

**Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic**

*Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.*

**HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**  
***Philosophy 2662G 550: Topics in the Philosophy of Religion***  
**2021-2022**

<b>Winter Term, 2022</b>	<b>Instructor: Dr. Steve Bland</b>
<b>Prerequisites: none</b>	<b>Office: A301</b>
<b>Mondays, 11:30-12:20, H111 (when in person)</b>	<b>Office hours: By appointment only</b>
<b>Wednesdays, 11:30-1:20, H111 (when in person)</b>	<b>Email: <a href="mailto:sbland2@uwo.ca">sbland2@uwo.ca</a></b>

Is it rational to believe in the existence of God? This is the question around which this course is organized. It can be answered in a number of ways. One may present evidence for or against the belief in God's existence. Positive evidence might include: religious experiences, miracles, empirical arguments, or conceptual arguments. Atheists have attacked each of these justifications, and presented arguments of their own against God's existence. Alternatively, one might argue that belief in God is rational because of its benefits, such as personal salvation, moral principles, and a meaningful life. Atheists argue that these benefits are illusory, or that they are matched or exceeded by the benefits of non-theistic beliefs. We will examine and evaluate each of these lines of argument.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

To successfully complete this course, students will be expected to:

1. Seriously engage with the course material over the entire semester;
2. Effectively manage their time so that they meet all course deadlines;
3. Charitably reconstruct and rigorously evaluate arguments for and against God's existence.

**CLASS METHODS**

While this course is being delivered online, we will meet via Zoom at the appointed times. The Zoom links can be found on the course OWL site. I will deliver the lectures and facilitate discussion just as I would if we were meeting in person. The lectures will be interactive, and include PowerPoint slides, discussions, and in class questions.

I ask that you arrive at the meeting on time. No one will be admitted beyond five minutes after the beginning of class. I also ask, but do not require, that you turn your camera on, since it's easier have

a responsive conversation when every participant's face can be seen. These conversations also benefit from a lack of distractions, so please limit your access to possible sources of distraction during tutorial meetings, e.g., phone, television, roommates, social media, etc.

If we return to in-person learning, we will proceed by meeting at the appointed times and classroom. Everything else about the course delivery will remain the same.

## **TEXT**

*The Philosophy of Religion Reader*. Edited by C. Meister. New York: Routledge.

## **METHODS OF EVALUATION**

### 15% Participation

The bulk of this grade will be determined on the basis of attendance, but a perfect attendance record, by itself, will not earn a perfect participation grade. In addition, you will be expected to make informed contributions to the class by way of asking questions, interpreting texts, and offering arguments. **Any student with an attendance record of less than 70% will receive a grade of 0% for participation.** A lack of attendance or participation **cannot be accommodated**, since there is no alternative to evaluating your engagement with the course material and classmates in real time.

### 20% Reflection questions (4 assignments, each worth 5%)

Each lecture will include one question to prompt further reflection on a particular aspect of the topic under discussion. Answers to these questions must be submitted **within one week** of the question's occurrence in class. You can choose to complete this assignment for **any four** lectures. If you complete less than four, you will receive a grade of zero for each missing assignment. You can miss any 8 assignments you like, and for any reason, but **you cannot be accommodated** if you complete less than 4 by the end of the semester.

### 20% Quotation explanations (4 assignments, each worth 5%)

Before every lecture, you will be given a quotation from one of the sources we will be discussing in class. Your assignment is to explain the content of the quotation within the context of the reading as clearly as possible. This will typically involve reconstructing the author's argument for their position, and identifying the position they are arguing for. Answers must be submitted **before** the beginning of the relevant lecture, without exception. You can choose to complete this assignment for **any four** lectures. If you complete less than four, you will receive a grade of zero for each missing assignment. You can miss any 8 assignments you like, and for any reason, but **you cannot be accommodated** if you complete less than 4 by the end of the semester.

10% In-class debate

On Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, we will have a formal debate on the rationality of believing in God. You will be assigned to one of two teams; each team will argue one side of the resolution. You will be given one class to prepare your case (Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>), and the debate will take place on the following class. Each of you will be responsible for submitting the notes you made during your preparation for the debate, as well as a grading breakdown for the other members of your team. Your grade will be determined on the basis of: (1) your team's performance, (2) your individual performance, (3) your debate notes, and (4) your teammates' assessment of your performance.

35% Final dialogue (due April 8<sup>th</sup>)

A philosophical dialogue consists in a discussion between a number of fictional (or fictionalized) characters who hold different views on the topic under discussion. You can think of it as a play where the characters defend their commitments. You will be responsible for submitting a dialogue of roughly 3,000 words in which a theist, atheist, and agnostic debate the rationality of believing in God.

LATE PENALTY: the penalty is 3% per day, including weekends. If you have recognized grounds for academic accommodation for an applicable assignment, present them to Academic Counselling as soon as possible; if your request for accommodation is accepted by Academic Counselling, it is then your responsibility to make alternative arrangements with the instructor before the due date. If either of these conditions are not met, an accommodation will not be made.

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

<b>Lectures</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1	The Ontological Argument	Anselm of Canterbury, "The classical ontological arguments": pp. 291-294 Gaunilo of Marmoutier, "Gaunilo's response to Anselm": pp. 295-299.
2	The Cosmological Argument	Thomas Aquinas, "The classical cosmological argument": pp. 193-196. William Lane Craig, "The <i>Kalam</i> cosmological argument": pp. 197-214.
3	The Argument from Design	William Paley, "The classical design argument": pp. 251-255. David Hume "A critique of the design argument": pp. 279-287.
4	Creationism and Darwinism	Michael J. Behe "A recent intelligent design argument": pp. 256-266. Philip Kitcher "Born again creationism": OWL

5	Religious Experience	William James, "Mysticism": pp. 476-484. Louis P. Pojman, "A critique of the argument from religious experience": OWL
6	Spiritual Experience	Sam Harris, "Experiments in Consciousness": OWL
7	Problem of Evil	William L. Rowe, "The problem of evil": pp. 526-536 David Lewis, 'Divine evil': OWL
8	Miracles	David Hume, "The unreasonability of belief in miracles": pp. 397-408 Richard Swinburne, "A case for miracles": pp. 409-414
9	The Mind-Body Problem	Rene Descartes, "Meditation VI": OWL
10	Faith and Reason	W.K. Clifford, "The ethics of belief": pp. 359-365. Blaise Pascal, "The wager": pp. 389-394. William James, "The will to believe": pp. 366-378.
11	Mental Viruses	Richard Dawkins, "Viruses of the mind": OWL Susan Blackmore, "Why I no longer believe religion is a virus of the mind" ( <i>Guardian</i> article available online)
12	Religion and Morality	Paul Copan, "The moral argument": pp. 315-337. Friederich Nietzsche, ""Good and Evil," "Good and Bad": OWL
13	Religion and Meaning	Leo Tolstoy, "The meaning of life": OWL Albert Camus, "The myth of Sisyphus": OWL

**\*Please note:** this is a **provisional** schedule: one or more lectures may need to be deleted due to time constraints or external circumstances; no new topics will be introduced.



## Appendix to Course Outlines: Academic Policies & Regulations 2021 - 2022

### Mandatory Use of Masks in Classrooms

Students will be expected to wear triple layer non-medical masks at all times in the classroom as per Huron policy and public health directives. Students are now permitted to drink water in class by lifting and replacing the mask each time a drink is taken. Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks.

Students unwilling to wear a mask as stipulated by Huron policy and public health directives will be referred to the Dean's Office, and such actions will be considered a violation of the Huron Student Code of Conduct.

### **Pandemic Contingency**

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, typically using a combination of synchronous instruction (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) and asynchronous material (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online at the discretion of the course instructor. In the unlikely event that changes to the grading scheme are necessary, these changes will be clearly communicated as soon as possible.

### **Student Code of Conduct**

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

### **Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information**

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

### **Attendance Regulations for Examinations**

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Review the policy on Attendance Regulations for Examinations here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/exam/attendance.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf).

### **Statement on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf). The appeals process is also outlined in this policy as well as more generally at the following website: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf).

### **Turnitin.com**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

### **Statement on Use of Electronic Devices**

It is not appropriate to use electronic devices (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

### **Statement on Use of Personal Response Systems (“Clickers”)**

Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else’s clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

### **Academic Consideration for Missed Work**

Students who are seeking academic consideration for missed work during the semester may submit a self-reported absence form online provided that the absence is **48 hours or less** and the other conditions specified in the Senate policy at

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_illness.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf) are met.

Students whose absences are expected to last **longer than 48 hours**, or where the other conditions detailed in the policy are not met (e.g., work is worth more than 30% of the final grade, the student has already used 2 self-reported absences, the absence is during the final exam period), may receive academic consideration by submitting a Student Medical Certificate (for illness) or other appropriate documentation (for compassionate grounds). The Student Medical Certificate is available online at

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. **Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work, and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.**

Students who have conditions for which academic accommodation is appropriate, such as disabilities or ongoing or chronic health conditions, should work with Accessible Education Services to determine appropriate forms of accommodation. Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>.

### **Policy on Academic Consideration for a Medical/ Non-Medical Absence**

**(a) Consideration on Medical Grounds for assignments worth *less than 10%* of final grade:  
Consult Instructor Directly and Contact Academic Advising**

When seeking consideration on **medical grounds** for assignments worth *less than 10%* of the final course grade, and if the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported absences, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. If documentation is requested, the student will need to complete and submit the [Student Medical Certificate](#). The instructor may **not** collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation.

**(b) Consideration on Non-Medical Grounds: Consult Huron Support Services/Academic Advising, or email [hurousss@uwo.ca](mailto:hurousss@uwo.ca).**

Students seeking academic consideration for a **non-medical** absence (e.g. varsity sports, religious, compassionate, or bereavement) will be required to provide appropriate documentation where the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence have not been met, including where the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported. All consideration requests must include a completed [Consideration Request Form](#). Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor.

Please review the full policy on Academic Consideration for medical and non-medical absence at: [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_illness.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf). Consult [Huron Academic Advising](#) at [hurousss@uwo.ca](mailto:hurousss@uwo.ca) for any further questions or information.

**Support Services**

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should email an Academic Advisor in Huron's Student Support Services at [hurousss@uwo.ca](mailto:hurousss@uwo.ca). An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>.

Department Chairs, Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about individual programs. Contact information can be found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/contact/faculty-staff-directory/>.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your workload is not manageable, you should consult your Academic Advisor. If you are considering reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines. Please refer to the Advising website, <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/> or review the list of official Sessional Dates on the Academic Calendar, available here: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm>.

You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP and/or Scholarship/Bursary eligibility.

Huron Student Support Services: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>  
Office of the Registrar: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/>

Student Quick Reference Guide: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/#1>

Academic Support & Engagement: <http://academicssupport.uwo.ca/>

Huron University College Student Council: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/beyond-classroom/hucsc/>

Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

### **Mental Health & Wellness Support at Huron and Western**

University students may encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. Huron offers a variety of services that are here to support your success and wellbeing. Please visit <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/wellness-safety> for more information or contact staff directly:

Wellness Services: [huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca](mailto:huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca)

Community Safety Office: [safety@huron.uwo.ca](mailto:safety@huron.uwo.ca)

Chaplaincy: [gthorne@huron.uwo.ca](mailto:gthorne@huron.uwo.ca)

Additional supports for Health and Wellness may be found and accessed at Western through, <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.