chapters, which will be available via Canvas, Library E-reserve, or both. These include:

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
Hösle, Vittorio. "Crises of Identity: Individual and Collective." *Objective Idealism, Ethics, and Politics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998: 83-100.
Benedict XVI. "Belief in the World of Today." *Introduction to Christianity*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004: 39-81.
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Antichrist. The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin, 1976: 565-656.

Syllabus Supplement

On Canvas you will find the syllabus supplement, which includes the following sections and subsections.

Suggestions for Students

- Useful Books for College Students
- Co-Leading Discussions
- Speaking in Class: Informal Tips
- Writing Manuals
- Useful Web Sites

Grading Criteria

- Policy on Attendance and Tardiness
- Grading Scale for the University of Notre Dame
- Criteria for Grading Class Contribution
- Criteria for Grading Short Written Contributions
- Criteria for Grading Papers
- Criteria for Grading Oral Examinations

University Policies, Guidelines, and Support Structures

- Disability Accommodation
- Support for Student Mental Health at Notre Dame
- Student Privacy Statement
- Academic Code of Honor