

**PHI 459 Philosophy of Religion**

**Spring 2006**

Classroom: BEH 213  
Class Time: MW 1:00-2:15  
Instructor: Dr. Alan Rhoda  
Office: CDC 422  
Office Hours: MTWR 2:30-3:30 and by appt.  
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Course Description

The philosophy of religion is concerned primarily with (a) the concept of God, (b) the existence of God, and (c) the rationality of religious belief. These issues are related. First, (a) and (b) are related in that before we can meaningfully ask whether or not God exists, we need some idea of what kind of being we're talking about. What sorts of properties or attributes does God possess? What kinds of relations (if any) does God bear to other things? Second, (a) and (c) are related in that before we can meaningfully assess the rationality of religious belief we need to have some idea of the *content* of that belief. Finally, (b) and (c) are related insofar as the rationality of a particular religious belief depends on the availability (or lack) of cogent arguments for or against that belief. In this class we will look at both Western and Eastern religious traditions (though primarily Western) within the context of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion.

As a sub-field of philosophy, the philosophy of religion is of particular interest for at least a couple reasons. First, it is historically interesting because religion in one form or another has had a profound influence on the history of thought, and in particular philosophical thought. One simply cannot understand the history of philosophy, especially medieval and early modern philosophy, without doing philosophy of religion. Second, it is theoretically interesting because the concept of God is (with some variations) that of an absolutely fundamental ground or source for (nearly) everything else. As such, the existence or nonexistence of God has tremendous repercussions for metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

Course Texts

Louis P. Pojman, ed., *Philosophy of Religion*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Wadsworth, 2003)  
Keith E. Yandell, *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 1999)  
Various supplementary readings. Some on reserve. Some on the Internet.

Summary of Course Requirements

Exams (2).....	60%
Term Paper .....	30%
Participation .....	10%

Borderline grades will be decided at the discretion of the instructor on the basis of attendance, participation, general comportment, and progress throughout the course of the semester.

Exams

There will be a *take-home midterm* (two 3-5 page essay questions) and an *in-class essay final*. Each will be worth 30% of your final grade (60% total).

In the case of the midterm, I'll pass the questions out in class, and your typed responses will be due back to me a week later. While I encourage you to discuss the questions with each other, I expect you to write your answers by yourself. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the full extent the University allows* (an "F" for the exam, at least). You must not pass off someone else's work as your own, and you must fully document all your sources. Similar penalties apply to those who willingly allow their own work to be used by someone else.

With respect to the final, I'll give you a list of several questions to prepare for a week ahead of time and then randomly pick two for you to answer on the final.

Term Paper

You will also be asked to write an 8-10 page response paper on a **recent** (1996 or later) article in contemporary philosophy of religion. You will need to clear your article with me. Selected articles must have been published in a *peer-reviewed journal* (e.g., *Faith and Philosophy*, *Philosophia Christi*, *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, *Religious Studies*, *Philo*, etc.). I will not allow any two students to write a response paper to *the same article*, so it's first come, first served.

You may use other sources in constructing your response, but your paper must center around the selected article. Again, plagiarism will not be tolerated. All sources must be clearly and fully documented.

## Participation

Participation encompasses several things. First, you will be expected to come to class regularly, having read the assigned material and ready to participate in class discussions.

Second, on most class days I will assign one member of the class to *take notes* for that day. Everyone will be asked to do this *at least once* during the semester. Notetakers will be expected to distribute their notes and to present a 5-10 minute summary of the lecture at the beginning of the next class meeting.

Third, I will expect all of you to participate in a weekly *blog discussion*. The blog is accessible through my website (<http://www.alanrhoda.net>). Basically, once a week I will start a blog thread entitled something like “PHI 459 – Blog Discussion, Jan 30 – Feb 5” and get things started with a question or thought based on that week’s readings. I would like each of you to submit at least one *thoughtful* question or comment *per week*. Quality counts for more than quantity. I won’t have time to respond individually to each of your comments, so what I’m hoping to see is constructive interaction among you. For example, if one student is having trouble understanding something in the readings or has questions about some of the ideas it raises, I would really like it if others of you chime in with helpful responses. In addition:

1. To post you *will need to create an account* in the Blogger system (it’s free and easy—just click the comments link and follow the instructions). Your account must be registered under *your real name* (first name, last initial is fine).
2. All the comments will be moderated and approved by me before they appear in the blog. Rude or snide comments will be both censored and censured. It’s legitimate to critique one another’s arguments, but *ad hominem* attacks of any sort have no place in philosophical discourse, and such behavior will incur a very low participation grade. Conversely, constructive interaction with each other’s ideas will boost your participation grade.

## Excuses and Late Work

Time extensions or make up exams will be given only in the case of serious illness or other extenuating circumstances (like a death in the family). In *all* cases, appropriate documentary evidence (e.g., note from a doctor on official stationary, or a funeral program or bulletin) must be produced by the student. Any make up exams will have to work around *my* schedule. Contact me ASAP if you need an extension or a make up. The maximum extension or makeup deadline *for any reason* will be one week from the original due date / exam date.

## Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you should contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) located in the Reynolds Student Services Complex, room 137. You can contact the DRC at 895-0866 (Voice), 895-0652 (TDD), 895-0651 (Fax), or via the Internet at <http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/drc>.

## Schedule

Week	Topic	
	Monday	Wednesday
1	MLK Jr. Day (no class)	Class introduction
2	Ontological argument (Anselm & Gaunilo)	Ontological argument (Kant & Malcolm)
3	Cosmological argument (Aquinas & Edwards)	Cosmological argument (Clarke & Rowe)
4	Cosmological argument (Craig & Draper)	Teleological argument (Paley & Hume)
5	Teleological argument (Swinburne)	Teleological argument (Craig & Sober)
6	President’s Day (no class)	Problem of evil (Mackie & Rowe)
7	Problem of evil (Gannsele & Hick)	Skeptical theism & gratuitous evil (Hasker)
8	Providence and evil (Hasker)	God & morality (Plato & Adams) ( <b>midterm due</b> )
9	Spring Break (no class)	
10	God & morality (Nowell-Smith & Mavrodes)	The coherence of theism (Drange)
11	God & Time (Davis & McCann)	Foreknowledge & future contingents (Pike)
12	Foreknowledge & future contingents (reading TBD)	Non-Western perspectives (Yandell)
13	Non-Western perspectives (Yandell)	Non-Western perspectives (Yandell)
14	Miracles (Hume & Mackie)	Miracles (Swinburne & Purtill)
15	Evolution & naturalism (Plantinga & Sosa)	Rationality of religious belief (Clifford & Van Inwagen)
16	Rationality of religious belief (Pascal & Morris)	TBD ( <b>papers due</b> )
Final exam: Monday, May 8 at 1:00pm		

NOTE: This schedule is subject to revision at the discretion of the instructor.