

Team-Teaching the Atheism-Theism Debate

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Abstract: In this paper, we discuss a team-taught, debate-style Philosophy of Religion course we designed and taught at the Ohio State University. Rather than tackling the breadth of topics traditionally subsumed under the umbrella of Philosophy of Religion, this course focused exclusively on the nuances of the atheism-theism debate, with the instructors openly identifying as atheist or theist, respectively. After discussing the motivations for designing and teaching such a course, we go on to detail its content and structure. We then examine various challenges and hurdles we faced, as well as some benefits we encountered along the way. Next, we discuss some informal data collected from the students enrolled in the course, some of which suggest some rather surprising outcomes. We conclude with some considerations of the applicability of this style of teaching to other philosophical debates.

In early 2011, the authors conceived of and designed a new model for teaching the Introduction to Philosophy of Religion course at the Ohio State University. Instead of having one instructor present material in a neutral fashion, on this new model, *two* instructors—one atheistic and one theistic—announce their views to the class at the beginning of the term and then conduct the lectures in the style of a debate. We then taught the class on this model in both Spring 2011 and Spring 2012.

This paper is a discussion of our experience developing and teaching this course. In section 1, we discuss our motivations for designing this model of the course, before moving on to sections 2 and 3 for discussions of the course structure, its content, and classroom conduct. In sections 4 and 5, we discuss various challenges, hurdles, and benefits, some of which were due to the specific nature of the course and others to the team-teaching approach more generally. Section 6 contains a discussion of student feedback and the (sometimes quite surprising) results of informal polling amongst the students. We conclude in sec-

tion 7 with some remarks on applying this pedagogical approach to other philosophical debates.

1. Motivations for Developing the Course

We got the idea to develop this new model for the course while we were graduate students in the Department of Philosophy at Ohio State. At the time, we had been friends and colleagues for six years, with a friendship largely predicated on frequent amiable and rigorous discussions about the existence of God, with Cray identifying as an atheist and Brown identifying as a theist.¹

Despite this difference in ontological commitment, we shared a set of frustrations. The first was a frustration with the New Atheist movement, populated by writers such as Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris. The writings of many such authors, we worried, were lacking in informed philosophical engagement and encouraged polemics and rhetoric rather than rigorous argumentation. The second was a frustration with a sort of anti-intellectualism amongst certain religious believers: a rejection, supposedly in the name of some notion of faith, of critical thought and serious engagement with disciplines such as philosophy and the sciences. The third was a frustration with the overall unfriendly and antagonistic tone that often accompanied discussions amongst those influenced by these camps. It seemed to us that, at the popular level, the debate over God's existence was not only being presented in a manner that was regrettably oversimplistic, but was also being carried out with unnecessarily adversarial attitudes, too often leading to accusations of one party or the other being either stupid or wicked.

In light of these frustrations, we set out to design a new model of Introduction to Philosophy of Religion that would serve two goals: (i) expose students to just how difficult and nuanced the atheism-theism debate can get, especially when considerations of topics ranging from cosmology and evolutionary theory to modal logic and set theory are taken into account; and (ii) directly demonstrate to them that the debate, as hard as it is, can still be carried out in an amiable fashion. Even if we acknowledge that if one side is right, the other is wrong—and *vice versa*, as neither of us endorse any sort of metaphysical relativism about whether or not God exists—we can still conduct the debate in a rigorous and careful manner that neither results in nor presupposes accusations of stupidity or wickedness.

2. Course Structure

We offered the course for the first time in the Spring quarter of 2011 and again in the Spring quarter of 2012, with an enrollment of 75 students each time. In the 2011 section, we had two teaching assistants who handled all grading; in the 2012 section, we handled all teaching and grading duties ourselves. Otherwise, the structure and content of the course were consistent across both offerings.

Though we had advertised the course as a team-taught course, many students enrolled unaware of this fact. On the first day of class, rather than starting off by introducing the class or mentioning the team-taught structure, Cray immediately began by offering “opening remarks” on why he is an atheist. Directly afterwards, Brown offered similar “opening remarks” on why he is a theist. Following these remarks, we shook hands and proceeded to introduce the class as normal, discuss the syllabus and course requirements, etc. We found that students were both drawn in and quite taken aback by this approach.

Our lectures were conducted, not as debates *per se*, but as “debate-style” presentations of the material. On any given day, one of us would open by presenting an argument or problem, and we would then trade off blocks of lecture time, roughly five to twenty minutes each, in an effort to present the material in a back-and-forth, point-counterpoint style. For example: Brown might open class by discussing Anselm’s ontological argument, with Cray then presenting Gaunilo’s response, followed by Brown defending the argument against the response, and so on. As such, the person actively doing the teaching changed several times during any given class meeting. We found that this method of presentation helped students pay attention and stay engaged.

In addition to merely presenting the material, we also made it very clear to students which arguments we ourselves thought were compelling. Brown, for example, agreed with Cray that the ontological argument fails to provide a compelling case for God’s existence, and Cray agreed with Brown that the logical problem of evil ultimately poses no significant worry for the theist. This approach allowed students to not only be exposed to philosophy in the form of standard journal articles and book chapters, but also to see it actively done in front of them.

Rather than taking sides with either of us, students were encouraged to think for themselves and critically engage with both instructors. We made it very explicit that we, the instructors, were *doing* philosophy, and that they, the students, should join the discussion and do it along with us. Students were assessed through engagement grades (including participation and attendance), a series of quizzes and exams (including substantial essay portions), and, the first time the course was offered, an argument-based term paper.

3. Course Content

We structured the course so that the material discussed formed an overarching narrative. After spending a day on logic and argument and a day on the concept of God, we devoted several weeks to examinations of what we called the *external data*: looking at both our shared concepts and the world around us to see if such things provide support for or reasons against theism. In this section of the course, we worked through the following (with associated readings in parentheses):

- The ontological argument (Anselm’s original presentation of the argument, as well as William Rowe’s 1993 “An Analysis of the Ontological Argument”).
- The causal/explanatory version of the cosmological argument (Aquinas’s original presentation, as well as discussions by Samuel Clark; Paul Edwards’s 1959 “A Critique of the Cosmological Argument”; and Rowe’s 1978 “An Examination of the Ontological Argument”).
- The Kalam cosmological argument (selections from William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland’s 2003 *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*; Paul Draper’s 1997 “A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument”).
- The moral argument (selections from C. S. Lewis’s 1952 *Mere Christianity*; Plato’s *Euthyphro*).
- The biological teleological argument (William Paley’s original formulation, as well as selections from Daniel Dennett and Alvin Plantinga’s 2010 *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*).
- The cosmological teleological (“fine-tuning”) argument, (selections from Richard Swinburne’s 1979 *The Existence of God*; Robin Collins’s 1999 “A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God”).
- The logical problem of evil (J. L. Mackie’s 1959 “Evil and Omnipotence”; John Hick’s 1981 “Soul-Making Theodicy”; selections from Plantinga’s 1975 *God, Freedom, and Evil*).
- The evidential problem of evil (Rowe’s 1979 “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”; Peter Van Inwagen’s 1988 “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy”; Van Inwagen’s 1991 “The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence”).

In the second half of the course, we examined what we called the *internal data*: personal, psychological, existential, and pragmatic factors relevant to the debate, including discussions of

TEAM-TEACHING THE ATHEISM-THEISM DEBATE

- Religious experience (selections from C. D. Broad's 1930 *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological Research*; Louis Pojman's 2001 "A Critique of the Argument from Religious Experience"; William Alston's 1982 "Religious Experience and Religious Belief").
- Norms governing belief-formation (Blaise Pascal's famous *Wager*; William Clifford's 1879 "The Ethics of Belief"; William James's 1897 "The Will to Believe").
- The epistemology of religious disagreement (Richard Feldman's 2007 "Reasonable Religious Disagreements").
- Existential concerns (Susan Wolf's 2007 "The Meanings of Lives").

The course was taught at a very high level, and many of the readings were quite difficult. This was intentional: one of our goals was to show the students how difficult this debate can get, so we wanted to expose them to even the most challenging literature. The idea was that the students would struggle with the readings, and then we would distill down and clarify the important points during lectures. Evaluation of the students' work focused primarily on their understanding of the lectures.

The scope of the course was also, by nature, quite limited: we focused exclusively on the debate over the existence of the God conceived of by standard Western monotheism (the so-called "God of the philosophers"), and were forced, due to time limitations, to pass over some important topics, such as that of miracles. This was the result of our choice to sacrifice breadth in favor of depth: doing full and equal justice to both the theistic and atheistic perspectives required spending a great deal of time on each argument covered, forcing us to be quite selective about which material found its way into the course.

4. Challenges and Hurdles

Before teaching the course, we expected there to be challenges and hurdles. Our expectations were certainly met. In this section, we discuss these challenges and hurdles, most of which we expected and some of which took us by surprise. Most of our focus here is on challenges and hurdles that we take to be the result of this particular kind of course, rather than those inherent to team-teaching itself.²

4.1 Administrative Obstacles

A fundamental challenge in orchestrating any team-teaching course will be getting the course itself approved by the institution. For obvious reasons, it can be difficult to convince the relevant administration to compensate two faculty members for teaching a course that could, on

a more standard model, be taught by a single faculty member. Given that we were both graduate students at the time we taught the course, we were able to circumvent this issue to some extent. Compensating both of us amounted to the same as compensating a graduate student instructor and a teaching assistant. In the 2011 version of the course, we also had two graders, which amounted to the same as compensating a graduate student instructor and three teaching assistants. We realize, however, that many who might be interested in teaching such a course will not be in the same position we were in at the time. (Neither are we anymore, for that matter.)

Based on our experience, however, there do seem to be good justifications (other than merely pedagogical ones) that can be offered for this style of course that generalize to full-time faculty. First, given the extra instructor in the classroom, we were able to raise the cap on enrollment and allow more students into the course. Whereas a typical Philosophy of Religion course at Ohio State would have forty-five to sixty students, our model allowed for seventy-five to eighty. Though, as instructors, we tend to favor smaller classes in general, increasing the number of students enrolled increases the amount of revenue from which a second instructor could be compensated. With proper advertising amongst students, the course will be very likely to reach maximum enrollment, given its controversial nature. Second, the course attracted some positive media attention, being featured on the Friendly Atheist blog and mentioned on various Christian news-sharing sites. Similar courses taught at other institutions could receive similar attention, which would, in typical cases, be of at least some small benefit for those institutions.

4.2 Preparation Time

The next challenge, which we very much expected, was the amount of preparation required for a course like this to run successfully. In order to keep us on task and make sure that we were each given equal time to present and respond to various arguments, we planned each lecture quite literally down to the minute. Furthermore, in order to make sure that neither of us were caught by surprise by any moves one of us might make during the discussion, we fully worked out in advance, together, each instructor's arguments, counterarguments, and responses. As such, we found ourselves putting in an average of two-to-four hours of prep time for each and every lecture, in addition to the normal time it would take to individually re-acquaint ourselves with the readings for the day. Since this prep time was, by necessity, collaborative, we found ourselves having to schedule it well in advance so that we could find sufficient time to meet either in person or over the phone. (Given the nuances of planning each lecture in the method described, email

proved simply inefficient.) By the end of the term, we had put in at least double the amount of time outside of the classroom as we had spent inside. Thankfully, the amount of prep time greatly decreased the second time we taught the course.

4.3 Sensitive Material

A third challenge, also expected, was handling the sensitivity of the material discussed, as well as the potentially polarizing nature in which it was presented. After all, it might be predictable that students would feel pressured, preached to, or otherwise put off by instructors openly discussing their own views (and being encouraged by those instructors to do so themselves), especially with a topic as controversial and central to their lives as the existence of God. Students might also be uncomfortable with instructors directly asserting that they take many of the students' beliefs about such matters to be false.

We addressed this challenge in several ways. First, we included the following disclaimer on our syllabus:

Throughout the quarter, we'll be discussing some controversial topics. Sometimes, people have very strong convictions regarding these topics. Nonetheless, it will be expected that everyone will engage with everyone else in a manner that indicates respect, thoughtfulness, and intellectual humility.

We then attempted to lead by example, treating each argument with care and treating each other (and every student) with the utmost respect. We also collaborated with each other rather frequently, with one instructor aiding the other by offering further clarification or insight into arguments *against* their own positions, and occasionally even suggesting stronger versions of such arguments. It was not uncommon for, say, Cray to interject during Brown's block of lecture time in order to strengthen a point in favor of the theistic position, or for Brown to follow up on Cray's interactions with students to help them further understand the atheistic arguments being offered. In doing this, we were able to show that even those who disagree strongly about fundamental matters can still cooperate in the search for truth and understanding.

To keep tension low and the atmosphere positive, we made it a point to remain friendly and amiable to one another, shaking hands, exchanging jokes and laughs, and, on a few occasions after particularly strong disagreements, giving each other hugs. We also injected (we think, at least) a healthy dose of comedy and theatre: on the first day of class, Cray and Brown dressed similarly, but with Cray wearing mostly black and Brown wearing mostly white. Both instructors would often wear hats: when Cray would help Brown strengthen a point in favor of theism, the instructors would often literally switch hats. This was Cray "putting on his theist hat." We believe this element of theater to

have been essential to the course, and the actual long-standing friendship of the instructors to have been essential to making the theater act convincing.

4.4 Lack of Neutrality

Given that we made our own personal and philosophical views public at the very beginning of the first day of class, we worried that students would question our ability to remain neutral while evaluating their work and assigning them grades. This was less of an issue the first time we offered the course, since we had two teaching assistants who handled all student evaluation and could remain neutral by keeping their views off the record. The second time the course was offered, we handled all of the grading ourselves, and put a lot of additional thought in to how to avoid this problem.

Our attempted solution was this: we simply and straightforwardly made the concern known to students, and emphasized to them that we would be grading based on their understanding of the material, rather than on which “side” they agreed with. They were assured, that is, that their grade would be based on their *work*, rather than on their *beliefs*. All student work was then graded blindly. In the end, there were no complaints from the students about a lack of neutrality, even from the most devoutly atheistic or theistic students.

4.5 Instructor-Instructor Interaction

One challenge we did *not* expect was that of settling disputes between us, as instructors. While we agreed about mostly everything (except, of course, about whether or not God exists), when it came to certain issues—how much time to allot to certain arguments, whether to address certain arguments at all, whether to allow extra credit, how students should be allowed to format their allowed “cheat sheets” during exams—we found ourselves with no tie-breaking procedures. This led to some disputes between us, especially when we were each particularly passionate about our own take on the dispute. In the end, we adopted a system in which we alternated “putting our foot down”: if Cray, for instance, insisted on one course of action, Brown would concede, on the condition that Cray would then be expected to concede the next time we reached a similar impasse. This solution was at least minimally adequate but not exactly pleasant; we are still brainstorming for better solutions to the problem.

Another unexpected aspect of our interaction was a product of the debate-style format: occasionally, each of us would feel the urge to *win*. This sometimes resulted in one or both of us going “off script,” and, on a few occasions, our back-and-forth going well beyond the

undergraduate level. In one particularly heated exchange, Cray thought of a new and somewhat obscure objection to the Kalam cosmological argument during Brown's block of lecture time, and presented it very quickly right at the very end of class, giving Brown very little time to cognize the objection, let alone respond. This led to the only truly heated exchange (after class) between us during either time the course was offered. We made up a few days later.

We addressed this problem by openly acknowledging it to one another, and reminding ourselves, individually and collectively, that we were not there to *win*, but to *demonstrate*. Specifically, we were there to demonstrate how to have friendly but rigorous arguments about the existence of God, in the face of robust disagreement. Reminding ourselves of this goal helped quell our occasional desires to be *right* rather than *instructive*—though, admittedly, during points of particularly strong disagreement, overcoming such desires took a good amount of self-control.

4.6 Student Participation

Another challenge which we did not expect was how to deal with low levels of in-class student participation. While we received a great deal of student questions during office hours and over email, and regularly had students approach us with questions and input before or after lecture, the amount of student interaction *during* class was lower than we had hoped for. We predict that this was a by-product of the debate-style format of the lectures, as well as the strict schedule we kept to maintain balance in the presentation of the material.

In neither of the times that we offered the course did we find a satisfying solution to this problem. We would attempt to leave extra time open at the end of the lecture, explicitly for discussion, but, unfortunately, given the sheer amount of material to be covered, this time was often sacrificed to keep the lecture on schedule. We would also repeatedly and explicitly encourage students to ask questions at any time that they had them, as well as to offer any input or insight they might have, but, aside from a few outgoing students, we still found the level of participation lower than would be desirable. We are, at this point, still brainstorming for solutions to this problem. An obvious solution would be to cover less material throughout the term and spread the discussions out more, but we have found it quite difficult to agree about which topics to skip or trim down. Another suggestion would be to follow a more formal debate format, removing some of the built-in informal flexibility and more strictly limiting our own speaking time as instructors so as to guarantee more time for student questions at the end. We are hesitant toward this suggestion, since we worry that

such strictures would compromise the spontaneity and liveliness of the course, which we take to be central to its unique atmosphere.

5. *Benefits of the “Debate-Style” Approach*

We found that there were several benefits to teaching the course on this model. Students were able to see their instructors as models for rigorous, friendly interaction.³ Additionally, given that Cray is primarily a metaphysician and Brown is primarily an ethicist, students were exposed to the material in a manner sensitive to a wide variety of philosophical issues. Vogler and Long (2003: 123) describe a similar experience, stating that “the combination of our different areas of expertise would provide students with a better, more inclusive learning experience than if either of us taught this course alone.” Their remarks ring true for our experience, as well.

We also found ourselves, as instructors, benefitting substantially from the course. We again echo others’ remarks—this time, those of Hohenbrink, Johnsten, et al. (1997: 298):

We were working to understand each other and our different ideas. Each of us at times had questions that helped us understand something new. We eventually trusted each other enough to take risks, expose our ignorance, and test our ideas before they were well formed. It was exciting rather than intimidating.

Our experience designing and teaching this course was very similar. Professionally and personally, we found the work put into this course, both inside and outside of the classroom, to be among the most demanding that we’ve ever done, as well as among the most fulfilling. We found that teaching the course in this manner helped us become both better teachers and better philosophers.

6. *Outcomes*

Both times, student reactions to the course were positive, and, in some respects, quite surprising. In this section, we discuss discursive student feedback and the results of informal polling amongst the students, both at the beginning and end of the course.

6.1 Student Feedback

At the end of each term, we solicited informal, discursive feedback from the students. We take this feedback to confirm that the course successfully met the main goal we started with: to lead by example and show that atheists and theists can engage in friendly but rigorous debate informed by both philosophy and science. Below are some samples of student feedback from the Spring 2012 section:

TEAM-TEACHING THE ATHEISM-THEISM DEBATE

- “I’m genuinely sad that this class is over. It’s incredibly interesting and refreshing to see 2 people with opposite views make their case articulately and genuinely, while maintaining perfect respect for the other opinion.”
- “I loved the mutual respect between the instructors. No one ever spoke in an accusing tone.”
- “[Cray]—you absolutely warped my opinion of a devout atheist. Usually atheists in my life have said that they ‘believe science, not religion’ and continually bash on the Christian right in politics to justify themselves. Your arguments have made me truly examine my faith and even though you cracked jokes at [Brown], I really know you have a deep respect for your opposition.”
- “If only more theists and atheists were like the two of you, there would be so much less ignorance and hostility in religious debates everywhere.”
- “This is the best class I have taken in my life. The structure of the course seems groundbreaking and extremely effective in keeping a respectful atmosphere amongst students. This class has had more of an impact on my life than any other class at Ohio State.”

Beyond asking for their views on how the course went, we also asked students about how the class affected their views on the subject matter. Below are some excerpts from the answers we received, also taken from the Spring 2012 section:

- “This class challenged me to look deep into my own beliefs and see why I had those beliefs. I discovered things about myself as well as believers and non-believers that I would not have known on my own.”
- “This class made me realize that there are very strong arguments for both sides. It also made me realize that I did not really (prior to this course) have any substantial reasons for my beliefs.”
- “This class didn’t have a strong effect on my views. I do feel better equipped to combat ignorant claims about religion though.”
- “Although my atheistic position has not changed, this course has driven me to treat these questions like any other philosophical question, and to, therefore, be more understanding of disagreement. In other words, it bridged the gap between thinking like a Dawkins to thinking like a good philosopher.”

6.2 Results of Informal Polling

We also engaged in some informal polling of the students' views throughout the course. On the first day of the course, we asked the students to anonymously answer the following question (an activity which, if it made them uncomfortable, they were welcome to opt out of):

How would you describe yourself?

- a. I believe in a God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good.
- b. I believe in some other conception of God/the gods/supernatural beings.
- c. I believe there is no God.
- d. I don't have a well-defined belief about God. / I am agnostic.⁴

We then tracked shifts in the views of each individual student over the course of the class. The results from the Spring 2011 section were as follows:

- Twenty-nine initially choose (a). At the end of the term, two among those twenty-nine switched to (b); one switched to (c); one switched to (d); and 25 remained unchanged.
- Six initially choose (b). At the end of the term, one among those six switched to (a), and five remained unchanged.
- Ten initially choose (c). At the end of the term, one among those ten switched to (b); one switched to (d); and eight remained unchanged.
- Seventeen initially choose (d); at the end of the term, one among those seventeen switched to (a); five switched to (b); six switched to (c); and five remained unchanged.

The net changes, then, were as follows: two fewer students opted for (a) at the end compared to the beginning of the course; seven more opted for (b); five more opted for (c); and ten fewer opted for (d). If we combine answers (a) and (b) under the umbrella term of *general theism*, call those who answered (c) *atheists*, and consider those who answered (d) *agnostics and others*, we see that, by the end of the term, we had ten fewer agnostics and others, five more atheists, and five more general theists, in total. The results were similar for the Spring 2012 section.

Also at the end of the term, we polled students about their reactions to specific arguments presented throughout the class. To keep the survey tractable, the options were quite coarse-grained: for each argument, they were to indicate whether they found it *not at all persuasive*, *a little bit persuasive*, or *very persuasive*. Of course, this does not tell us what exactly about the argument they found persuasive or unpersuasive, and does not differentiate between those who found, say, the logical

TEAM-TEACHING THE ATHEISM-THEISM DEBATE

problem of evil persuasive against the claim that the divine attributes as traditionally understood are incompatible versus those who found the argument persuasive against the claim that God exists—but, again, keeping the options simple kept the survey tractable while still providing some degree of interesting data.⁵ To get a rough measure of overall persuasiveness, we assigned 0 percentage points to an argument each time it was selected by a student as *not at all persuasive*; 0.5 points for being selected as *a little bit persuasive*; and 1 point for being selected as *very persuasive*. The results from the Spring 2011 section are as follows:

<u>Persuasiveness</u>	<u>Argument</u>
72%	Cosmological Teleological (“Fine-Tuning”) Argument
70%	Evidential Problem of Evil
62%	Free-Will Defense
55%	Kalam Cosmological Argument
54%	Soul-Making Defense
45%	Massive Irregularity Defense
44%	Biological Teleological Argument
36%	Logical Problem of Evil
35%	Causal/Explanatory Cosmological Argument
34%	Moral Argument
13%	Ontological Argument

We also asked the students the following, more general questions. The percentages indicate the response rates amongst students in the Spring 2011 section.

Overall, how do you evaluate the external evidence for/against God’s existence?

- It supports the existence of God (29%)
- It opposes the existence of God (28%)
- It is inconclusive (43%)

Is it rational to appeal to personal experiences when forming beliefs about God?

- Yes (64%)
- No (20%)
- Not sure (15%)⁶

If the evidence for/against God’s existence is inconclusive, what should we do?

- Believe in God for pragmatic reasons (11%)
- Have faith, and live as though God exists (46%)
- Believe that there is no God (16%)
- Withhold belief until the evidence settles the matter (26%)

The class was obviously divided over the external evidence (that is, arguments such as the cosmological and teleological arguments, the problem

of evil, etc.), with most students finding it inconclusive and the rest evenly split between those who thought it supported theism and those who thought it supported atheism. However, the class was generally in favor of the importance of religious experiences and pragmatic considerations. Again, the results were similar in the Spring 2012 section.

In light of the previous results, our final survey question led to quite a surprise:

Taking into account everything that was said throughout the class, who made the stronger case?

In Spring 2011, 41% thought Cray made the stronger case; 12% thought Brown made the stronger case; and 47% thought the debate was too close to call. In Spring 2012, 34% went with Cray; 13% went with Brown; and 54% thought it was too close to call.

This is somewhat puzzling: the results of the prior questions indicate an overall trend toward sympathy for theism, but, in both cases, the atheist was thought to have made the stronger case overall. In the interest of charity, we predict that this is the result of a number of theistically-oriented students finding Brown's overall approach toward his theism—a highly rational, scientifically-based theism—less convincing than Cray's approach, but going on to adopt theism over atheism for other reasons not discussed in the course.

7. Team-Teaching Other Philosophical Debates

While our course focused on a very narrow topic—the existence of God—it is worth considering whether this specific kind of team-taught approach, in which instructors openly declare their views and then conduct debate-style lectures, could be applied to other philosophical topics. What of debates such as, say, the foundationalism-coherentism debate, the Confucianism-Daoism debate, or the debate over the possibility of artificial intelligence?

Our prediction is that our model would work very well for some of these topics, and, unfortunately, quite terribly for others. Some marks of the atheism-theism debate that we think were central to the successful application of this style of teaching include the facts that (i) the majority of students have most likely already thought about the topic enough to have developed some sort of personal view, and (ii) the topic is, in many cases, eminently relevant to their lives and interests, as non-philosophers. These aspects of the topic, we believe, really helped to draw to students *into* the debate, rather than leaving them to act as mere spectators while their instructors argued about (by the students' lights) some esoteric topic. Debates that enjoy both of these features would be ideal for this sort of approach, and we predict that those that enjoy at least one or the other might be good candidates,

TEAM-TEACHING THE ATHEISM-THEISM DEBATE

as well. Debates that enjoy neither, we speculate, would most likely not work very well. We predict, then, that our approach would work well for debates such as those that could be had over the possibility of artificial intelligence, topics in contemporary political philosophy, various existential issues, and, with proper set-up, debates such as the Confucianism-Daoism debate. More specialized philosophical problems, such as the aforementioned foundationalism-coherentism debate, would probably not fare so well.

The make-up of the class is also quite relevant, however. If the foundationalism-coherentism debate is taught in this manner to a class of mostly philosophy majors who have some background in epistemology, it would have a far greater chance of success than if it were taught to students from a variety of majors, taking the course to satisfy a General Education requirement, with neither background nor interest in epistemology. For classes composed mostly of the latter sort of students, however, our approach is recommended only for courses focusing on the more accessible, familiar debates mentioned above.

It should be emphasized, however, that, no matter the topic of the course, the team-taught, debate-style approach will work ideally *only if* the instructors are themselves friendly and amiable, both to the other instructor and to the opposing position. An air of dismissiveness or intolerance would likely be quite off-putting to the students. Even worse, such an atmosphere would run the risk of instilling such attitudes and vices in them. Throughout both occasions that we taught this course, we would repeatedly remind the students that, despite the friendly and amiable tone, we genuinely disagree—if Cray is right, Brown is wrong and *vice versa*—with the hopes that they would see that serious disagreements can be had without resorting to polemics or condescension. Removing the amiability in the face of serious, objective disagreement would remove an essential aspect of the course.

Notes

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1. For the purposes of this paper and the course discussed herein, we take *theism* to be the belief that God exists and *atheism* to be the belief that God does not exist. We take *agnosticism* to be the lack of either of these beliefs.
2. For further discussion of team-teaching in general, including very helpful suggestions on procedures and instructor relationships, see Vogler and Long 2003, as well as Robinson and Schaible 1995, Winn and Messenheimer-Young 1995, Arnold and Jackson 1996, Bondy and Brownell 1997, and Bondy and Ross 1998.
3. For more on this notion, see Robinson and Schaible 1995.
4. In the 2011 version of the survey, option D read only “I don’t have a well-defined belief about God.” This was poorly worded on our part, as it did not capture the possibility of agnosticism, as it was intended to. As such, before the students filled out the survey, we verbally clarified to them that if they consider themselves agnostic, they should pick option D. The option was reworded, as above, in the 2012 version of the survey. In retrospect, we still find this wording of option D problematic, and, if either of us teach this version of the course again, we would give agnosticism its own, distinct option.
5. Thanks to an anonymous referee for calling for more clarification here.
6. Occasionally, as in this case and with a few of the results reported in the remainder of this section, the total does not add up to exactly 100%. This is merely an artifact of the results having been rounded to the nearest whole numbers.

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