



Department of Philosophy,
University of Notre Dame

PHIL 20801 // Philosophy of Religion

Fall 2025

Instructor: John William Waldrop
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Meeting Days: Tues & Thurs
Section 2 Time: 9:30am-10:45am
Section 2 Room: Coleman Morse 243
Section 3 Time: 11:00am-12:15pm
Section 3 Room: Main Building 404

Course description: This course will examine principal questions in the philosophy of religion relating to the nature and existence of God, religious beliefs, religious experience, divine hiddenness, religious pluralism and exclusivism, immortality, the relationship between God and ethics, and other questions.

Student Responsibilities: To be successful in this philosophy course, students should attend all lectures prepared to actively participate in discussions; meticulously complete readings before class to enable productive dialogue; thoroughly review material in preparation for exams; and submit assignments on time while following provided format guidelines:

- Carry out the one practice exercise and bring the resulting work to class on the listed due date.

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- Submit short papers to me by 11:59pm on the listed due date.
 - Schedule a 20-minute slot in the week of October 13th for an oral exam. Sign ups will take place during the prior week. Arrive at the appointed time and take the exam.
 - Schedule a 20-minute slot during exam week for an individual oral exam. Sign ups will take place during the last week of classes. Arrive at the appointed time and take the exam.

Adhering to these expectations and procedures will lead to an enriching semester.

Course Materials: Most of the readings for the course will be from the following required textbooks:

1. Anselm of Canterbury, *Basic Writings*. Translator: Thomas Williams (Hackett)
2. Augustine of Hippo, *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translator: Thomas Williams (Hackett)
3. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Eerdmans)

The remaining readings for the course will be available under “files” in the page for this course on Canvas.

Course Requirements:

1. Participation and Attendance (10%)
2. One practice exercise for completion (5%)
3. One mid-term exam (20%)
4. Two short papers (20% each)
5. One final exam (25%)

Important Deadlines: See the course schedule below.

Late submission policy: Paper assignments should be submitted by or prior to the listed due date. I will not typically punish reasonable delays, and please feel free to email me with good-faith requests for extensions. If this lenient policy is abused or if I conclude that it is leading to poor learning outcomes, a more inflexible policy will be instituted.

Attendance and Participation: Students should arrive on time to all lectures and should participate in discussions. Please feel free to email me informing me of reasonable reasons for your absence. For now, no particular penalties will attach to repeated absences, though if this lenient policy is abused or if I conclude that it is leading to poor learning outcomes, a more inflexible policy will be instituted.

Technology Policy: To facilitate engaged dialogue, laptops, phones and other electronic devices should be closed during class. Students should possess hard copies of all textbooks. Those requiring technology access due to learning needs or disability accommodations should provide appropriate notice through the Sara Bea Accessibility Services in the Center for Student Support and Care.

Outside of class, assignments should be completed without the assistance of LLM chatbots like ChatGPT or Claude.

For such timely concerns, please see the University's **Generative AI Policy for Students** (<https://honorcode.nd.edu/generative-ai-policy-for-students-august-2023/>), and particularly the following statement:

Representing work that you did not produce as your own, including work generated or materially modified by AI, constitutes academic dishonesty. Use of generative AI in a way that violates an instructor's articulated policy, or using it to complete coursework in a way not expressly permitted by the faculty member, will be considered a violation of the Honor Code.

See also the **Fall 2024 Update** (<https://honorcode.nd.edu/policy-update-ai-editing-tools-fall-2024/>), which clarifies the application of University policy to AI editing tools like Grammarly.

Other Notes on Classroom Etiquette: Be respectful, kind, encouraging, and patient with others.

Interesting links:

1. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu>
2. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/index.html>

Office hours: By appointment.

Course Schedule:

Week	Monday	Wednesday
Week 1: 8/25, 8/27	8/25: First day of class	8/27
Week 2: 9/1, 9/3	9/1 (Labor Day; classes meet)	9/3
Week 3: 9/8, 9/10	9/8	9/10
Week 4: 9/15, 9/17	9/15	9/17
Week 5: 9/22, 9/24	9/22	9/24
Week 6: 9/29, 10/1	9/29	10/1
Week 7: 10/6, 10/8	10/6	10/8
Week 8: 10/13, 10/15	10/13: Oral Exams	10/15: Oral Exams
Week 9: 10/20, 10/22	No class (Fall break)	No class (Fall break)
Week 10: 10/27, 10/29	10/27	10/29
Week 11: 11/3, 11/5	11/3	11/5
Week 12: 11/10, 11/12	11/10	11/12
Week 13: 11/17, 11/19	11/17	11/19
Week 14: 11/24, 11/26	11/24	No class (Thanksgiving)
Week 15: 12/1, 12/3	12/1	12/3
Week 16: 12/8, 12/10	12/8	12/10: Last day of class

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

...

*Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

(Psalm 19:1, 4)

For God is in heaven, and you on earth;

Therefore, let your words be few.

(Ecclesiastes 5:2b)

Reading Schedule

1. 8/25, *First day of class* (No readings)
2. 8/27, **Why Philosophy of Religion?** (In-class) Blaise Pascal, §682 from *Pensées*; Anselm, Ch. 1 from *Proslogion*
3. 9/1, **Is There a God?** Avicenna, selections from *The Salvation: Metaphysics*; Leibniz, "On the Ultimate Origination of Things"
4. 9/3, **How Does God Relate to the World?** Anselm, Chs. 1-14 in *Monologion*
5. 9/8, **What is God Like?** Anselm, Chs. 15-28 in *Monologion*
6. 9/10, **What Can't We Say About God?** Maimonides, Chs. 50-55 from Part I of *The Guide to the Perplexed*
7. 9/15, **What Can We Say About God?** Maimonides, Chs. 56-64 from Part I of *The Guide to the Perplexed*
8. 9/17, **Is it Rational to Believe in God?** Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?"
9. 9/22, **What is Evil?** Augustine, Bk. I of *On Free Choice of the Will*
 - *Practice Assignment Due*
10. 9/24, **Where does Evil Come From?** Augustine, Bk. I of *On Free Choice of the Will*
11. 9/29, **Are We Actually Free?** Augustine, pp. 64-80 of Bk. II, and pp. 70-83 of Bk. III in *On Free Choice of the Will*
12. 10/1, **What's Evil Good For?** Augustine, pp. 87-123 of Bk. III in *On Free Choice of the Will*

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13. 10/6, **Does Evil Show That God Doesn't Exist?** Plantinga, pp. 1-29 of *God, Freedom, and Evil*
 14. 10/8, **Can we Show That It Doesn't?** Plantinga, pp. 29-64 of *God, Freedom, and Evil*
 15. 10/13, *Oral Exams (No readings)*
 16. 10/15, *Oral Exams (No readings)*
 - *Paper #1 Due Friday*
 17. 10/20, *No Class: Fall Break*
 18. 10/22, *No Class: Fall Break*
 19. 10/27, **Why does God Allow Evil?** Van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy"
 20. 10/29, **What was the First Sin?** Anselm, Chs. 1-11 in *On the Fall of the Devil*
 21. 11/3, **Why did it Happen?** Anselm, Chs. 12-20 in *On the Fall of the Devil*
 22. 11/5, **How did it Happen?** Anselm, Chs. 21-28 in *On the Fall of the Devil*
 23. 11/10, **Can We Show That This is the Best Possible World?** Leibniz, selections from *Discourse on Metaphysics*; Voltaire, selections from *Candide*
 24. 11/12, **Can We Show That it's Not?** Hudson, "Best Possible Worlds Theodicy"
 25. 11/17, **Does God Have to Create the Best?** Adams, "Must God Create the Best?"
 26. 11/19, **Did Angels Mess it All Up?** Cutter and Swenson, "The Omission Theodicy"
 27. 11/24, **What's So Bad About Sin?** Anselm, Chs. 1-15 in Bk. I of *Cur Deus Homo*
 28. 11/26, *No Class: Thanksgiving Break*
 29. 12/1, **How Bad is Sin?** Anselm, Chs. 16-25 in Bk. I of *Cur Deus Homo*
 30. 12/3, **How would a Good God Fix it?** Anselm, Bk. II of *Cur Deus Homo*
 31. 12/8, **How Bad is Hell?** Sampson, "Effective Altruism, Disaster Prevention, and the Possibility of Hell: A Dilemma for Secular Longtermists"
 32. 12/10, **How Good is Heaven?** Rota, "A Better Version of Pascal's Wager"

- *Paper #2 Due Friday*