

# NATURAL THEOLOGY AND THE PROOFS OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

PHI 101  
Fall 2018  
MWF 9:00-10:00am  
Humanities 1023

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This course is an historical introduction to western philosophy focusing on the historical proofs of God. The purpose of this course is to assess the merits of each of these proofs, judging them by the formal structure and logical presuppositions of each rather than on the basis of religious belief. We will question: what can reason alone, independent of faith and divine revelation, tell us about a necessary, eternal being we might call 'God?' In light of modern advances in science, is it still possible to be 'rational' and claim that there necessarily exists this First Cause? Is deciding between atheism and religious faith a false dichotomy?

The course is divided into three sections:

1. *Faith and Reason*. To begin, we will examine the basic terms to be used in class, asking what makes a philosophical approach to the question of God's existence distinct from a religious approach. We will ask in what ways reason is independent of faith. Moreover, by considering the writings of Aquinas, Averroes, and Maimonides, we will consider whether faith is opposed to reason, and if not, in what ways they can be reconciled.
2. *Classical Accounts of the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs*. We will examine the ontological and cosmological proofs of God's existence by approaching the writings of Anselm, Descartes, and Aquinas. What are the limitations of each proof, and how do presuppositions about the function or power of reason underlie each?
3. *Hume, Kant, and the Critique of Natural Theology*. We will examine the skeptical critiques of the cosmological and ontological proofs by David Hume. We will consider the force of Hume's arguments alongside the presuppositions attached to them. Then, we will consider Kant's response to Hume's skepticism and his offering of a 'moral proof' for God's existence in an effort to overcome it.

## Degree Requirements and Prerequisites

This course fulfills DEC G and SBC Hum requirements. Although this is an introductory course and does not assume prior philosophical knowledge, there will be a number of intensive readings and difficult writing assignments requiring serious commitment from each course member.

## Required Texts

Most of the texts we will read are available in PDF form on Blackboard. These texts must be printed out and brought to class when appropriate. Otherwise, I have ordered students to purchase:

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett) ISBN: 9780872201927.  
Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hackett) ISBN: 9780872204027.  
Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology* (Cornell) ISBN-13: 978-0801493799.

If you have financial concerns about purchasing these texts, please contact me immediately.

## Assignments and Grading

*Attendance, Participation, and Short Writing Assignments (20%):* Attendance will be taken every class. You must arrive on time and participate regularly during class sessions. You must bring all relevant course materials in hard copy to class. I also conduct class with group discussions in mind, which means that students should be prepared to contribute meaningfully to questions. In addition to in-class discussions and debates, your participation grade will include short 1-2 page doubled-spaced responses to questions I give throughout the semester. Expect 5-6 or so of these short assignments, graded check, check-minus, or check-plus. Based on these assignments, I reserve the right to raise (or lower) your grade by up to 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B+ to A).

*Reading quizzes (20%, 10 quizzes for 2% each):* There will be ten short reading quizzes consisting of straightforward reading comprehension questions. Being absent and thus missing a quiz will automatically result in a 0 for that quiz, unless due to medical emergency or other extenuating circumstances.

*Midterm Exam (30%):* An in-class midterm exam will consist of short open responses to be written during the course of a designated class period.

*Final Exam (30%):* The take-home final exam will consist of two short essay topics. I will distribute a list of possible questions before the exam, along with my expectations. Each essay must be 900-1000 words, for a total of 1800-2000 words.

*Grading Scale:* A (93-100%), A- (90-92%), B+ (87-89%), B (83-86%), B- (80-82%), C+ (77-79%), C (73-76%), C- (70-72%), D+ (67-69%), D (63-66%), D- (60-62%), F (below 60%)

## Course Policies

*Lateness and absences:* You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. After you miss three classes unexcused, your participation grade will drop by a letter grade per absence. If you miss six classes without a valid excuse, you will fail the

course. Lateness will not be tolerated. If you are consistently late more than five minutes for class, I will begin counting late arrivals as absences.

*Technology Policy:* This is a no-screens course, meaning that laptops and cellphones are not allowed. However, exceptions will be made for students who require the appropriate services.

*Disability Support Services (DSS) Statement:* If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

*Academic Integrity Statement:* Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty is required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty please refer to the academic judiciary website at: [http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic\\_integrity/index.html](http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html).

*Critical Incident Management:* Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of University Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

### Course Schedule. \* = Assignment Due

#### I. Faith and Reason

August 27	Introduction: What is Philosophy?
August 29	Aquinas on Faith and Reason, <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> I.4-8, 12.
August 31	Averroes on Faith and Reason, Ch. 2.
September 3	HOLIDAY
September 5	Maimonides on Faith and Reason. <i>Guide for the Perplexed</i> , Ch.L-LII.
September 7	Dawkins on Faith and Reason. <i>The God Delusion</i> , pp. 303-308.

#### II. Classical Accounts of the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs

September 10	Anselm's Ontological Proof. <i>Proslogium</i> , Preface and Ch. I-V.
September 12	Gaunilo's Response to Anselm. "On Behalf of the Fool."
September 14	Anselm's Response to Gaunilo. "In Reply to Gaunilo."
September 17	Descartes' Ontological Proof. <i>Meditations</i> I.
September 19	Descartes' Ontological Proof. <i>Meditations</i> III.
September 21	Descartes' Ontological Proof. <i>Meditations</i> V.
September 24	Descartes' Ontological Proof. Review <i>Meditations</i> selections.
September 26	Replies to Descartes. Replies and Objections to <i>Meditations</i> III.
September 28	Replies to Descartes. Replies and Objections to <i>Meditations</i> V.
October 1	Aquinas' Five Ways. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> I.13.
October 3	Aquinas' Five Ways. <i>Summa Theologica</i> , I.2.1-3.
October 5	Aquinas' Five Ways. <i>Summa Theologica</i> , I.2.1-3.
October 8	FALL BREAK
October 10	Aquinas on God's Attributes. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> I.14-20, 32-43.
October 12	Aquinas on God's Attributes. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> I.14-20, 32-43.
October 15	Aquinas on God's Attributes. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> I. 14-20, 32-43.
October 17	Aquinas on God's Attributes. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> I. 14-20, 32-43.
October 19	Aquinas on God's Intellect. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> , I.44-45, 49, 60.
October 22	Aquinas on God's Will. <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> , I.72-73, 91, 97-98.
October 24	Review for midterm.
October 26	MIDTERM EXAM

### III. Hume, Kant, and the Critique of Natural Theology

October 29	Hume Contra <i>A Posteriori</i> Arguments. <i>Dialogues</i> II-III. 13-23.
October 31	Hume Contra <i>A Posteriori</i> Arguments. <i>Dialogues</i> , IV-V. 28-39.
November 2	Hume Contra <i>A Posteriori</i> Arguments. <i>Dialogues</i> , VI-VIII. 39-54.
November 5	Hume Contra <i>A Posteriori</i> Arguments. Review / Buffer Class.
November 7	Hume Contra <i>A Priori</i> Arguments. <i>Dialogues</i> , IX. 54-58.
November 9	Conclusion to the Dialogues. <i>Dialogues</i> , XII. 77-89.
November 12	Kant's Philosophical Theology. Introduction to Kant.
November 14	Kant's Philosophical Theology. <i>Lectures</i> pp. 21-32.
November 16	Kant's Philosophical Theology. <i>Lectures</i> pp. 33-42.
November 19	Kant's Philosophical Theology. Review / Buffer Class.
November 21	THANKSGIVING BREAK
November 23	THANKSGIVING BREAK
November 26	Kant's Moral Theology. <i>Lectures</i> pp. 109-120.

November 28	Kant's Moral Theology. <i>Lectures</i> pp. 121-130.
November 30	Kant's Moral Theology. <i>Lectures</i> pp. 131-145.
December 3	Kant's Moral Theology. <i>Lectures</i> pp. 146-159.
December 5	Critiques of Kant: Hegel. <i>Science of Logic</i> pp. 63-66.
December 7	Critiques of Kant: Schopenhauer. "On the Basis of Morality."
December 10	Review of the course.