



**PH 273 *Is Christianity True?* (3)  
Winter 2002**

**Instructor:** Terry Fach

**Office Hours:** T/Th 12:30-2:00

**Class Times:** Tues. and Thurs. 8:15 am

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**Office:** Fifth Floor

**Phone:** 571-2550, ext. 229

**Location:** Room Two

**Course Description**

This course guides students in critical study of some notorious problems in the philosophy of religion, with particular emphasis on theistic religions. Topics will be explored in lectures, and also through discussion of some current writing in the field of philosophical theology. PH 125 *Introduction to Philosophy* is a prerequisite for this class.

The format of this class is that of a senior-level philosophy course. Some of the time will be given over to lectures by the instructor. An equal (roughly) amount of class time will be devoted to the discussion of the writings of Alvin Plantinga, whose work addresses many different topics in philosophy of religion. Students will be expected to prepare adequately for class by reading appropriate materials and making contributions to discussion. Students will also contribute in the class through presentations of seminar essays.

**Course Objectives**

1. An improved, explicit understanding of the way in which philosophical and religious concepts and reasoning work;
2. An improved ability to consider critically, and yet sensitively, some of the assertions, assumptions, and arguments connected with theistic traditions; and
3. Improved general skills of thinking sensitively and yet critically about religion and similar subjects.

**Course Topics (Outline)**

The following is a chronological guide to the topics we will cover over the next 14 weeks. This is a rough estimate of our progress, and adjustments will be made as circumstances suggest:

1. Introduction to Philosophy of Religion (1 week): What is philosophy of religion? What is the relationship between faith and reason?

2. Theism and Rationality (2 weeks): What kind of being do theists believe in, and what makes believing “rational”?
3. Support for Theism (2 weeks): What are the traditional arguments for the existence of God? Are any of them good arguments?
4. Religious Experience (1 week): Could private experiences of God be good evidence that God exists?
5. Arguments Against God (2 weeks): How can belief in God be reconciled with the existence of evil and suffering?
6. Faith and Basic Belief (1 week): Does the idea of “faith”, or “basic belief,” make arguments irrelevant?
7. Science and Religion (1 week): In what ways could science and religion relate to each other?
8. Miracles and Life-After-Death (1 week)
9. Philosophy and Theological Doctrines (1 week)

### **Course Requirements**

**1. One Review Essay (30%)**

You will be asked to summarize and evaluate one of the articles by Plantinga. Length of this essay is 8 – 12 pages.

**2. One Seminar Essay (30%)**

Write an essay, between 8 - 12 pages in length on a topic selected from a list supplied by the instructor. One of these essays will be presented in class as a short seminar, and will be scheduled at a time when the essay topic is directly relevant to the week’s topic. Dates to be announced.

**3. A Take-Home Examination (40%)**

The exam question(s) will be given at the last class meeting, April 16, 2002.

### **Required Texts**

Textbooks required for this course are:

*Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), by M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach, and D. Basinger.

*The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, edited by James F. Sennett

Other reading and research materials may be utilised, and will be provided in the form of in-class handouts and “readings on Reserve” (in the Thomson Library).

### **Late or Incomplete Term Work**

Assignments are expected on the day that they are due. No term work can be submitted for credit after the last day of classes. Extensions will be considered depending on the merits of the excuse. No essay will be accepted after a due date unless approved in advance by the instructor.

### **Class Attendance and Preparation**

All students are expected to attend class regularly and to prepare for lectures and discussions. Students unable or unwilling to attend regularly or undertake this preparation cannot expect to do well in the course and should consider other options.

### **Office Hours**

I can be reached by phone (voice-mail) at Nazarene University College (571-2550 ext. 229). My office hours this term are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1 – 2:30 pm. If you cannot meet me during office hours, I can arrange to see you at another time that is mutually convenient. You can also reach me by e-mail: [terry.fach@nuc.edu](mailto:terry.fach@nuc.edu)

### **Grading Criteria**

It goes without saying that some of the grading done in a course like this depends on the critical judgement of the marker. That does not mean that the standards of good writing and argumentation are entirely a matter of individual preference. Part of what you will learn in a class like this one is the set of standards used by academics teaching in this discipline. If you have questions about what lies behind the assignment of a particular grade, or if the comments on an assignment leave you uncertain as to what you would need to do to improve it, please consult me and I will be happy to discuss the matter with you.

What follows is a rough guide to grading criteria used in this course:

An **A** essay or examination answer is free from most stylistic, technical and factual errors, demonstrates an excellent grasp of the subject matter, is exceptionally well-organized and well-argued, and exhibits a fair degree of originality (where that is required).

A **B** essay or examination answer is free from most stylistic, technical and factual errors, demonstrates a good grasp of the subject matter, is well-organized and well-argued beyond the level of mechanical repetition of text or lecture material and shows some promise of originality.

A **C** essay or examination answer contains some stylistic, technical or factual errors, demonstrates an average grasp of the subject matter, but in a repetitive and mechanical fashion, and exhibits some elementary organizational and argumentative ability but without any evidence of originality.

A **D** essay or examination answer contains excessive stylistic, technical or factual errors, fails to demonstrate a grasp of the subject matter in even a routine or mechanical fashion, is poorly organized and void of argument and originality.

The following chart matches letter grades with a brief description and percentages:

A+	Exceptional	96-100
A	Excellent	91-95
A-		86-90
B+	Very Good	82-85
B	Good	75-81
B-		72-74
C+	Satisfactory	68-71
C	Adequate	63-67
C-		60-62
D+		56-59
D	Marginal	50-59
F	Failure	49% and below