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or by appointment

## **Philosophy 260: Philosophy of Religion** January term 2007

Religion is a crucial element of most human cultures, and shapes both how people understand the world and how they conduct their lives. However, religions differ greatly in their beliefs and moral teachings, and their origins are a bit mysterious. Further, some other modes of understanding the world seem to conflict with religion and religious claims.

In this course we will examine some major religious claims in particular, and religious modes of knowledge in general.

- Is there a God?
- If God knows what we will do, are we free?
- Is God responsible for the evil in the world?
- Can human reason show that religious claims are true, or that they're false?
- Is it reasonable to accept religious claims on the basis of religious authority (e.g. prophets and priests) or religious experience?
- Is God a moral authority? If so, why?

We will consider these questions and others like them.

The course will examine these questions primarily as they arise in a Christian context. However, many of these questions arise in the exact same, or a similar manner for other monotheistic religions such as Islam, Judaism, and at least some forms of Hinduism. Students with background in or familiarity with religions other than Christianity are encouraged to ask questions or offer comments about how the course material relates specifically to these traditions.

### **Assignments and grading**

Your grade in this course will be based on class participation, papers, a reading journal, and the final exam.

Discussion is an extremely important part of a philosophy class. In order to participate fully in discussion, be sure to read the assigned text carefully before coming to class. Then be ready to ask good questions and actively participate in the discussion as it unfolds.

Each class day (after the first) I will collect journal entries from each of you. Journal entries are an occasion for you to reflect on the texts you have just read, and the ideas they raise. For example, you may include thoughts of the form, "Author M seems to be saying this . . .", "I like the idea that . . .", or "Author N has to be wrong about X, because . . ." When writing about questions you have, avoid simply saying, "I don't understand." Rather, say what you do understand, and be specific about what is puzzling about the rest.

Each journal entry should be typed, at least 1/3 of a page (or more), double-spaced. You will be judged both on completing them and on their quality. I will read some of the entries for each day, as we go, to judge their quality, and return comments on them. For each student, I will read at least ¼ of your total journal entries, selected at random. I may read them all. You may skip up to three journal entries without penalty.

I will distribute at least four regular essay assignments, of which you must

complete at least three. Your three best essay grades will count toward your course grade. I strongly encourage you to write the first essay; philosophical writing is different from other writing, and you may not be satisfied with your first attempt. Essays will require you to engage critically with the course texts and their topics.

The essay assignments I distribute will be fairly specific; follow them carefully. I do encourage students to develop their own thoughts in writing. If you would like to write on a topic of your own choosing, you may describe the topic in a paragraph and submit it in writing, in advance, for my approval.

The final exam will include both short answer and essay questions. It will test both comprehension of the course texts and your ability to think critically about the texts and their themes. I will distribute a study sheet including sample exam questions in advance, to help you study. However, the best way to prepare for the exam will be to read carefully, participate actively in class, and re-read the texts in light of the discussion. *You must attend the final exam to pass the course; plan accordingly.*

One other element of the course is required but not graded. I will collect response cards at the end of each class day. You should write a line or two about an idea or question that stands out from that day's lecture and discussion. If you turn in fewer than sixteen cards, your course grade will be penalized by one step (e.g. B+ to B), and an additional step for each two fewer cards.

As in other classes at Randolph-Macon College, I will use the full range of letter grades.

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percentage of grade</i>
Class participation	10%
3 regular essays (about 4 pages each)	45% (15% each)
1 thought paper	5%
Journal	15%
Final exam (cumulative)	25%

### **Readings and course goals**

The texts in this course are different from many that you have read before, and a major goal of the course is to help you learn to read them for yourselves. Be prepared to read and re-read, in order to master them. Lecture and discussion in class is designed to help you digest the material in the texts, and to develop your own thoughts on the themes they discuss. Papers and tests will be based mainly on the texts themselves, not on what I say in class.

### **Communicating with me**

The best times to communicate with me are during, before and after class, and at my office hours. At a small college like this, you should plan to communicate with me in person for the most part, and to some extent by phone. Email is a wonderful technology, but it also has serious limitations. I may occasionally send information about the class by email. Please do check your email regularly. You are welcome to email me with questions that can be answered simply. I will usually respond within 24 hours, not counting weekends. For more complex matters, however, it will usually be much more effective to speak in person. These may include questions about the ideas in the course, about the meaning of particular passages, or ideas you have for your papers. You may email me about these, but do not be surprised if I give only a limited response by email, and invite you to come to my office for more.

**Course texts**

- Louis Pojman, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: an Anthology* (Wadsworth, 2003).
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Grand Inquisitor* (Frederick Ungar, 1981).
- *The Bible* (you may use or borrow from a friend any standard edition).
- additional readings to be distributed.

Please bring with you the relevant texts for each day's class.

**Detailed Reading Schedule**  
(subject to change)

Jan	8	M	Introduction	
	9	T	Kierkegaard on Abraham, Cosmological Argument I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genesis 15.1-6; 16.1-3, 15; 17.1-8, 15-19; 18.;1-4, 8-15; 21.1-7; 22.1-19</li> <li>• Kierkegaard, "Exordium"</li> <li>• PHR I-I.A.3 (intro, Aquinas, Clarke, Edwards)</li> </ul>	
	10	W	Cosmological Argument II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHR I.A.5-7 (Craig, Craig, Draper)</li> </ul>	
	11	H	Teleological Argument I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHR I.B.1-3 (Paley, Hume, Swinburne)</li> </ul>	
	12	F	Teleological Argument II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Betty &amp; Cordell, "The Anthropic Teleological Argument" (handout)</li> <li>• additional reading on fine-tuning argument (handout)</li> </ul>	
	15	M	Religious Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHR II-II.1, II.3-5 (intro, Selections, Freud, Broad, Pojman)</li> <li>• brief additional selections TBA</li> </ul>	
	16	T	Problem of Evil I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHR III-III.4 (Hume, Leibniz, Hick, Madden&amp;Hare)</li> </ul>	<i>essay 1 due</i>
	17	W	Problem of Evil II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHR III.5-6 (Mackie, Plantinga)</li> </ul>	
	18	H	Problem of Evil III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Grand Inquisitor</i></li> </ul>	
	19	F	Foreknowledge & Freedom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHR IV.B-IV.B.3 (Augustine, Pike, Plantinga)</li> </ul>	
	22	M	Faith & Reason I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PHR VII-VII.A.3</i> (incl. Flew et al., Scriven, Lewis)</li> </ul>	
	23	T	Faith & Reason II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PHR VII.B</i> (incl. Pascal, Clifford, James)</li> <li>• Judges 6:33-40; 1 Kings 18:17-40; 19:1-3, 9-18</li> </ul>	<i>essay 2 due</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark 5:38-43; 7:31-7</li> <li>• John 11:1-4, 14-15, 21-26, 39-44, 47-48</li> </ul>	
24	W	Faith & Reason III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selections from <i>Fides et Ratio</i> (handout)</li> <li>• <i>PHR</i> VII.D.1, VII.D.4 (Hick, Pojman)</li> <li>• news articles (handout)</li> </ul>	
25	H	Naturalistic Accounts of Religion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> I; II.19-21, 23; III.25, 27-28 (handout)</li> </ul>	
26	F	Religion & Ethics I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PHR</i> X-X.3 (Plato, Nowell-Smith, Mavrodes)</li> </ul>	<i>essay 3 due</i>
29	M	Religion & Ethics II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PHR</i> X.4-5, II.3 (Russell, Freud, Walker)</li> <li>• Durkheim (handout)</li> </ul>	
30	T	Religion & Ethics III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MacIntyre, "Which God?"; Stephen Smith selection (handout)</li> <li>• Matthew 25:31-46; John 13:3-15, 34-35; 15:1-5, 12-17; 17</li> <li>• 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Timothy 5:8; James 1:22-27; 1 John 4:7-21</li> </ul>	
31	W	Religious Pluralism I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PHR</i> IX-IX.2, IX.4 (Hick, Plantinga, Dalai Lama)</li> </ul>	
Feb 1	H	Religious Pluralism II, review and reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PHR</i> IX.3, IX.5 (Basinger, Runzo)</li> </ul>	<i>essay 4 due</i>
2	F	<i>Final Exam</i>	