

**Department of Philosophy**  
**PHL 3050: God and Philosophy**  
**Semester II, 2025-26**

**I. General Information**

Meetings: TR: 9:30am-10:45pm  
Room: Smee, Wesleyan Seminar Room  
Professor: Rob Thompson  
Office: Smee Hall 207  
Phone: 849-2930  
Office Hours: After this class until noon and by appointment  
E-mail: [robertthompson@pointloma.edu](mailto:robertthompson@pointloma.edu)  
Texts: Proslogion, St. Anselm;  
ISBN: 9780872205659  
Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit, Elizabeth A. Johnson;  
ISBN-10: 0809134152  
On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process, Catherine Keller  
ISBN: 9780800662769  
For Self Examination and Judge for Yourself, Soren Kierkegaard;  
ISBN: 978-0691020662  
I and Thou, Martin Buber;  
ISBN: 0684717255  
Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and  
Religious Belief, Ludwig Wittgenstein;  
ISBN: 978-0520251816  
The Cross and the Lynching Tree, James Cone;  
ISBN: 9781626980051

**II. PLNU MISSION**

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

**III. Course Description**

This course provides an exploration of issues related to theological discourse, especially language about God. The class engages significant figures and ideas throughout the Western philosophical tradition. There will be a focus on Medieval Christian philosophers including St. Augustine, St. Anselm, and St. Aquinas. There will also be a focus on justice issues related to gender, race, class, ecology, and disability.

#### **IV. OUTCOMES**

1. Students will engage in the disciplined practices of asking questions about God, the world, and of themselves, including questions for which there may be no easy answers. (Learning, Growing)
2. Students will differentiate among interrelated movements or figures in the history of philosophy. (Learning)
3. Students will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of human reasoning or experience to provide adequate accounts of significant issues that relate to our human condition, the world, ethics and Christian life. (Learning, Growing, Serving)

#### **V. Course Objectives**

1. To develop and widen an openness towards the pursuit of wisdom.
2. To examine the philosophical impact of the body as we consider the relation of the soul to the body.
3. To study historically impacting figures in the history of (broadly western) philosophy in order to enrich our engagement with this tradition.
4. To consider the way the transcendence and immanence of God shapes a conception of God.
5. To explore issues related to theological discourse, especially language about God and the metaphysical assumptions found in Christian thought.
6. To consider the nature of religious belief.
7. To consider the relationship between reason and faith and the extent to which reason can be applied to religious belief and or conviction.
8. To nurture creative and reflective thinking by reading some really good but difficult texts that address some key issues within the Western philosophical tradition, like religious experience, faith, reason, God's existence, theodicy, immortality, mortality, ethical action, idolatry, iconography, and language.
9. To wrestle with these issues as they relate to our lives.

#### **VI. CHRISTIAN STUDIES CORE REQUIREMENT:**

This class fulfills the Core philosophy requirement (PHL 3050) for all Christian Studies majors.

#### **Rationale for Its Inclusion in the SoTCM Core**

The core philosophy course will not be a technical course.

It will not be a specialized course.

It will be self-consciously general.

Its main interest will be the cultivation in each of its students a disposition of generous inquiry.

The content of the course (God and Philosophy) will provide a context for the habituation of this disposition.

We will inquire into issues related to textual interpretation (including scripture).

We will inquire into issues related to embodiment (e.g., the incarnation of Christ, mortality, and human vulnerability).

We will inquire into issues related to power dynamics (e.g., issues that come to bear on women, post-colonial dynamics, politics, race, environmental concerns, poverty, and disability). We will inquire into issues related to ethical concerns as we consider the logic at work within the life death and resurrection of Jesus.

The nature of philosophy is such that it intentionally addresses thought and action at the broadest, most primary levels. Its task, in part, is to make explicit logics that are already present within human presuppositions, endeavors, and history, but, at the same time, it anticipates those that are not yet present. Philosophy is an inter-play between what has been presumed, articulated and acted upon and what has not yet been thought or said. In other words, philosophy both describes what is already present and vigilantly awaits and anticipates what is yet to be.

The inclusion of the God and Philosophy course in the SoTCM core is significant for our students in that they will be learning how to ask after significant and properly basic issues. These questions will be important for each of our students throughout their lives as they are confronted with the opacity of human life and the profundity of theological problems. As ministers, they will need to be able to deal meaningfully with the despair that often comes with poverty, sickness, and death, or a loss of a sense of meaning and/or identity. As theologians, they will need to engage the logic at work within Creation, the transcendence and immanence of God, and the particularity of love. As interpreters of Holy Scripture, they will need to begin with the nature of authorship and authority in writing itself. As Christians, they will need to ask the question, “how are we to love those we meet as the church?” They will need to ask the principle and properly basic question, “what, then, is love?”

God and Philosophy will only begin to engender these questions in a meaningful way. Our students will continue in this attitude of inquiry throughout our curriculum in the SoTCM. The synthetic relationship between the areas of study in our school will be particularized in each student. What we hope is that each student will continue to pursue Jesus the Christ throughout each of their lives. This pursuit will take on different forms in unimaginable ways for each one who passes through our doors.

## **VII. Course Requirements and Grading**

**Attendance and Participation:** Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions (virtual or face-to-face), the faculty member may issue a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university drop date or, after that date, receive the appropriate grade for their work and participation. See [Academic Policies](#) in the Undergraduate Academic Catalog. If absences exceed these limits but are due to university excused health issues, an exception will be granted.

This is also a seminar style class. As such, student engagement in each session and discussion is essential both for the student’s success and for the success of the class as a whole.

- 15% **Readings:** Read all the assigned material before coming to class. During roll call at the beginning of each class, students will be asked to give a number between 0 and 10 (10 being highest) indicating how much of the assigned reading was carefully and thoughtfully read. The number given will be the grade that the student receives for the day. For example, if you have read carefully and thoughtfully 85% of the reading for a given day, you should represent, and will receive, an 8.5 for the day. The lowest score will be dropped, including if you have received a zero due to missing class.
- 12% **Presentation:** Throughout the term each student will do one in-class presentation. Each presenter should include a brief and general introduction to the figure covered during that session, including a unique picture of the figure/author discussed. The presentation should mainly be an outline of the text(s) for the day, but with a goal to engage the class in significant discussion over major issues raised by the text, and should reference 6-8 significant portions (quotations or specific page/text references) of the text to be covered in class. Each student must give me a copy of their presentation notes, including references to selected quotations, where it is clear that consideration has been given to how to teach the material, pose questions to foster discussion over the text, and to tease out implications given the view forwarded by the text. Please refrain from using electronic sources unless they are full text journals accessed through our library's numerous database collections (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is an example of a full text journal). (**NB:** the goal is both to move through the salient elements of the reading for the day and to engage in critical discussion on the reading, so the presentations should reflect an effort to accomplish both elements.)
- 3% **Wiley Reflection:** You will be required to attend one Wiley lecture and write a two-page reflection. The lectures are in Crill Auditorium and one of the times (on Tuesday and in lieu of meeting for class) is given in the course schedule, though other times are available (see the numerous communications from the Wiley Lecture facilitators for that information).
- 22% **Essay:** There will be one paper. The paper will be 7-8 pages in length and will cover either James Cone's book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, or Catherine Keller's book, *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process*. You should rely on the relevant text primarily, but you may use other texts as well. You will need to do a close and careful analysis of the main argument regarding the significant relationship between the cross of Jesus and the lynching tree in the U.S. south or the hope found through the dynamism in the Divine mystery. The deadline for the paper is 5/01 by 11:59pm PST (submitted in Canvas). You may use whichever manual of style you prefer. All papers must fully reference all texts utilized for the paper in accordance with the preferred manual of style. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in either zero credit for the assignment and a minimum additional full grade reduction for the class or failure of the course altogether (this is up to my discretion). Both will result in a letter to the Provost to be placed in your academic record.
- 48% **Exams:** Each student will be expected to complete a written, in-class mid-term exam. In addition, each student will be expected to complete a comprehensive final exam. It will

be an in-class essay exam with a matching component. Each exam is 24% of the final grade.

## **VIII. UNIVERSITY AND COURSE POLICIES**

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY**

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism and the use of unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any exam or other academic exercise. It also includes assisting others in any attempt to cheat. It will not be tolerated. However, respect for academic honesty is consistent with discussing the ideas of the course with others. In fact, I encourage you to discuss any and all of the course material that you find interesting outside of class. In the end, however, you must do your written work on your own. If you have any questions about academic honesty, either in general or in particular, please ask me.

A special note on plagiarism is warranted. Each of you is responsible to know what plagiarism is and to avoid even the appearance of plagiarism in your work. (A decent working definition is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the result of another person's creativity and effort.) No act of plagiarism, whether born of one's intention or ignorance, will be tolerated in this class. Anyone caught plagiarizing will incur severe academic consequences. Such consequences will include a grade of zero for the plagiarized work, and may also include expulsion with a failing grade from the course. The student's name and an explanation of the incident will also be forwarded to the Department Chair/School Dean and the area Dean. The area Dean will review the report and submit it to the Provost and the Vice President for Student Development. It will also be placed in the student's permanent academic file. Please see the University policy stated in the catalogue ([Academic Policies](#)). Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g, ChatGPT, iA Writer, Marmot, Botowski) is not permitted, and use of these tools will be treated as plagiarism.

### **FINAL EXAMINATION POLICY**

Successful completion of this class requires taking the final examination on its scheduled day. The final examination schedule is posted on the [Class Schedules](#) site. If you find yourself scheduled for three (3) or more final examinations on the same day, you are authorized to contact each professor to arrange a different time for one of those exams. However, unless you have three (3) or more exams on the same day, no requests for alternative final examinations will be granted.

### **DISCRIMINATION/HARASSMENT POLICY**

Discrimination or harassment related to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity or orientation, differences in ability, religious choice, or any other type of behavior that dehumanizes human beings or dismisses difference, is not conducive to a good learning environment and is harmful to human vitality and healthy community. These behaviors will not be tolerated. I encourage all students to be open to any honest, respectful, and tactful discussion of issues that might arise in the context of our learning.

### **PLNU ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY**

While all students are expected to meet the minimum standards for completion of this course as established by the instructor, students with disabilities may require academic adjustments, modifications or auxiliary aids/services. At Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU), these students are requested to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), located in the Bond Academic Center ([DRC@pointloma.edu](mailto:DRC@pointloma.edu) or 619-849-2486). The DRC's policies and procedures for assisting such students in the development of an appropriate academic adjustment plan (AP) allows PLNU to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against students with special needs and guarantees all qualified students equal access to and benefits of PLNU programs and activities. After the student files the required documentation, the DRC, in conjunction with the student, will develop an AP to meet that student's specific learning needs. The DRC will thereafter email the student's AP to all faculty who teach courses in which the student is enrolled each semester. The AP must be implemented in all such courses.

If students do not wish to avail themselves of some or all of the elements of their AP in a particular course, it is the responsibility of those students to notify their professor in that course. PLNU highly recommends that DRC students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester about the applicability of their AP in that particular course and/or if they do not desire to take advantage of some or all of the elements of their AP in that course.

## **INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE POLICY**

The use of inclusive language is now prevalent, even expected, throughout most sectors of our society (e.g., academia, government, business, religious organizations). Further, inclusive language is very often a more accurate and fair representation of the intended meaning of a person's communicative content. As such, everyone is expected to make use of inclusive language in all written work. The avoidance of such use in a given project will result in a lowering of the grade for that project. Everyone is also expected to make use of inclusive language during classroom discussions.

The Welch School of Theology and Christian Ministry is committed to the equality of all people. Recognizing that people have often used the English language in ways that imply the exclusion or inferiority of women and gender-diverse individuals, we urge students, faculty, and staff to avoid sexist language in public discourse, in classroom discussion, and in their writings. Thus, terms like "man" or "mankind" or the pronoun "he," should not be used to refer to all humans. Instead "people," "humanity," "humans," and "he, she or they" better acknowledge individuals as full persons.

## **LANGUAGE AND BELONGING**

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe and hospitable learning environment for all students. As Christian scholars we are keenly aware of the power of language and believe in treating others with dignity. As such, it is important that our language be equitable, inclusive, and prejudice free. Inclusive/Bias-free language is the standard outlined by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and it is the expected norm in university-level work. Good writing and speaking do not use unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about personal qualities such as age, disability, economic class, ethnicity, marital

status, parentage, political or religious beliefs, race, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Inclusive language also avoids using stereotypes or terminology that demeans persons or groups based on age, disability, class, ethnicity, gender, race, language, or national origin. Respectful use of language is particularly important when referring to those outside of the religious and lifestyle commitments of those in the PLNU community. By working toward precision and clarity of language, we mark ourselves as serious and respectful scholars, and we model the Christ-like quality of hospitality. You may report an incident(s) using the [Bias Incident Reporting Form](#).

## **LAND, LABOR, AND LIFE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

As students and scholars at PLNU, we acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the [Kumeyaay Diegueño Indian Tribe](#). May we be good guests to the people, the stories, the wisdom, the fruits of the land and dwell with one another with peace.

## **SPIRITUAL CARE**

Please be aware PLNU strives to be a place where you grow as whole persons. To this end, we provide resources for our students to encounter God and grow in their Christian faith.

If students have questions, a desire to meet with the chaplain or have prayer requests you can contact the [Office of Spiritual Development](#)

## **STATE AUTHORIZATION**

State authorization is a formal determination by a state that Point Loma Nazarene University is approved to conduct activities regulated by that state. In certain states outside California, Point Loma Nazarene University is not authorized to enroll online (distance education) students. If a student moves to another state after admission to the program and/or enrollment in an online course, continuation within the program and/or course will depend on whether Point Loma Nazarene University is authorized to offer distance education courses in that state. It is the student's responsibility to notify the institution of any change in his or her physical location. Refer to the map on [State Authorization](#) to view which states allow online (distance education) outside of California.

## **PLNU COPYRIGHT POLICY**

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

## **USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

In order to be successful in the online environment, you'll need to meet the minimum technology and system requirements; please refer to the [Technology and System Requirements](#) information. Additionally, students are required to have headphone speakers compatible with their computer available to use. If a student is in need of technological resources please contact [student-tech-request@pointloma.edu](mailto:student-tech-request@pointloma.edu).

Problems with technology do not relieve you of the responsibility of participating, turning in your assignments, or completing your class work.