Syllabus
REL 352.01: Philosophy of Religion

Spring 2006
MW 2:15-4:05, Steiner 306

Prof. Tyler Roberts Steiner Hall 203
Office Hours: TTh 1-3 x-4472; robertst@grinnell.edu

Course Description
Traditionally, the philosophy of religion has dealt with topics such as the existence of God, the reality of evil, and the relationship between religion and science. It has understood its task as evaluating the plausibility of arguments for particular religious claims and beliefs. We will do things differently this semester. We will focus on the relationship of religious thought to religious practice or, more generally, to "spiritual" and ethical exercises and disciplines. We will consider how particular ideas and practices of thought and attention contribute to the formation of religious or spiritual selves; we will consider the various influences intentional practice, psychodynamics and social and political context have on the formation of such selves; we will consider the relationship between religious or spiritual practices and academic practices of reading, writing, discussion and attention.

Course Requirements and Grading
1) Class Participation (30% of final grade; 20% in class, 10% feedback groups):
The class will be conducted as a seminar. Although on occasion I will lecture for brief periods, discussion will be the focus of most class sessions. This means that a successful semester depends in large part on your attendance and your active participation in our discussions. More than two unexcused absences during the course of the semester will have a significant adverse effect on your final grade. You are expected to have done all the assigned reading for each class session and to come to class (with the readings in hand) having formulated specific questions and/or observations about the reading that you are ready to discuss in class. I will push you to be an active participant in class and blackboard discussions.

In some key ways, this course is an experiment. Accordingly, and as part of the experiment, I want your input into the course(reflection on assignments, discussions, dynamics) as we go along. At three points during the semester (see assignment schedule) I will ask you to gather in small groups outside of class to prepare a one page reflection/assessment of the previous three or four weeks of class. I will hand out a more detailed description of my expectations for this exercise early in the semester.

2) Papers (20%)
Three short papers will be due over the course of the semester. The first, due Feb. 2, will be on Rowan Williams's The Wound of Knowledge (2-3 pp.). The other two papers will be presented in class and will review some significant aspect of the previous class in a way that connects it with the current day's readings. The papers will be made available to the class via email by 5:00 p.m. on Sunday (for Monday's class) and on Tuesday (for Wednesday's class). These papers will start on Feb. 13 and go through April 26. Each student will be responsible for two such papers.

3) Blackboard Work (10%)
During the first three weeks of class, you will be expected to post on our Blackboard site a question or observation regarding some central aspect of the reading for the upcoming class. Your posting should go up by 10:00 pm the night before class and you should read all the postings before coming to class. Between Feb. 13 and April 26, you also will post before each class but your posting will focus on some aspect of the student paper to be presented in the next class.
4) Final Paper (40%)
A final paper of 15-20 pages will be due on Thursday, May 18. The paper will focus on one of the major texts or figures discussed in class: Goodchild's Capitalism and Religion, Foucault, Butler's Giving an Account of Oneself, Saba Mahmood's Politics of Piety, Eric Santner's On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life, or William Connolly's Pluralism. In order to facilitate the writing of the paper and to assure some feedback during the process, the following deadlines will be observed.
April 13: One paragraph project statement due.
April 27: Detailed outline due.
May 4: Five page thesis paper due. (Hand in two copies, one for me and one for a student reader)
May 11: Responses to thesis papers due.
May 18: Final paper due.

Class Schedule
*indicates Blackboard reading

Week 1
Jan 23: Philip Goodchild, Capitalism and Religion, pp. 1-9
Rowan Williams, The Wound of Knowledge, pp. 11-24
Amy Hollywood, "Practice and Belief"*
John Cottingham, The Spiritual Dimension, 1-17

Week 2
Jan 30: The Wound of Knowledge, chaps. 4-5
Peter Brown, "Desert Fathers," from The Body and Society*
Feb 1: Friedrich Nietzsche, Prefaces from Human all too Human (2), Daybreak, and The Gay Science*
Tyler Roberts, "Nietzsche and Asceticism" from Contesting Spirit*
James Edwards, The Plain Sense of Things, 1-58
Feb. 2: 2-3 pp. paper on Rowan Williams due by 5:00 pm.

Week 3
Feb 6: The Wound of Knowledge, finish
The Plain Sense of Things, 59-110
Feb 8: Stanley Cavell, "Words," from The Senses of Walden*
Henry David Thoreau, Walden, "Economy" through "Reading"*
Feedback Paper #1

Week 4
Feb 13: Cottingham, The Spiritual Dimension, pp. 37-57, 102-126
Michael McGhee, Transformations of Mind, pp. 8-38*
Feb 15: Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality II, 1-32 and "On the Genealogy of Ethics"*
Pierre Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life"*

Week 5
Feb 20: Foucault, "The Ethics of a Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom"*
James Bernauer, "Foucault's Philosophy of Religion" *
Feb 22: Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics"*
Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *

Week 6
Feb 27: Jeremy Carrette, "Body and Belief"*
Claire Colebrook, "Ethics, Positivity, and Gender"*
March 1: Mark Vernon, "I am not what I am"*
David Halperin, "The Queer Politics of Michel Foucault"*

Week 7
March 6: Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself, pp. 3-83
March 8: Giving an Account of Oneself, pp. 84-136
Feedback Paper #2

Week 8:
March 13: Saba Mahmood, Politics of Piety, pp. 1-117 (skim 40-117)
March 15: Politics of Piety, finish

Week 9
April 3: Eric Santner, On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life, 1-45
April 5: On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life, 47-129

Week 10
April 10: On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life, 131-146
April 12: Amy Hollywood, "Jacques Lacan, Encore" from Sensible Ecstasy*
Slavoj Zizek, "From Law to Love...and Back," from The Puppet and the Dwarf*
Cottingham, The Spiritual Dimension, pp. 58-78
April 13: One paragraph project statement due.

Week 11
April 17: Tim Dean, "Lacan and Queer Theory"*
Slavoj Zizek, "Subtraction, Jewish and Christian," from The Puppet and the Dwarf*
April 19: Cottingham, 127-149
Rowan Williams, "The Suspicion of Suspicion"*
Feedback Paper #3

Week 12
April 24: Philip Goodchild, "Piety" and "Experience" from Capitalism and Religion*
Edwards, The Plain Sense of Things, pp. 110-194
April 26: Cavell, "The Uncanniness of the Ordinary" and "The Interminable Shakespearian Text"*
Martha Nussbaum, "Love's Knowledge"*
April 27: Final Paper Outline Due

Week 13
May 1: William Connolly, Pluralism, pp. 1-92
May 3: Connolly, Pluralism, pp. 93-170
Cottingham, The Spiritual Dimension, pp. 150-172

Week 14
May 8: Goodchild, "Awakening" and "Conclusion" from Capitalism and Religion
May 10: Concluding Discussion
May 11: Responses to thesis papers due

May 18: Final papers due.

Texts Available in Bookstore
Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself
William Connolly, Pluralism
John Cottingham, The Spiritual Dimension
James Edwards, The Plain Sense of Things
Saba Mahmood, Politics of Piety
Eric Santner, On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life
Rowan Williams, The Wound of Knowledge

Readings Available on Class Blackboard
James Bernauer, "Foucault's Philosophy of Religion"
Peter Brown, "Desert Fathers," from The Body and Society
Jeremy Carrette, "Body and Belief"
Stanley Cavell, "Words," from The Senses of Walden
-------"The Uncanniness of the Ordinary"
-------"The Interminable Shakespearian Text"
Claire Colebrook, "Ethics, Positivity, and Gender"
Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics"
Tim Dean, "Lacan and Queer Theory"
Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality II, 1-32
-------"On the Genealogy of Ethics"
-------"The Ethics of a Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom"
-------"What is Enlightenment?"
Philip Goodchild, selections from Capitalism and Religion
Pierre Hadot, "Philosophy as a Spiritual Practice"
David Halperin, "The Queer Politics of Michel Foucault"
Amy Hollywood, "Practice and Belief"
-------"Jacques Lacan, Encore" from Sensible Ecstasy
Michael McGhee, Transformations of Mind, pp. 8-38
Iris Murdoch, "On God and the Good"
Martha Nussbaum, "Love's Knowledge"
Friedrich Nietzsche, Prefaces from Human all too Human (2), Daybreak, and The Gay Science
Tyler Roberts, "Nietzsche and Asceticism" from Contesting Spirit
Henry David Thoreau, Walden, "Economy" through "Reading"
Mark Vernon, "I am not what I am"
Rowan Williams, "The Suspicion of Suspicion"
Slavoj Zizek, "From Law to Love. . . and Back," and "Subtraction, Jewish and Christian," from The Puppet and the Dwarf