

**The Death of God  
Atheism in Modern European Culture and Thought**

**GE 23620-01 / PHIL 20816-01**

Fall 2019, MW, 3:30 - 4:45 p.m., O'Shaughnessy 114

Professor Robert E. Norton  
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In 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote:

God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! Yet his shadow still looms. How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it.

In this course, we will explore some of the historical and cultural developments, philosophical arguments, and ethical implications involved in the debates for and against the existence of God.

### **Course requirements**

Although there is a large number of participants in this course, it will be conducted more like a seminar than a lecture. That is, you are expected to have read and thought about all of the readings before class and be prepared to participate actively in class, which means contribute to the discussion, offer your own thoughts and perspectives, answer questions, and in general engage in the conversation and thinking that take place. Attendance of each class session is thus essential and absences will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

You will write two papers over the course of the semester. The first paper (4-5 pages, due on **October 28**) will concentrate on the analysis and critique of a specific argument based on a specific reasoning. The second paper (8-10 pages, due on **December 11**) will be comparative in character. Paper topics will be chosen in consultation with me 2 weeks before the papers are due. The first paper will count for 20%, the second for 30% of the grade. In addition, you will take two in-class written exams: a short pre-midterm test (**Oct. 9**, in class), a short post-midterm test (**Nov. 6**, in class) and a final exam (2 hours). The two in-class tests will each count for 10% of the grade. Given the importance of discussion to the course, attendance and participation in class will count for 30% of the grade. Participation includes making **at least** ten posts on the daily blog in Sakai for the course, which will count as 10 % of the final grade.

Students must familiarize themselves with the Honor Code on the University's website and pledge to observe its provisions in all written and oral work, including oral presentations, quizzes and exams, and drafts and final versions of essays.

### **Course Materials**

Most of the texts we will read in class will be supplied in electronic form by me or are available online. I draw heavily on two compilations of scholarly articles and refer to them in the syllabus below. They are:

*CCA* -- Michael Martin, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge UP 2013)

*OHA* -- Stephen Bullivant, Michael Ruse, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford UP 2007)

Both books are accessible online through the catalogue on Notre Dame Hesburgh Library website.

Books you are required to purchase:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

Giacomo Sartori, *I am God*, trans. from the Italian by Frederika Randall

### **Support for Student Mental Health at Notre Dame**

Care and Wellness Consultants provide support and resources to students who are experiencing stressful or difficult situations that may be interfering with academic progress. Through Care and Wellness Consultants, students can be referred to The University Counseling Center (for cost-free and confidential psychological and psychiatric services from licensed professionals), University Health Services (which provides primary care, psychiatric services, case management, and a pharmacy), and The McDonald Center for Student Well Being (for problems with sleep, stress, and substance use). Visit [care.nd.edu](http://care.nd.edu).

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Week 1**

**Wednesday, Aug. 28                      Introductions**

#### **Week 2**

**Monday, Sept. 2                              Definitions, Problems, Concepts**

**Reading:**

Paul Draper, "Atheism and Agnosticism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Stephen Bullivant, "Defining Atheism," in *OHA*

T.J. Mawson, "The Case Against Atheism," in *OHA*

**Wednesday, Sept. 4 Definitions, Problems, Concepts (cont.)****Reading:**

William Lane Craig, "Theistic Critiques of Atheism," in *CCA*

Richard M. Gale, "The Failure of Classical Theistic Arguments," in *CCA*

**Week 3****Monday, Sept. 9 The Existence of God****Reading:**

Antony Flew: "The Presumption of Atheism."

<http://www.positiveatheism.org/writ/flew01.htm>

Findlay, J.N. "Can God's Existence be Disproved?"

<http://www.ditext.com/findlay/god.html>

**Wednesday, Sept. 11 Atheological Arguments****Reading:**

Drange, Theodore. [Incompatible-Properties Arguments: A Survey](#)

**Week 3****Monday, Sept. 16 The Problem of Evil****Reading:**

William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism"

For reference, you may also consult:

*The Evidential Problem of Evil*: Internet Encyclopedia of

Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/e/evil-evi.htm>

*Evil*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>

**Wednesday, Sept. 18 The Problem of Evil (cont.)****Reading:**

William L. Rowe, "Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil"

**Week 4****Monday, Sept. 23 Historical Perspectives****Reading:**

Jan Bremmer, "Atheism in Antiquity," in *CCA*

David Sedley, "From the Pre-Socratics to the Hellenistic Age," in *OHA*

Gavin Hyman, "Atheism in Modern History," in *CCA*

**Wednesday, Sept. 25****Reading:**

Denis J.-J. Robichaud, "Renaissance and Enlightenment," in *OHA*

Alan Charles Kors, "The Age of Enlightenment," in *OHA*

**Week 5****Monday, Sept. 30                      Historical Voices I****Reading:**

Voltaire, "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster" (1755/56)  
 Lessing, "The Education of the Human Race" (1780)

**Wednesday, Oct. 2                      Historical Voices II**

David Hume, "Of Miracles," in Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding  
<https://davidhume.org/texts/e/10>

**Week 6****Monday, Oct. 7****Reading:                      Historical Voices III**

Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Introduction: §§1-2; Part I: Chs. XV and XVIII)

**Wednesday, Oct. 9**

Pre-Midterm Test (in class)

**Week 7****Monday, Oct. 14                      Historical Voices IV****Reading:**

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Preface, § 1-4, 1-2, 11, 12, 14, 26-27, 37, 50, 56, 58, 76, 108-112, 115, 122, 124, 125, 132, 143

**Wednesday, Oct. 16                      Historical Voices V****Reading:**

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §276, 283, 285-291, 295, 299, 302, 307, 319, 328, 335, 343, 344-345, 347, 349, 354, 356, 357, 371, 374, 375, 377, 382, 383

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**Oct. 19-27**

**Fall Break**

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**Week 8**

**Monday, Oct. 28**                      **Historical Voices VI**

\*\*\*\* **First Paper Due** \*\*\*\*

**Reading:**

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

**Wednesday, Oct. 30**                **Atheism and Other Isms**

**Reading:**

Alison Stone, "Existentialism," in *OHA*

Peter Thompson, "Marxism," in *OHA*

### Week 9

**Monday, Nov. 4**                      **Atheism and Other Isms II**

**Reading:**

Christine Overall, "Feminism and Atheism," *CCA*

Stephen Law, "Humanism," in *OHA*

**Wednesday, Nov. 6**

Post Mid-Term Exam

### Week 10

**Monday, Nov. 11**                    **Atheism and Science**

**Reading:**

Michael Ruse, "Naturalism and the Scientific Method," in *OHA*

Evan Fales, "Naturalism and Physicalism," in *CCA*

**Wednesday, Nov. 13**                **Evolution**

**Reading:**

Daniel C. Dennett, "Atheism and Evolution," in *CCA*

David P. Barash, "Atheism and Darwinism," in *OHA*

### Week 11

**Monday, Nov. 18**                    **Natural Selection and the Problem of Evil**

**Reading:**

Paul Draper, "Natural Selection and the Problem of Evil."

[http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/paul\\_draper/evil.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/paul_draper/evil.html)

Alvin Plantinga, "Naturalism vs. Evolution: A Religion/Science Conflict?"

[http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/alvin\\_plantinga/conflict.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/alvin_plantinga/conflict.html)

**Wednesday, Nov. 20**                **The Problem of Ethics and Morality**

**Reading:**

Peter Byrne, "Moral Arguments for God's Existence"

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-arguments-god/>

Theodore Drange, "Why Be Moral?"

[http://infidels.org/library/modern/theodore\\_drange/whymoral.html](http://infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/whymoral.html)

### Week 12

**Monday, Nov. 25**                      **The Problem of Ethics and Morality (cont.)**

**Reading:**

David O. Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *CCA*

Stephen Pinker, "The Moral Instinct"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/magazine/13Psychology-t.html?scp=1&sq=pinker>

**Wednesday, Nov. 27**

**Thanksgiving Break**

### Week 13

**Monday, Dec. 2**                      **Atheism in other Religious Traditions**

**Reading:**

Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, "A World of Atheism: Global Demographics," in *OHA*

Lois Lee, "Western Europe," in *OHA*

Sarah Whyllly, "Japan," in *OHA*

**Wednesday, Dec. 4**                **A Literary Consideration**

**Reading:**

Giacomo Sartori, *I am God*, trans. from the Italian by Frederika Randall (Restless)

### Week 14

**Monday, Dec. 9**

**Reading:**

Giacomo Sartori, *I am God* (to end)

**Wednesday, Dec. 11**

**\*\*\*\* Final Paper Due \*\*\*\***

**Final Discussion**

