

RELG 215 PHILOSOPHY & THEOLOGY

Spring 2026
Augustana College

General Information:

- Instructor: Dr. Deke Gould
- Meetings:
 - Section 01: MWF 10:00am - 11:15am in Denkmann B2
 - Section 02: MWF 11:30am - 12:45pm in Evald 113
- Office Hours: WTh 2:00pm - 3:00pm, or by appointment in Old Main 224
- email: dekegould@augustana.edu

Required Texts:

- Rea & Pojman. *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, Seventh Edition*. Cengage. 2015. ISBN: 978-1-285-19732-6.
- Occasionally, additional required and optional materials will be made available on Moodle.

Course Description:

Through the use of philosophical analyses and argumentation in the rational support and criticism of doctrines that are central to theistic religions, this course will give students the opportunity to examine their theological commitments carefully and systematically. Does God exist? Why (or why not)? What are the attributes of God? How should God's (non-)existence matter to our lives? Having reflected rationally on their (lack of) faith in a divine being, students will come to a clearer understanding of what their (non-)religious commitments really involve, and thereby arrive at a better sense of who they really are. The course will be theoretical preparation for the immensely important practical task of living an authentic life – a life that best expresses one's genuine beliefs.

Learning Outcomes:

Augustana is committed to nine college-wide learning outcomes grouped under three categories:

INTELLECTUAL SOPHISTICATION — Understand, Analyze, Interpret

INTERPERSONAL MATURITY — Lead, Relate, Communicate

INTRAPERSONAL CONVICTION — Create, Respond, Wonder

In this course, we will attempt to achieve the following: **Understand** some of the major doctrines and theses concerning God and the Nature of God; **Analyze** some of the most important arguments involved in supporting and criticizing these doctrines; **Create** one's own version of some of these theses and arguments by investigating and comparing the views of the philosophers and thinkers to be studied; cultivate a sense of **Wonder** and continuing intellectual curiosity about the insights and ideas considered in this course with a view to **Responding** in a life lived in harmony with one's genuine beliefs.

Course Outcomes:

If you meet its requirements and expectations, by the end of this course you will achieve the following.

- Have an all-encompassing framework for thinking about theistic religion
- Understand the main concepts within that framework
- Know the most important analyses and arguments involving those concepts

- Be able to read and understand the structure and meaning of complex texts
- Be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of theses
- Be able to devise and attack arguments
- Be able to express your own ideas and analyses in clear and mature prose

- Satisfy the REF graduation requirement
- Satisfy an elective for the Religion major or minor
- Satisfy an elective for the Philosophy major or minor

Grading:

This is the breakdown by weight for the overall grade:

- In-class Discussion Participation: 20%
- Reading Quizzes: 20%
- First Short Essay: 10%
- Midterm Exam: 15%
- Second Short Essay: 15%
- Final Exam: 20%
 - Each portion is explained in more detail below.

In general, grades in this class reflect the following scale:

- 100-98%: A+, 97-93%: A, 92-90%: A-
- 89-87%: B+, 86-83%: B, 82-80%: B-
- 79-77%: C+, 76-73%: C, 72-70%: C-
- 69-60%: D
- 59-0%: F

General NO GADGETS Policy:

The only technology you are permitted to use (with some rare exceptions; see below) are physical books, physical paper, and a physical writing utensil. We will use each meeting in this class as an opportunity to exercise and strengthen our attention and focus; both of these are skills that are desperately needed in our world today, and can help to improve the quality of our lives. I have much, much more to say about this, but for now, you are aware that no electronic devices should be used in class. Thus, all of your texts need to be physical print copies (remember to print **double-sided**, if they aren't books you've purchased), and you will need to print all documents I share on Moodle and bring them with you to class. Students who violate this policy will be ejected from the classroom, and will earn no participation credit for that day.

In-Class Participation:

Classroom participation and discussion are essential to the proper function of any decent philosophy course. Thus, everyone in the class is responsible for all class meetings and students will be graded on their classroom participation. For most class meetings, I will record a point score for each student, ranging from zero to two points. If a student misses a class meeting (for any reason), the student will receive zero (out of two) points for that day. If the student attends a class meeting but contributes nothing to the discussion, the student will receive one (out of two) points for the day. If the student attends and positively contributes to class discussion, the student will receive two (out of two) points for that day.

Mature and respectful dialogue is crucial for any philosophy course to be successful. Thus, any student who engages in disrespectful behavior will be ejected from the classroom and will earn zero points for that day. To be clear, talking while others are talking, texting in class, or habitual tardiness (more than twice) count as disrespectful behavior.

Attendance:

You shouldn't miss class, since a significant portion of your grade depends on your active daily contributions to the dialogue. For more details regarding attendance, please consult the official attendance policy and guidelines for Augustana College here:

<https://www.augustana.edu/information-students/attendance-guidance> .

Reading Quizzes:

You are expected to complete the readings at least once *before* the first meeting, and then re-visit and re-read the texts throughout the rest of the week before the Wednesday and Friday meetings. The proper function of each class meeting will presuppose this regular preparation. In order to help you hold yourself accountable to this responsibility, I will administer a brief reading quiz about some central concepts from the readings assigned that week. Each quiz will be "open book/open note", but students will only have a very short (about 5 minute) amount of time to complete. Each quiz will be worth 5 potential points: a complete demonstration of proper preparation will earn 5 points, an adequate but incomplete demonstration will earn 4 points, and inadequate demonstrations will earn either 3, 2, or 1 point. Late or missing quizzes will not be accepted for credit; however, I will drop the two lowest quiz scores, in case of unavoidable absences.

Short Essays:

You will write essays defending your own arguments in response to the ideas we are studying in this class. Given the importance of using our own brains when exercising these central skills, we will host AI-free writing workshops in-class. Details will be given in class at least one week before these workshops. If the student misses class during scheduled essay writing days for a legitimate excusable reason, it is the student's responsibility to arrange a make-up writing session with the instructor within a week of the absence.

Midterm & Final Exams:

The exams for this class are in-class essay exams, which will cover the concepts and core arguments from the assigned readings and class discussions. More details (and a brief study guide) will be given in class at least one week before each exam. If the student misses class

during scheduled exam for a legitimate excusable reason, it is the student's responsibility to arrange a make-up exam with the instructor within a week of the absence.

Statement on Academic Dishonesty:

Everyone is expected to be familiar with the college's policy on academic dishonesty. I have no tolerance for cheating in my classes: **if someone is caught cheating in my class, that student will receive an F for the course, and a message will be sent to the Honor Council.**

Generic statement on the use of AI in this class: unless your instructor notes otherwise, all written work submitted in your classes is assumed to be your work, and not the product of an AI system. Suspicious cases will result in a one-on-one meeting between the student and the instructor, in which the student will demonstrate their understanding of the content or an explanation of the generation of the work. Cases of blatant use of AI in order to pass off its products as one's own **will count as plagiarism**, and the penalties listed above will apply. Further details will be discussed in class.

Statement on Accommodations:

If you have any need for any accommodations, please let me know by the end of the first week of the semester. Below is a common syllabus statement provided by the Office of Disability Services:

If you are a student who has a documented disability, or had academic accommodations in high school or at another institution of higher learning, you may be eligible for services. Services are coordinated through the ODS (office of disability services). Augustana College in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is committed to equity, access, and inclusion for all students. Please visit the ODS website <https://www.augustana.edu/student-life/residential-life/disability-services> for more information.

RELG 215 COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings scheduled below are required for the week listed, so students are expected to read the assigned texts before we meet, preferably more than once.¹ There are about 18 average pages of reading each of the 9 reading weeks: please budget your time accordingly.

Week 1 (Wed 4 Feb & Fri 6 Feb):

- logic and essay writing handouts (on Moodle)
- podcast: [Think \(KERA 12 November 2025\), "Everybody Can Read, But Nobody Does"](#)
- podcast: [On Point \(WBUR 11 August 2025\), "Does Using AI Dumb You Down?"](#)

Week 2 (Mon 9 Feb, Wed 11 Feb, & Fri 13 Feb): The Concept of God

- Selections from Ancient Greek Philosophers (p6-11)
- Tillich, "The Reality of God" (p48-54)
- McCann, "The God Beyond Time" (p90-103)
 - about 24 pages

¹ In general, you are expected to work for approximately 2 to 3 hours outside of class per week for each hour spent in class with your instructor. Thus, you should expect to devote approximately 7.5 to 11.25 hours per week outside of our class meeting time on work and preparation for RELG 215.

Week 3 (Mon 16 Feb, Wed 18 Feb, & Fri 20 Feb): The Concept of God

- Aquinas, “Is God’s Power Limited?” (p104-105)
- Augustine, “Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will” (p110-112)
- Plantinga, “God’s Foreknowledge and Human Free Will are Compatible” (p124-127)
 - about 9 pages

Week 4 (Mon 23 Feb, Wed 25 Feb, Fri 27 Feb): Traditional Arguments for the Existence of God

- Anselm, “The Ontological Argument” (p155-157)
- Kant, “A Critique of the Ontological Argument” (p158-161)
- Aquinas, “The Five Ways” (p164-165)
 - about 7 pages

Week 5 (Mon 2 Mar, Wed 4 Mar, & Fri 6 Mar): Review and Writing Workshop

- first short essay due on Friday 6 March

Week 6 (Mon 9 Mar, Wed 11 Mar, & Fri 13 Mar): Traditional Arguments for the Existence of God

- Rowe, “An Examination of the Cosmological Argument” (p167-166)
- Paley, “The Watch and the Watchmaker” (p198-200)
- Hume, “A Critique of the Argument from Design” (p201-206)
 - about 11 pages

Week 7 (Mon 16 Mar, Wed 18 Mar, Fri 20 Mar): Review and Midterm Exam

- midterm exam on Friday 20 March; a study guide for the midterm exam will be available by Monday 16 March

SPRING BREAK: no class Monday, 23 March - Friday, 27 March

Week 8 (Mon 30 Mar, & Wed 1 Apr): Evil and the Hiddenness of God

- Hume, “The Argument from Evil” (p232-236)
- Leibniz, “Theodicy: A Defense of Theism” (p237-242)
- Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence” (p256-263)
 - about 18 pages
 - *nota bene*: no class on Friday 3 April (Easter Break)

Week 9 (Wed 8 Apr, & Fri 10 Apr): Religion and Experience

- Alston, “Perceiving God” (p431-437)
- Hume, “Against Miracles” (p460-468)
- Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria” (p494-501)
 - about 23 pages
 - *nota bene*: no class on Monday, 6 April (Easter Break)

Week 10 (Mon 13 Apr, Wed 15 Apr, & Fri 17 Apr): Faith and Reason

- Pascal, “The Wager” (p572-573)
- Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” (p574-577)
- James, “The Will to Believe” (p578-586)
 - about 14 pages

Week 11 (Mon 20 Apr, Wed 22 Apr, & Fri 24 Apr): Review and Writing Workshop

- second short essay due Friday 24 April

Week 12 (Mon 27 Apr, Wed 29 Apr, & Fri 1 May): Religious Pluralism

- Hick, “Religious Pluralism and Ultimate Reality” (p637-644)
- Plantinga, “A Defense of Religious Exclusivism” (p645-659)
- Basinger, “Hick’s Religious Pluralism and ‘Reformed Epistemology’ --A Middle Ground (p660-666)
 - about 28 pages

Week 13 (Mon 4 May & Fri 8 May): Death and Immortality

- Plato, “Immortality of the Soul” (p676-680)
- Russell, “The Finality of Death” (p681-683)
- Baker, “Death and the Afterlife” (p693-709)
 - about 24 pages
 - *nota bene*: no class Wednesday, 6 May (Celebration of Learning)

Week 14 (Mon 11 May, Wed 13 May, & Fri 15 May): Review

- a study guide for the final exam will be available by Monday, 11 May

Week 15 (Finals Week)

- Final Exam Dates and Times:
 - Section 01:
 - Section 02:
 - Please double-check the registrar’s final exam schedule page to make sure this is accurate.