



ST. JEROME'S UNIVERSITY

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo

Department of Philosophy

PHIL 285J Winter 2023

Great Christian Thinkers: Aquinas on God

10:00-11:20MW, SJ1 3027

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Bruno Tremblay
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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00am-2:00pm
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Official calendar description: "An introduction to and examination of the thought of one important figure of Christian philosophy, such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, or Kierkegaard. The choice of the philosopher studied varies from term to term."

The course this term consists in a close reading of some of the most important passages from Aquinas' *Sum of Theology* (often called simply "the Summa", in English) that treat in a philosophical manner the question of God's existence and that of His nature. Since the question of God's existence is both more fundamental and less multifaceted than that of what He is, we will put a little more emphasis on the former and will examine it relatively more exhaustively.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, the student should be able to:

- understand and explain how a philosophical treatment of the topic of God differs from that of theology;
- understand and explain some of the challenges posed by the problem of proving that God exists;
- understand and explain how Aquinas tackles the problem of rationally proving God's existence in general and the five specific ways in which he attempts to do so in his Summa;
- understand and explain some of the results of the inquiry into what God is that he conducts in the Summa; and
- appreciate better the importance, complexity and value of a philosophical examination of the question of God.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The required readings are essentially *Sum of Theology*, I, q.1-2 (on theology and how it differs from philosophy and on whether God exists), and chosen excerpts from *ibid.*, q.3-22 (on what God is). A few additional complementary readings from other sources may also be added during the term. All course readings will be provided for free, on LEARN.

After each class, a message will be posted on LEARN so as to let students know what reading must be completed before the following lecture.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

The course evaluation breakdown is as follows:

- Ten short quizzes (10 x 2% = 20% of final grade), lasting approximately 5 to 10 minutes each and written with no aid. **These quizzes will be given throughout the semester and without warning.** Their aim is to verify the students' completion of the reading assigned at the end of the previous class. (N.B. There will actually be about 12 such quizzes. Only the best 10 results will be retained. **This also allows for any quiz missed due to illness or any other valid reason, for which there will therefore be no make-up quizzes.** Should a student miss more than 2 quizzes for a legitimate and documented reason, however, make-up quizzes may be arranged.)
- An in-class midterm (worth 25% of final grade), to be held on Wednesday March 1st. It is to be written without aid, will last for the whole period, will consist in one or a very small number of questions requiring fully-developed answers and will concern the material covered up to that point.
- A term paper (worth 25% of final grade), to be handed in by Monday April 10th, at noon. Detailed guidelines for the term paper will be distributed before reading week.
- A final exam (worth 30% of final grade), to be held during examination period, at a date/time set by the UW registrar's office. It is to be written without aid, will last for 2.5 hours, will consist in a very small number of questions requiring fully-developed answers and will concern the material covered during the whole term.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Given the difficulty of the material and the fact that this course is taught for the first time, the following schedule is vague and necessarily very tentative:

Introduction: the problem of God in the history of philosophy; Aquinas as philosopher; the Summa (Week 1)

Part 1: What theology is and why and how huge sections of a work called "Sum of Theology" can concern and be of interest to philosophy (Week 1)

Part 2: Aquinas' general approach to the problem of proving God's existence (Week 2)

Part 3: Aquinas' "Five Ways" (Weeks 3-7)

Part 4: A few important elements of Aquinas' views on what God is (Weeks 8-12)

Conclusion (Week 12)

What we will cover more precisely in Part 4 will depend a lot on how much time we will need for Parts 1, 2 and especially 3, and on whether the above schedule for those parts is realistic.

COVID CONTINGENCY PLAN

If one or some in-person classes are to be cancelled by the university because of COVID, the lecture or lectures will be recorded and posted on LEARN by the instructor and students will be able to view them asynchronously. In such a scenario, any planned in-person evaluation (test, final exam, etc.) that has to be cancelled will also take place online, on LEARN.

If a student needs to self-isolate and miss in-person classes as a consequence, it is their responsibility to reach out to fellow students or to the instructor if they want to know what was

covered in class during their absence, just as for any other absence.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

For important dates about the beginning and end of term, holidays, reading week, course dropping deadlines, make-up class days, etc., see <https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/important-dates/list>

POLICY ON LATE WORK, MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, AND MAKE-UP TESTS

Concerning missed quizzes, see, above, “Course requirements and assessments”.

Make-up tests (or some other analogous solution) will be set up for students with valid, documented reasons and in agreement with University of Waterloo policies.

A late penalty of 10% (i.e. 2.5 marks) a day will be deducted on late term papers, unless some different deadline had been previously granted to a given student on the basis of justified, documented and exceptional circumstances.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.

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](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome’s Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information. 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 instructor, 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](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome’s University Policy on [Student Appeals](#).

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, 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 AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.