

PHIL 20801.02 – Philosophy of Religion (Fall 2008)

Classroom: DeBartolo 240
Class Time: TR, 9:30–10:45 am
Instructor: Dr. Alan Rhoda
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Course Description

As a sub-field of philosophy, the philosophy of religion is of particular interest for at least two reasons. First, reflection on the existence and nature of the Divine has had a profound influence on the history of thought, especially philosophical and theological thought. One simply cannot understand the development of ideas from the pre-Socratics to the present without significant engagement with the philosophy of religion. Second, the topics covered in philosophy of religion are theoretically fascinating because the concept of God is, with some variations, that of an absolutely fundamental ground or source for (nearly) everything else. As such, how we think about God has tremendous repercussions for metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

In this class we will focus primarily on Western conceptions of God (as exemplified in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) in the context of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. The central issues before us will be (a) the concept of God, (b) the existence of God, and (c) the rationality of religious belief. These issues are tightly interconnected. Questions concerning (b) the existence of God depend on (a) the concept of God in that before we can meaningfully ask whether God exists, we need some idea of what sort of being we're talking about. Similarly, before we can assess (c) the rationality of religious belief we need to have some idea of (a) the content of that belief. Finally, (c) the rationality of religious beliefs, including belief in God, depends to a significant extent on (b) the availability (or lack) of cogent arguments for or against those beliefs.

Course Text

Michael L. Peterson, et al., (eds.) *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (3rd ed.).
Supplementary course readings will be available either on e-reserve or on the Internet.

Summary of Course Requirements

Exams (2)	60%
Research Paper	30%
Participation	10%

Exams

There will be a *take-home midterm* (two 4-5 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 matters with each other outside of class, 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 students who willingly allow their work to be copied. (In short, you will be held to the standards of Notre Dame's Academic Code of Honor.) With respect to the final, my plan is to give you a list of five or so questions to prepare for ahead of time of which I will randomly pick two for you to answer on the final.

Research Paper

You will also be asked to write an 8-10 page response paper on a *recent* (1998 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 *professional philosophy journal* (e.g., *Faith and Philosophy*, *Philosophia Christi*, *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, *Religious Studies*, *Philo*, etc.). No two students may 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 in accordance with the APA style guide (e.g., <http://library.austincc.edu/help/APA/>).

Participation

Participation encompasses several things. **First**, you are expected to come to class regularly and promptly. I will take role each class to track attendance. Every *unexcused* absence after the second will result in a half-grade reduction of your final grade (e.g., a B would become a B-). Tardiness will also be penalized. To be excused, an absence must be officially approved by the university (specifically, by the assistant vice-president for residence

life). **Second**, you should always come to class prepared, having read the assigned material and being ready to participate in class discussion. The readings in this course are typically short, but very dense, so make sure that you get an early start. To enforce preparedness, I reserve the right to have a “pop quiz” whenever I feel like it. If and when I should hold a pop quiz, it will be graded as pass/fail, and a failure will count as one-half of an unexcused absence. **Third**, your quality contributions to class discussion are essential for a highly successful class experience this semester. I suggest preparing some questions ahead of time as you are doing the readings. Obviously, you should always be respectful in your comments toward your fellow students and myself.

Schedule: This is a guideline subject to revision at my discretion. Page numbers are given for readings in the course textbook. Readings on e-reserve are followed by an (E). Internet resources are followed by an (I).

Week	Topic	
	Tuesday	Thursday
1	8/26: Course introduction	8/28: van Inwagen, “The Idea of God” (E)
2	9/2: Anselm, “The Classical Ontological Argument,” pp. 176-178 Gaunilo, “Critique of Anselm’s Argument,” pp. 178-181	9/4: Malcolm, “Anselm’s Two Ontological Arguments” (E) Plantinga, “A Contemporary Modal Version of the Ontological Argument,” pp. 181-194
3	9/9: Aquinas, “The Classical Cosmological Argument,” pp. 194-196 Aquinas, “The Five Ways” (I)	9/11: Reichenbach, “The Cosmological Argument,” pp. 197-209 Rowe, “An Examination of the Cosmological Argument” (E)
4	9/16: Craig, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument,” pp. 210-222 Mackie, “Critique of the Cosmological Argument,” pp. 223-231	9/18: Paley, “The Analogical Teleological Argument,” pp. 232-235 Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion” parts II, V (I)
5	9/23: Hume (cont.) Swinburne, “The Argument from Design” (E)	9/25: Betty & Cordell, “The Anthropic Teleological Argument,” pp. 235-246
6	9/30: Lecture on Evolution and Intelligent Design	10/2: Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” pp. 304-314 Ganssle, “The Problem of Evil” (I)
7	10/7: Rowe, “The Evidential Argument from Evil,” pp. 354-364 Hick, “The Soul-Making Theodicy,” pp. 341-354	10/9: Hasker, “The Skeptical Solution to the Problem of Evil” (E) Hasker, “Can God Permit ‘Just Enough’ Evil?” (E)
8	10/14: Plato, “Euthyphro” (I) midterm exams due	10/16: Adams, “Moral Arguments for God’s Existence,” pp. 246-256 Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality” (E)
9	Mid-term break (no class)	
10	10/28: Nowell-Smith, “Morality: Religious and Secular” (E)	10/30: Helm, “Providence—Risky or Risk-Free,” pp. 382-393 Basinger, “Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought,” pp. 393-401
11	11/4: Adams, “An Objection to Middle Knowledge,” pp. 402-407 Lucas, “The Vulnerability of God,” pp. 407-416 Cobb & Griffin, “God Is Creative-Responsive Love,” pp. 416-423	11/6: Hasker, “Providence and evil: Three theories” (E)
12	11/11: Boethius, “God is timeless,” pp. 155-158 Wolterstorff, “God is everlasting,” pp. 159-167	11/13: Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action,” pp. 149-155 Zagzebski, “Foreknowledge and Free Will” (I)
13	11/18: Drange, “Incompatible-Properties Arguments: A Survey” (I)	11/20: Hume, “The Evidence for Miracles Is Weak,” pp. 473-481
14	11/25: Swinburne, “Miracles and Historical Evidence,” pp. 481-487	11/27: Thanksgiving holiday (no class)
15	12/2: Alston, “Religious Experience as Perception of God,” pp. 45-54 Proudfoot, “Religious Experiences as Interpretive Accounts,” pp. 54-64	12/4: Martin, “Critique of Religious Experience,” pp. 65-78
16	12/9: Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” pp. 104-110 James, “The Will to Believe,” pp. 110-118	12/11: Pascal, “The Wager” (I) papers due
17	Final exam: Friday, December 19, 10:30 am	