

PHI1002

# Philosophy and Religion

Module Outline  
(Semester 1)



Image: William Blake's 'The Day of Judgment' (1805). <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William\\_Blake\\_-\\_The\\_Day\\_of\\_Judgment.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Blake_-_The_Day_of_Judgment.jpg)>.

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## Module Content

The purpose of this module is to explore the connections between philosophy *and* religion. Semester one proceeds by breaking this down into three related topics:

- (i) Philosophy of Religion: examining the nature of religion by considering the sorts of **questions** for which it provides answers (from metaphysics to ethics).
- (ii) Philosophy in Religion: showing the influence of philosophy upon **theology** in the middle ages (from Plato and Augustine to Aristotle and Aquinas).
- (iii) Philosophy after Religion: showing the influence of theology upon **philosophy** from the early modern period to the present day (from Leibniz's theodicy to Roko's Basilisk).

## Module Structure

Each semester is worth 10 credits. Semester one will take place over the course of 11 weeks, broken down into two parts of 5 weeks each, separated by a **reading week** (week 6: 4/10-10/10). With the exception of reading week, each week will consist in a lecture followed by a seminar. It is important that you attend **both** lectures and seminars.

The **first lecture** will last for two hours, and take place in MERZ.L303 from 9:00-11:00 on 01/10. All other lectures will last for one hour, and take place in PERB.G.05 from 12:00-13:00.

There is **set reading** for each week (listed in **red**), which must be read before each lecture. There is also **optional reading**, which you are encouraged to read (it's interesting!).

Lectures will be recorded and made available on **ReCap** (accessed via **Blackboard**). This means that if, for some reason, you cannot attend a lecture, you will be both able, and **expected** to watch the recording at your leisure.

## Seminars

Seminars are opportunities for you to discuss the readings and the lectures, and even to range beyond them (it's fun!). They are **at least** as important as lectures. There are 5 seminar groups:

Tuesday 13:00 in BSTC 2.41A - Pete

Tuesday 14:00 in BSTC 2.39 - Zoe

Thursday 12:00 in BSTC G.33 - Zoe

Friday 11:00 in OLB 2.21 - Pete

Friday 15:00 in BSTC 2.41A - Pete

## Assessment

The module will be assessed by a 2,000 word essay worth the full 10 credits. Essay questions will be provided in week 5 along with guidance on writing an **essay plan** over reading week, to be submitted by 12/11/2019, for which feedback will returned within 2 weeks. **Completed essays** should be submitted by January 20/01/2020, for which grades will be returned within 4 weeks.

## Part One: Platonic Theology

In the first half of the semester we will be exploring the influence of Platonic philosophy on early Christian theologians, and the way their ideas have in turn influenced later philosophical thinkers.

### Week 1 (1/10) – Introduction: Philosophy and Theology

**Questions:** What is philosophy? What is religion? What is the divine?

**Theology:** Plato (idea and soul), Neoplatonism (**Plotinus 'On Beauty'**)

**Philosophy:** Roko's Basilisk (Auerbach 'The Most Terrifying Thought Experiment of All Time')

**Extra:** How to take a course.

### Week 2 (8/10) – Good, Evil, and Sin: Theodicy

**Questions:** What is evil? Why does it exist? Why do we do evil deeds?

**Theology:** Augustine I (**Confessions, §2.4-2.10; §7.9-7.16**)

**Philosophy:** Leibniz (*Theodicy*, Appendices, 'Excursus on Theodicy')

### Week 3 (15/10) – Creation and Time I: Eternity

**Questions:** Why is there something rather than nothing? Is time real?

**Theology:** Augustine II (**Confessions, §11.3-11.28**)

**Philosophy:** Heidegger ('What is Metaphysics?')

### Week 4 (22/10) – Negative Theology I: Mysticism

**Questions:** What can (and can't) be *thought*? What can (and can't) be *said*?

**Theology:** Pseudo-Dionysius (***The Mystical Theology***)

**Philosophy:** Wittgenstein (*Tractatus*, selected propositions)

### Week 5 (29/10) – Faith and Reason I: Perfection

**Questions:** What can (and can't) be *proved*? What is perfection? What is existence?

**Theology:** Anselm (***Proslogion*, ch. 1-5**)

**Philosophy:** Perfection in ethics and aesthetics.

**Extra:** How to plan an essay.

## Part Two: Aristotelian Theology

In the second half of the semester we will be exploring the influence of Aristotelian philosophy on theologians from other Abrahamic faiths (Islam and Judaism), its subsequent influence on medieval Christian theologians, and the way their ideas have in turn influenced later philosophical thinkers.

### Week 7 (12/11) – Faith and Reason II: Necessity

**Questions:** Why is the world the way it is? Could it be otherwise?

**Theology:** Aristotle I (physics and metaphysics), Ibn Sina (*The Salvation, 'Metaphysics'*)

**Philosophy:** Meillassoux ('The Immanence of the World Beyond')

### Week 8 (19/11) – Negative Theology II: Messianism

**Questions:** What can (and can't) be *known*? What can (and can't) be *hoped* for?

**Theology:** Aristotle II (logic and categories), Maimonides I (*The Guide of the Perplexed, Book I; Book II, ch. 32-40; Book III, ch. 27*)

**Philosophy:** Derrida ('Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority')

### Week 9 (26/11) – Creation and Time II: Change

**Questions:** How can something emerge from nothing? Is change real?

**Theology:** Maimonides II (*The Guide of the Perplexed, Book II, ch 13-25*), Aquinas I (*Treatise on Creation, Q45-46*)

**Philosophy:** Lee Smolin ('The Metaphysical Baggage of Physics'), Max Tegmark ('Life is a Braid in Spacetime')

### Week 10 (3/12) – Faith and Reason III: Simplicity

**Questions:** What is the difference between creator and created? Why is there only one creator? What's the difference between material and immaterial beings?

**Theology:** Aquinas II ('*On Being and Essence*')

**Philosophy:** Wojciech P. Grygiel ('Artificial Intelligence and Scholastic Epistemology')

### Week 11 (10/12) – Conclusion: Univocity

**Questions:** Do we speak of God analogically, or univocally?

**Theology:** Duns Scotus ('*The Possibility of Knowing God*')

**Philosophy:** TBC

**Extra:** How to write an essay.

## Books

This is the main text for semester one is:

A. Hyman & J. J. Walsh, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973). Latest edition: third edition, 2010 (edited with Thomas Williams).

It is available to buy from the bookshop, and also as an electronic resource from the library. All of the **set readings** are taken from this book, with the sole exception of week 1 (Plotinus, 'On Beauty'). These will also be available as individual PDFs on **Blackboard**, but you are encouraged to browse the rest of the book, as it contains more pieces by the relevant thinkers, as well as additional historical context.

All **optional readings** will also be made available as PDFs on **Blackboard**.

The following books are good general overviews of the historical period we are covering.

A. Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy, A New History of Western Philosophy II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005)

J. Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007)

There are many other books available from the library on every specific thinker and topic we will be covering on the course, and you are encouraged to go find them. Don't restrict yourself to the things listed here!

## Articles

There are many excellent articles available from the library. The best way to search for these is by using the following websites:

JSTOR: <https://www.jstor.org/>

PhilPapers: <https://philpapers.org/>

Get used to searching for relevant articles. It's an important skill!

## Online Resources

Other good online resources include:

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/>

The History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: <https://historyofphilosophy.net/>

These are great for getting your bearings, **but should not be referenced or relied on exclusively**.

## Zotero

Zotero is a piece of software that can be used to organise your research and essay writing. It doesn't just make these easier, it encourages you to develop good research and referencing habits from the get go. It is entirely optional, but highly recommended. It can be downloaded here: <https://www.zotero.org/>

To get a bit more technical, Zotero is a [free and open-source reference management software](#) to manage bibliographic data and related research materials (such as [PDF](#) files). Notable features include web browser integration, online syncing, generation of in-text citations, footnotes, and bibliographies, as well as integration with the word processors [Microsoft Word](#), [LibreOffice Writer](#), and [Google Docs](#). It is produced by the [Center for History and New Media](#) at [George Mason University](#).

Zotero shows an icon when a resource (book, article, thesis) is being viewed on many websites (such as library catalogs, [PubMed](#), [Google Scholar](#), [Google Books](#), [Amazon.com](#), Wikipedia, and publishers' websites). Clicking this icon saves the full reference information to the Zotero library. Zotero can also save a copy of the webpage, or, in the case of academic articles, a copy of the full text PDF. Users can then add notes, tags, attachments, and their own [metadata](#).

Items are organized through a drag-and-drop [iTunes](#)-like interface, and can be searched.

Selections of the local reference library data can later be exported as formatted bibliographies.

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