

University of Waterloo
Department of Religious Studies
RS 258 God
Winter 2014
11:30 a.m.-12:50 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday, CGR 1300

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Bergen
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Course Description

An examination of ideas about God in Western thought from religious, philosophical, cultural, scientific, and political perspectives (catalogue description).

The first part of the course will be historical in orientation, and will trace ideas about God as they took shape in Judaism and Christianity, and then developed through the last 500 years in the West. We will focus on how particular notions about God and notions about human knowledge of God arose in response to developments in the Enlightenment and modernity. This approach will help us to see how atheism is helpfully understood as rejection of particular, historically-conditioned conceptions of God. The second part will examine several themes that have emerged in the 20th century discussions about theism and atheism: God and popular culture, God and morality, God and the three major Abrahamic religions, and new trajectories in discourse about God.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. think critically about the discourse about God, god, and “God” from multiple perspectives
2. enter into contemporary debates about the ethical, social, and political implications of beliefs about God
3. give an account of how the received “common sense” about God in the West has emerged from particular intellectual, religious, social, and political histories
4. read key texts about God carefully, critically, and aware of the contexts in which they were produced
5. write short critical essays

Required Text

Paul E. Capetz, *God: A Brief History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Readings Available on LEARN

All further required readings are posted on LEARN, in PDF format or as a link.

Please bring a copy of the required readings for the day (whether hard or electronic copy) with you to class.

Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation (if known)	Weighting
1. Reading quizzes	unannounced	15%
2. Short essays (weighted equally)		50%
i. First short essay	Jan. 21	
ii. Second short essay	Feb. 27	
iii. Third short essay	Apr. 1	
3. Final exam	as determined by university	35%
Total		100%

Engaged participation

You are expected to participate in class and take responsibility for your own learning. This means careful and critical reading of assigned texts before class, attending class, taking notes during lectures, asking questions, contributing your ideas and opinions in a respectful way. You will not do well in this course if you do not do the required readings and attend class. If you miss a class, you are responsible for the material that was covered. All handouts, including lecture outlines, will be posted on LEARN, usually several hours before class. I will not give mini-lectures on what you missed, nor will I distribute my own lecture notes.

Assessment 1: Reading Quizzes

This course is an engagement with texts. It is imperative that you complete required readings prior to class, and that you read critically. Scanning a reading a few minutes before class will not suffice. Some readings are difficult and you may need to read it several times. Focus on the big picture. I will often define key terms in advance, or give guidelines for reading.

There will be occasional unscheduled (“surprise”) reading quizzes during the first few minutes of class, starting in the second week. They cannot be written at any other time. There will be a total of 10 quizzes, the best 8 of which will count. All quizzes that count will be weighted equally. These quizzes are not designed to trick you and will not be testing obscure information. If you have read the texts in a careful and critical way, it will be possible to get a perfect score on the quizzes.

Assessment 2: Three short essays

Three short essays, of 5-6 pages each, are required. Due Jan. 21, Feb. 27, Apr. 1. There are not research paper but they do require close engagement with a specific text. A separate document explains the requirements of these essays in greater detail. If you have questions or concerns about these assignments, please contact me before the due dates. There are no “make-up assignments” in this course.

Assessment 3: Final exam

An exam review sheet will be distributed in class but will not be posted on LEARN. This exam will be scheduled by the university and is subject to all university regulations for exams, including changes for conflicts. Student travel plans are not acceptable grounds for granting an alternative final examination time.

Course Outline

A. Introduction: The New Atheism, God, “God”, and gods

1. Jan. 7

2. Jan. 9

Richard Dawkins, “The God Hypothesis” (excerpts), in *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 2006), 51-59, 69-85, notes 437-438.

B. A brief history of God (in the West)

3. Jan. 14 – *Judaism, monotheism, early Christianity*

Capetz, chap 1-2.

4. Jan. 16 – *Classical Christian conceptions of God*

Capetz, chap 3-4.

Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, trans. and ed. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), book 1.5-10 and book 2.162-169 (pp. 30-31, 94-97).

5. Jan. 21 – *Middle Ages*

Capetz, chap 5.

First short essay due

6. Jan. 23 – *Protestant Reformation*

Capetz, chap 6.

John Calvin, “Knowledge of God the Creator,” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in *God: The Sources of Christian Theology*, ed. Lois Malcolm (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 183-188.

7. Jan. 28 – *Enlightenment, part 1*

Capetz, chap 7, 107-122.

8. Jan. 30 – *Enlightenment, part 2*

Capetz, chap 7, 122-132.

Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1989), 281-284.

9. Feb. 4 – *Biblical interpretation*

John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), 24-28, 32-34, 67-68.

10. Feb. 6 – *Science and evolution*

Stephen Barr, “The Design of Evolution,” *First Things*, October 2005, 9-12, online at www.firstthings.com.

11. Feb. 11 – *The 20th century*

Capetz, chap 8.

C. A domesticated God?

12. Feb. 13 – Pietism and the movement inward

August Hermann Francke, "If and How One May be Certain that One is a Child of God," in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 145-148.

- Reading Week -

13. Feb. 25 – Contemporary domestications: "Moralistic therapeutic deism" and civic religion

Christian Smith, "On 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' as US Teenagers' Actual, Tacit, De Facto Religious Faith," in *Religion and Youth*, ed. Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Pink Dandelion (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 41-46.

Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *The Robert Bellah Reader*, ed. Robert Bellah and Steven M. Tipton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 225-229, 238-242.

14. Feb. 27 – God in media culture

Second short essay due

D. God and morality

15. Mar. 4 – Atheist critiques of Christian morality

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1968), 500-503 (paras. 8, 1, 2), 515 (para. 5), 535 (para. 35).

16. Mar. 6 – The Holocaust

Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, "God and History: Philosophical and Religious Responses to the Holocaust," in *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 327-354, notes 442-446.

17. Mar. 11 – Liberation theology

Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Encountering God in History," in *A Theology of Liberation*, 15th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 106-116, notes 127-130.

18. Mar. 13 – Feminist theology

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 13-19, notes 201.

Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 241-245, notes 302.

E. God and the Abrahamic religions

19. Mar. 18 - Judaism

Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, "A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism," (2002), online at www.jcrelations.net.

National Jewish Scholars Project, "Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians And Christianity," (2002), online at www.jcrelations.net.

20. Mar. 20 – Judaism and Islam

Vincent J. Cornell, “The Ethiopian’s Dilemma: Islam, Religious Boundaries, and the Identity of God,” (part 1) in *Do Jews, Christians, & Muslims Worship the Same God?* by Jacob Neusner et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 85-105, notes 156-159.

21. Mar. 25 - Islam

Cornell, “The Ethiopian’s Dilemma,” (part 2), 105-129, notes 159-161.

F. New trajectories

22. Mar. 27 – Open theism

William Hasker, “The Need for a Bigger God,” in *God in An Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism*, ed. William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean Zimmerman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 15-29.

23. Apr. 1 – God after God

Third short essay due

24. Apr. 3 – Conclusion

LEARN will be used for the following:

- Posting of required readings
- Posting of all handouts given in class
- Posting of marks
- Posting of announcements about the course
- Two discussion groups which are entirely optional: “Ask a Question” is the place to ask the instructor about course content and/or course requirements. “Start/continue a conversation” is a place to start or continue a conversation about a particular topic. This forum is primarily for students, though I will monitor it, and may contribute from time to time. I encourage you to make use of these forums, and may occasionally “seed” a discussion with a particular question or comment.

Late Work

All papers are due at the start of class. All assignments must be submitted in hard copy, double-spaced, standard margins and 12-point font, with no report covers. Include page numbers. Late assignments will be penalized 3% per 24 hour period or portion thereof (including weekends), and can be accepted no later than the day of the final exam except in exceptional circumstances for which documentation is required. Late papers must be submitted to the Grebel main office between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday. You may “stop the clock” by emailing an assignment to me over the weekend, but only if you submit it in hard copy to the front office on the next business day. (E.g. A paper is due Thursday in class, that is, at 11:30 a.m. If you email me a copy on Saturday at 11:00 a.m., and hand in a hard copy on Monday, it will be considered 2 days late. However, if you email me a copy on Saturday but hand in a hard copy on Tuesday morning, then it will count as submitted on Tuesday morning, that is, 5 days late.) I will make every effort to return as soon as possible papers that have been submitted on time. I am willing to consider requests for extensions, but only if these requests have been made in reasonable advance of the deadline.

Electronic Device Policy

Electronic devices may be used in class only for taking notes. If you use phones or computers inappropriately during class, you may be asked to leave. Texting or surfing during class is disrespectful and disruptive to other students and to me. If you wish to record class lectures, please speak to me first. Be mindful of low-tech disruptions: I am okay with snacking in class, but please no “full meals.” Also, do not come and go during class. There may be legitimate reasons for exceptions to these rules (medical conditions, devices to support specific learning needs, etc.); please speak to me in advance.

Institutional-required statements for undergraduate course outlines approved by Senate Undergraduate Council, April 14, 2009

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. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity Webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) and the [Arts Academic Integrity Office Webpage \(http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/current-undergraduates/academic-responsibility\)](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/current-undergraduates/academic-responsibility) for more information.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline \(http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm\)](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties \(http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm\)](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm).

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4 \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70). When in doubt please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals \(http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm\)](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm).

Note for Students with Disabilities

The AccessAbility Services Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, 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 AccessAbility Services Office at the beginning of each academic term.