**Saints, Heretics and Atheists:**

**A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion[[1]](#footnote-1)**



**Recommended Texts:**

Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, translated by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993). ISBN: 0-87220-188-0

*Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings,* translated and edited by Muhammad Ali Khalidi (New York: Cambridge University Press 2005). ISBN: 0-521-52963-8.

Aquinas, *A Summary of Philosophy*, translated and edited by Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003). ISBN: 0-87220-657-2

Marguerite Porete, The Mirror of Simple Souls, translated and edited by Ellen Babinsky (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993). ISBN: 978-0809134274

Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, translated by Samuel Shirley, edited by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992). ISBN: 0-872201-309

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Second Edition*, edited by Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980). ISBN: 0-87220-402-2

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998). ISBN: 0-87220-283-6

**Course Description:**

Does God exist? What is the nature of evil and where does it come from? Are humans free? Responsible? Immortal? Does it matter? This course will explore foundational questions in the philosophy of western religion through the study of classic works by Plato, Augustine, Anselm, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Aquinas, Pascal, Spinoza, Hume, Mill, Nietzsche and James, as well as discussions by contemporary authors such as Pamala Milne, Marilynne Robinson and Daniel Dennett. Students will have the opportunity to reexamine their own views and assumptions about religion in dialogue with great thinkers of the past and present.

**Tentative Schedule**

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| **Class** | **What Is Piety?** |
| Core reading: | [Plato, “Euthyphro.”](http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html) |
| Supp. reading: | [Tim Whitmarsch, “Black Achilles,” *Aeon*, May 9, 2018](https://aeon.co/essays/when-homer-envisioned-achilles-did-he-see-a-black-man). |
| Optional reading: | [Margaret Talbot, “The Myth of Whiteness in Classical Sculpture,” *The New Yorker*, October 29, 2018](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-myth-of-whiteness-in-classical-sculpture) |

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| **Class** | **Whence Evil?** |
| Core reading: | Augustine, Book I of *On Free Choice of the Will* (pages 1-28 in the Williams translation) |
| Supp. reading: | [Pamala Milne, “Genesis from Eve’s Point of View,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 1989](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1989/03/26/genesis-from-eves-point-of-view/dc371184-1f4c-4142-ac2d-d5efee72a0da/?utm_term=.53015fdbe9c9) |

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| **Class** | **Why Free Will?** |
| Core reading: | Augustine, Book II of *On Free Choice of the Will* (pages 29-69 in the Williams translation) |
| Supp. reading: | [Allison Arieff, “Life is Short. That’s the Point,” *The New York Times*, August 18, 2018](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/18/opinion/life-is-short-thats-the-point.html). |

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| **Class** | **Why Do We Sin?** |
| Core reading: | Augustine, Book III, Chapters 1-9 of *On Free Choice of the Will* (pages 69-91 in the Williams translation) |
| Optional reading: | Book III, Chapters 10-25 (pages 91-124 in the Williams translation) |
| Supp. reading: | [Jim Holt, “Thinking Inside the Boxes,” *Slate* February 1, 2002](https://slate.com/culture/2002/02/robert-nozick-and-newcomb-s-problem.html). |

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| **Class** | **What is Free Will Anyway?** |
| Core reading: | [Anselm, “On Freedom of Choice”](http://jasper-hopkins.info/DeLibertate.pdf) (Jasper Hopkins translation) |
| Supp. reading: | [C. S. Lewis, “Petitionary Prayer: A Problem without an Answer,” *Christian Reflections*](http://www.basicincome.com/bp/files/Petitionary_Prayer_by_C.S._Lewis.pdf) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing 1967, pages 142-151). |

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| **Class** | **Are We Immortal?** |
| Core reading: | Ibn Sina, “On the Soul,” from *The Book of Salvation* (Khalidi trans., pages 46-57). |
| Supp. reading: | [Daniel C. Dennett, “Where Am I?,” excerpt from *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology*](https://lafavephilosophy.x10host.com/where_am_i.html) (Bradford Books, 1978). |

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| **Class** | **Is Religious Belief Founded in Reason?** |
| Core reading: | Al-Ghazali, *The Rescuer from Error,* by Al-Ghazali (Khalidi trans., pages 59-78: roughly first half of the work). |
| Supp. reading: | [B.C., “A Millennium-old Argument,” The Economist April 22, 2015](https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2015/04/22/a-millennium-old-argument). |
| Optional: | [Melvyn Bragg and Guests, “Al-Ghazali,” *In Our Time Broadcast*, BBC Radio 4, 19 March 2015](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b055j9rv). |

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| **Class** | **Is Religious Belief Founded in Experience?** |
| Core reading: | Al-Ghazali, *The Rescuer from Error,* by Al-Ghazali (Khalidi trans., pages 79-98: roughly second half of the work). |
| Optional reading: | Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (Khalidi trans., pages 155-180). |
| Supp. reading: | [Laurie A. Paul and Paul Bloom, “How Should We Make the Most Important Decisions of Our Lives? A Philosophical Debate,”](https://slate.com/culture/2015/03/transformative-experience-by-l-a-paul-in-conversation-with-paul-bloom.html) *Slate* March 5, 2015. |

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| **Class** | **Can We Prove that God Exists?** |
| Core reading: | *Aquinas, A Summary of Philosophy,* (pages 1-6 in Regan edition). Excerpted from: Aquinas’s *Summa Theologicae* Part 1, question 2, articles 1-3. |
| Supp. reading: | [Meghan Sullivan, “Uneasy Grace,” *First Things*, April 2014](https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/04/uneasy-grace). |

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| **Class** | **What is the Impersonal Nature of God?** |
| Core reading: | *Aquinas, A Summary of Philosophy*, pages 6-20 in Regan edition. Excerpted from: Aquinas’s *Summa Theologicae* I, Q3, Q4, Q7, Q11, Q13 |
| Supp. reading: | [Lawrence Shapiro, “A Drop in the Sea,” *Aeon*](https://aeon.co/essays/don-t-believe-in-miracles-until-you-ve-done-the-math) November 1, 2013 |

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| **Class** | **What is the Personal Nature of God?** |
| Core reading: | Aquinas, *A Summary of* Philosophy, abridged from his *Summa Theologica*, (pages 20-37 in Regan edition). Excerpted from Aquinas’s *Summa Theologicae* I, Q14, Q19, Q20. |
| Supp. reading: | [Julie Zauzmer, “Is God male? The Episcopal Church debates whether to change its Book of Common Prayer,” *The Washington Post*, July 3, 2018](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/07/03/is-god-male-the-episcopal-church-debates-whether-to-change-its-book-of-common-prayer/?utm_term=.4e11d5afdc20); OR [C.S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” from *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmanns](http://www.episcopalnet.org/TRACTS/priestesses.html)); OR [Michael Rea, “Gender as a Divine Attribute](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c9fdf5_e6877c8bc07f43cf9da452533656bea0.pdf). |

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| **Class** | **What is Salvation?** |
| Core reading: | Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* Chapter 114, p. 184-185 [=Division XIII, Chapter 11, pp. 242-244, Babinsky trans.]; Chapter 118, p. 189-194 [= Division XIV, Chapters 1-7, pp. 251-262, Babinsky trans.] |
| Supp. reading: | Peter Adamson, “After Virtue: Marguerite Porete,” History of Philosophy without Any Gaps, episode 267, podcast posted on 17 December 2016, URL=<https://historyofphilosophy.net/marguerite-porete> |

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| **Class** | **Should We “Bet” on God?** |
| Core reading: | [Pascal, “The Wager”](http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/Pascal_Wager.htm) |
| Supp. reading: | [Gary Gutting, “Pascal’s Wager 2.0,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2015](https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/09/28/a-new-wager/). |

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| **Class** | **Is God Nature?** |
| Core reading: | Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part I, Definitions, Axioms, Explication, Propositions 1-15 (including demonstrations and scholia), Appendix (appears at end of Part I) (pages 31-43, 57-62 in the Shirley edition). |
| Supp. reading: | [Jonathan Bennett, “Glimpses of Spinoza,” *Syracuse Scholar* (4) 1983, 43-56.](https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/jfb/glimpses.html) |

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| **Class** | **Are We Modes of God?** |
| Core reading: | Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part I, 1d3, 1d4, 1d5; Part II, Axioms, Propositions 1-3, 6,7, 9, 10, 48 (dem but not scholium), 49Scholium (together with dem, scholium, corollary); Part III, Preface, Definitions, Propositions 1,2, 6-13 |
| Supp. reading: | [Gregg Caruso and Daniel Dennett, “Just Deserts,” *Aeon* October 4, 2018](https://aeon.co/essays/on-free-will-daniel-dennett-and-gregg-caruso-go-head-to-head). |

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| **Class** | **Good without God?** |
| Core reading: | Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part IV Preface, Definitions, Axiom, Propositions 20-25, 30-37, 72 (including scholium) (pp. 31, 64-70, 95-100, 102-112, 152-155, 165- 167, 169-176, 194 in the Shirley edition) |
| Supp. reading: | [Louise M. Anthony, “Good Minus God,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2011.](https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/18/good-minus-god/) |

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| **Class** | **Life After Death?** |
| Core reading: | Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part V, Preface, Proposition 6, 19-33, 41-42 (pages 201-203, 205, 211-218, 222-223 in Shirley edition). |
| Supp. reading: | [Samuel Scheffler, “The Importance of the Afterlife. Seriously.” *NYU Law Magazine*, 2014](https://blogs.law.nyu.edu/magazine/2014/the-importance-of-the-afterlife-seriously/). |

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| **Class** | **Is the Universe Designed?** |
| Core reading: | Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Parts I – IV |
| Supp. reading: | [Hans Halvorson, “Fine-Tuning Does Not Imply a Fine Tuner,” *Nautilus*, January 2017](http://cosmos.nautil.us/short/119/fine-tuning-does-not-imply-a-fine-tuner) |

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| **Class** | **Design without a Designer?** |
| Core reading: | Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Parts V – VIII |
| Supp. reading: | [Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Cosmic Pantheism,” *Nautilus*, January 2017](http://cosmos.nautil.us/short/91/cosmic-pantheism). |

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| **Class** | **True Religion?** |
| Core reading: | Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Parts IX – XII |
| Supp. reading: | [Marilyn McCord Adams’s, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God,” *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray, pages 250-257](https://www.dropbox.com/s/wct7jxh1eoka0rh/Marilyn%20McCord%20Adams%20Horrendous%20Evils%20and%20the%20Goodness%20of%20God%20copy%20for%20sharing.pdf?dl=0). |
| Optional: | [Tara Isabella Burton, “’Spiritual but not religious’: Inside America’s Rapidly Growing Faith Group,” *Vox*, November 10, 2017](https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/11/10/16630178/study-spiritual-but-not-religious). |

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| **Class** | **Is Religion Useful?** |
| Core reading: | Mill, *The Utility of Religion*, available online at: <https://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/mill/three/utilrelig.html> |
| Supp. reading: | [Thomas Nagel, “A Philosopher Defends Religion,” *The New York Review of Books*, September 27, 2012](https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/09/27/philosopher-defends-religion/). |
| Optional: | [Greg M. Epstein, “Introduction” to *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (HaperCollins 2010).](https://aerbook.com/books/Good_Without_God-43385.html?social=1&retail=1&emailcap=0) |

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| **Class** | **What do “Good,” “Bad” and “Evil” Mean?** |
| Core reading: | Nietzsche, *First Treatise: “Good and Evil,” “Good and Bad”* (pages 9-33 in Clark and Swensen translation) |
| Supp. reading: | [Sue Prideaux, “Far right, misogynist, humourless? Why Nietzsche is Misunderstood,” *The Guardian*, October 6, 2018](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/06/exploding-nietzsche-myths-need-dynamiting) |

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| **Class** | **Whence Conscience, Bad Conscience, and Guilt?** |
| Core reading: | Nietzsche, *Second Treatise: “Guilt,” “Bad Conscience,” and Related Matters* (pages 35 – 66 in Clark and Swensen translation) (We’ll focus on sections 1-8 and 16-25, so if pressed for time you might skim sections 8-15.) |
| Supp. reading: | [Jonathan Bennett, “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,” *Philosophy* 49 (1979): 123-134](https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/jfb/huckfinn.pdf). |

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| **Class** | **No Alternative to Religion?** |
| Core reading: | Nietzsche, *Third Treatise: What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?* (pages 67 – 118 in Clark and Swensen translation) |
| Supp. reading: | [Claudia Roth Pierpont, “After God,” *The New Yorker*, April 8, 2002.](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/04/08/after-god) |

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| **Class** | **The Right to Believe? – William James’s *The Will to Believe*** |
| Core reading: | Required reading: *The Will to Believe*, William James. Available on-line at:  <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm> |
| Supp. reading: | [Peter van Iwagen, “*Quam Dilecta*,” *God and the Philosophers*, ed. Morris, 1994.](http://andrewmbailey.com/pvi/Quam_Dilecta.pdf) |

1. The image below is of Raphael’s *Disputation of the Holy Sacramen*t (1510). The fresco in the Stanza della Segnatura stands opposite Raphael’s famous *The School of Athens* and represents Christianity’s victory over philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)