

**St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of Philosophy**

Syllabus

Fall Term 2019

Course: PHIL 230J – GOD AND PHILOSOPHY: Section 001

Instructor: Professor Nikolaj Zunic

Class Times: 10:00 am – 11:20 am on Mondays and Wednesdays

Class Location: SJ1 3016

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays: 9:30 am – 10:00 am and 2:30 pm – 3:30 pm;
and by appointment: please e-mail the professor.

Required Text

Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
[ISBN 978-0-19-875194-6]

Course Description

Does God exist? Can God's existence be proven? What is God's essence? What is the human being's relationship to God? What is faith? Is it possible to know God? Is God-talk meaningful and coherent? Does God have a rightful place in philosophical discourse? These are some of the many questions and problems that will be investigated in PHIL 230J: GOD AND PHILOSOPHY this term.

As the title of the course suggests, we will be exploring the relationship between God "and" philosophy, generally speaking, not simply a *philosophical concept of God*. The emphasis should be placed on the conjunction which signifies a relation. To be sure, the reality of God is much greater than what is conceived within the parameters of philosophy alone. Blaise Pascal famously distinguished between the "God of the prophets" and the "God of the philosophers". Bearing this in mind, we will endeavour to investigate the full reality of God, rather than merely what philosophers consider God to be.

Therefore, the *object* of our concern in this course will be the reality of God taken in its broadest sense. However, the method of our inquiry will be philosophical. Philosophy is a discipline of

rational inquiry that aspires to a comprehension of the whole of reality. It takes its point of departure from reason and aims to justify its conclusions through the use of rational argumentation. Furthermore, philosophy values clarity of thought, analytic rigour, and the quest for knowledge. The reality of God, by contrast, can be approached in many different contexts and in various ways:

- From the perspective of religion, God is worshipped in rituals, rites, and devotional practices.
- From the perspective of mysticism, God is the object of an intimate, immediate and usually ineffable personal experience.
- From the perspective of theology, God is scrutinized rationally, but on the premise of faith and divine revelation which is God's self-disclosure to humankind.

Given the plurality of approaches to God's being, a philosophical orientation towards God must be cognizant not only of the uniqueness of its own perspective, which is a rational one without the necessary presupposition of faith, but also its limitations and deficiencies. To this end, we will attempt to assess both the value and the shortcomings of a philosophical inquiry into God.

Since the primary focus in this course is God and not religion as such, we will not be surveying the history of religions and the different cultural and religious conceptions of the divine. Moreover, this course presupposes a theistic conception of the ultimate reality. What this means is that the proper subject of this course is God, rather than some other term or concept to designate what philosophers call the highest or supreme being. Theism is a doctrine that maintains that the ultimate reality is an individual who is signified by the term "God" (*Theos, Deus*) and is believed to have certain attributes (e.g. intelligence, power). The very notion of theism is an interesting one since it is greatly determined by history, language, culture and religion. It challenges philosophy to conceive of the ultimate reality in specific ways and shows how philosophy is dependent on sources external to it in order to speak about and conceptualize the divine.

A variety of authors and perspectives will be featured in this course, both theistic and atheistic. The course text is an excellent anthology of readings with explanatory essays: Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*. This is an outstanding compilation of classical and contemporary philosophical writings on the topic of God.

There is no official doctrinal standpoint in this course with respect to the question of God. All rationally coherent and defensible perspectives will be entertained seriously. In short, the fundamental goal is to examine the topic of God philosophically so that we are all better informed and enlightened about what human beings have thought from time immemorial to be the most important and enduring reality.

Format of the Course

This is a lecture course and as such the professor will discuss the material contained in the readings and will expand on the subject-matter in his lectures. However, students are strongly encouraged to ask questions and to participate in class.

Objectives

- To examine rationally various arguments and perspectives on the topic of God.
- To explore philosophy's engagement with the subject of God.
- To think critically about the assumptions and views prevalent in our contemporary world regarding the question of God.
- To develop one's own philosophical conception and understanding of God.

Schedule

The following is a schedule of the classes for this course. The readings which will be discussed in each class are listed. Students are strongly advised to read the prescribed material before each class so that the lectures are more readily understood and pertinent questions may be posed.

Note: This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change.

WEEK 1:

September 4: Introduction to the course.

Philosophy and Religious Belief

WEEK 2:

September 9 and 11: Thomas Aquinas, "Faith and reason in harmony", 25 – 30.
 W. K. Clifford, "The ethics of belief", 31 – 35;
 Antony Flew, "The presumption of atheism", 36 – 41.

WEEK 3:

September 16 and 18: Alvin Plantinga, "Religious belief as 'properly basic'", Parts 1- 4, 42 – 94.
 D. Z. Phillips, "Grammar and religious belief", 108 – 114.
 Norman Malcolm, "The groundlessness of religious belief", 115 – 122.

The Problem of God-Talk

WEEK 4:

September 23 and 25: Augustine of Hippo, "How believers find God-Talk puzzling", 141 – 142;
 A. J. Ayer, "God-Talk is evidently nonsense", 143 – 146;
 Richard Swinburne, "God-Talk is not evidently nonsense", 147 – 152;
 Antony Flew, "Death by a thousand qualifications", 153 – 155.
 Thomas Aquinas, "One way of understanding God-Talk", 156 – 167.

Cosmological Arguments for God's Existence

WEEK 5:

Sept 30 and Oct 2: Anselm of Canterbury, "A concise cosmological argument from the eleventh century", 186 – 187;
 Thomas Aquinas, "A thirteenth-century cosmological argument", 188 – 190;
 John Duns Scotus, "A fourteenth-century cosmological argument", 191 – 193;
 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "A seventeenth-century cosmological argument", 194 – 195.

WEEK 6:

October 7: Herbert McCabe, "A modern cosmological argument", 196 – 201.
 Paul Edwards, "Objections to cosmological arguments", 202 – 212.
 J. L. Mackie, "More objections to cosmological arguments", 213 – 229.

October 9: **TEST #1**

WEEK 7:

October 14: Thanksgiving Day – No Classes
 October 15-18: Reading Week – No Classes

Design Arguments for God's Existence

WEEK 8:

October 21 and 23: Thomas Aquinas, "Is the world ruled by providence?", 251 – 252;
 William Paley, "An especially famous design argument", 253 – 259.
 David Hume, "We cannot know that the world is designed by God", 260 – 270;
 Immanuel Kant, "The limits of design arguments", 271 – 273.

ESSAY #1 DUE ON OCTOBER 21

WEEK 9:

October 28 and 30: R. G. Swinburne, "God, regularity, and David Hume", 274 – 285.
 Robert Hambourger, "Can design arguments be defended today?", 286 – 300.

Ontological Arguments for God's Existence

WEEK 10:

November 4 and 6: Anselm of Canterbury, "Anselm argues that God cannot be thought not to exist", 311 – 312;
 Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, "Gaunilo argues that Anselm is wrong", 313 – 317;
 Anselm of Canterbury, "Anselm replies to Gaunilo", 318 – 326.

WEEK 11:

November 11: Immanuel Kant, "A classic repudiation of ontological arguments", 337 – 341.
Alvin Plantinga, "A contemporary defence of ontological arguments", 342 – 352.

November 13:

TEST #2

God's Omnipotence**WEEK 12:**

November 18 and 20: Thomas Morris, "A modern discussion of divine omnipotence", 402 - 414.
Thomas Aquinas, "Why think of God as omnipotent?", 415 - 421.
Richard Swinburne, "Miracles and laws of nature", 422 – 429;
David Hume, "Why we should disbelieve in miracles", 430 – 435.

God's Knowledge**WEEK 13:**

November 25: Thomas Aquinas, "Why ascribe knowledge to God?", 446 – 455.
Nelson Pike, "Problems for the notion of divine omniscience", 465 – 472.

God's Eternity

November 27: Thomas Aquinas, "Why call God 'eternal?'", 482 – 484;
Elenore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "A modern defence of divine eternity", 505 – 518.
Paul Helm, "A different modern defence of divine eternity, 519 - 530.

God's Simplicity**WEEK 14:**

December 2: Thomas Aquinas, "A classic defence of divine simplicity", 539 – 544;
Thomas V. Morris, "Problems with divine simplicity", 545 – 548.
Brian Davies, "A modern defence of divine simplicity", 549 – 564.

Final Class. Discussion about the final exam.

ESSAY #2 DUE

Assignments

1. **Tests:** There will be two in-class tests based on the content of the readings and lectures. The tests will not only assess one's understanding of the course material, but will also be an opportunity for each student to express his or her own positions and perspectives on the issues discussed in the course. The format for each test will be two questions which will require reflective, essay responses. Each test is worth 15% of the final grade.
2. **Essays:** There will be two essays assigned in this course. Each essay is worth 20% of the final grade and is expected to be 5 – 8 double-spaced pages in length. The instructions for these essay assignments will be explained in detail in class.
3. **Final Examination:** A comprehensive examination that will assess your understanding of the ideas and doctrines studied in the course which will take place during the normal university exam period at the end of the term. The exam is worth 30% of the final grade.

Grading Scheme

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE – DATE SCHEDULED	VALUE
Test #1	October 9, 2019	15%
Test #2	November 13, 2019	15%
Essay #1	October 21, 2019	20%
Essay #2	December 2, 2019	20%
Final Examination	Scheduled during university exam period: Dec. 6-21, 2019	30%

Course Policies

1. **ATTENDANCE:** Students are expected to attend class regularly.
2. **CLASS NOTES:** It is crucial to take complete notes in class. It is the student's responsibility to record relevant and important information which is discussed in class. Students will be assessed on the lecture material which may not necessarily be contained in the readings. Furthermore, the professor's lecture notes will not be made available for copying. If you are absent from class please contact a classmate for the lecture notes.
3. **WATERLOO LEARN SITE:** This course has a Learn site. The instructor will post all assignments and instructions to the site. However, hard copies will also be provided in class. The instructor will use the Learn site sporadically, usually to give information that is useful and relevant to the course. Moreover, any important announcements will be communicated on the site. Students should check in with Learn regularly to keep abreast of course developments.
4. **DUE DATES:** The essays are due at the beginning of class on the dates given above.
5. **LATENESS PENALTY:** The penalty for late assignments is 3% deducted from the grade of the paper for each weekday that the paper is late.
6. **ABSOLUTE DEADLINE:** The maximum allowable amount of time for submitting essays beyond the due date is one week.
7. **NO MAKE-UPS:** The tests and quizzes must be written when they are originally administered in class. No make-up tests and quizzes will be permitted. An exception to this rule will be made if a student misses a test or quiz because of a medical condition, such as an illness, or because of some other serious reason, such as a death/funeral. In such cases proper documentation must be presented to the instructor which proves that the events in question actually took place (e.g. an official document from a physician or a death certificate or a funeral notice).
8. **EXTRA HELP:** If you are having difficulties in this course and are concerned about your performance, it is your responsibility to communicate these concerns to the professor in a timely fashion. The professor is willing to meet with students during office hours to discuss course material. Do not wait until the course is over to contact the professor about your final grade!
9. **POLITE BEHAVIOUR:** Students are expected to be courteous and civil in their behavior both in and outside of class. Unruly and rude behavior will not be tolerated.
10. **E-MAILS:** When you communicate with the instructor by means of e-mail be sure to use proper etiquette and a formal style of writing. For example, no e-mails with the salutation "Hey!" (a very popular opening for university students). Moreover, you should write in a legible and grammatically correct manner. Any correspondence which is vulgar, informal, or replete with spelling and grammatical mistakes will not be answered.

11. **LAPTOPS, CELLPHONES, TABLETS:** It is desirable that a proper pedagogical and learning atmosphere be created in the classroom. Therefore, it is requested of all students that various technologies not be used during the class. These include laptop computers, cellphones, tablets, and other devices. Any exceptions to this rule will be made on a case by case basis. For example, if you are registered with AccessAbility Services and you require the use of a laptop to take notes, an accommodation can certainly be made for you. But please do see the professor about any such request.

If you habitually and inappropriately use your cell phone or computer in class, be prepared to have the instructor speak to you about this.

Important Information

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo (AFIW) are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Academic Integrity Office (UW): A resource for students and instructors.

<https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the **St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline:** https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCApproved.pdf

For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to **University of Waterloo Policy 71 - Student Discipline:**

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read the **St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances:**

https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCApproved.pdf

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read the **St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Appeals:**

https://www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCApproved.pdf

Note for Students with Disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office (<https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/>), located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.