

St Francis Xavier University
Philosophy 245 - Philosophy of Religion - 2015-16

Professor: William Sweet

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Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10 a.m.-12:00 p.m., and by arrangement

Information on the course, on assignments and examinations, etc., will be periodically posted on the course web page: <http://people.stfx.ca/wsweet/phil245-15.html>

Explores the philosophy of religion, including different concepts of God, with emphasis on the Judeo-Christian tradition; grounds for belief and disbelief in God; and issues such as human destiny, religious language, evil, faith, revelation, and verification.

The aim of this course is to:

- Introduce students to the basic concepts and issues of the philosophy of religion
- Develop ability in logical reasoning that can be applied to the discussion of religion
- Increase ability in understanding key issues and distinctions central to religion and religious belief
- Introduce students to some classical and contemporary philosophers who are key figures in the philosophy of religion
- Have students develop a deeper understanding of religious faith and its relation to the real

Course Outline:

[Week 1] I. Introduction: What is the philosophy of religion?

- A. religion and philosophy
- B. the relation of faith and reason

[Weeks 2-5] II. Can we know anything about the nature of God or the gods?

- A. "the philosopher's God" and the believer's God
- B. omnipotence (Aquinas and Geach)
- C. omniscience (Boethius, Aquinas and Pike)
- D. eternal and immutable (Aquinas, Anselm and Hartshorne)
- E. perfectly good (Mascall on analogy)

[Week 6] III. Arguments against monotheism

- A. the problem of evil

[Weeks 7-8] IV. Arguments against religion

- A. God as a projection of the human mind (Feuerbach)
- B. religion as neurosis (Freud)
- C. religion as 'opiate' (Marx)

- [Weeks 9-11] V. Arguments for God's existence
- A. the teleological argument (Paley)
 - B. the cosmological arguments (Aquinas)
 - 1. efficient causality
 - 2. possible being
 - C. the ontological argument (Anselm)

[Week 12] VI. Summary and Conclusion / Why are debates about religion intractable?

Method of the course and the role of the student:

The class will have a 'lecture and discussion' format. The professor will introduce a topic with a summary of the relevant arguments or a commentary on a text. This will be followed by questions and discussion of the material by the class as a whole (e.g., points of clarification or criticism and of comparison; comments on the relations between or among different issues).

Students are expected to have **prepared the readings** before class, to **attend all** of the classes and to **participate** in discussion.

In conformity with University regulations, students who have **more than 3 unjustified absences** in a term may be reported to their Dean.

It is essential in learning how to do philosophy that students be prepared to ask and answer questions in class.

Textbook:

Philosophy of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Readings, coursepack prepared by William Sweet, 2014.

Links to supplementary readings and readings for essays will be placed on the course web page.

Supplementary texts: (not required, but useful as reference works)

- *Religion, Science, and Non-Science*, by William Sweet, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publishers, 2003.
- *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th. ed., by John Hick, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Publ.

Method of evaluation:

October quiz or short written assignment 20 %
Attendance / class notes / quizzes on readings 10%
Essay 30 %
Final examination 40 %

Laptops and other technologies

Laptops, smartphones, and similar technologies are **not permitted** unless you have my prior, explicit permission. Unauthorized use or related activities will result in being asked to leave the classroom.

Students with disabilities

Students who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Centre for Accessible Learning [Bloomfield Centre room 421; (902) 867-5349] as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Email and office policy

I can respond to short messages through email, and I try to check e-mail once a day. **I do not, however, provide grades or answers about course content by email.** Students should make use of my office hours and ask questions in class. Urgent requests (e.g., to meet) are best made by telephone. If I am not in when you call, please call later or drop by.

Writing to a course instructor is not the same as writing to a friend. For example, if you send me an e-mail message, please mention the course number and the specific topic of your message in the "subject" line. Use proper English. Begin the communication with an appropriate salutation, e.g., "Dear Professor Sweet" (A poorly written and misspelled message reflects badly on the author.) Sign the communication with your name and the name/number of the course in which you are enrolled.

Policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty

St. Francis Xavier University values academic integrity. **All forms of academic dishonesty (including plagiarism) are unacceptable and will be sanctioned.** For the university policy on plagiarism, please visit http://www.sites.stfx.ca/registrars_office/academic_integrity

Writing Centre

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources of the Writing Centre, particularly with regard to organizing study time, writing papers, preparing for examinations, etc. For more information, please see <http://sites.stfx.ca/writingcentre/>