

# METAPHYSICS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

05:550—Fall 2021  
(Version August 27, 2021)



*Saint Meinrad*  
Seminary &  
School of Theology

Faculty Offices

Instructor: Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB  
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Schedule: G156, Monday and Thursday, 8:30 – 9:45 AM  
Office Hours: By appointment (<https://Fr-Thomas.appointlet.com>)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Natural theology is the branch of metaphysics that considers the being and nature of God as demonstrable by the natural light of reason. The advances of modern science have spawned numerous arguments both for and against theism on rational grounds. This course examines traditional and contemporary approaches to the existence and attributes of God, with a special focus on the intersection of science and belief. Various approaches to science and belief will be compared and evaluated, including models of conflict, harmony, and integration.

## COURSE GOALS

Seminarians who successfully complete this course will:

- link metaphysical concepts to clarify the concept of God in classical theism;
- understand and apply classical and contemporary proofs for the existence of God;
- explain the basic concepts of cosmology and evolution for a general audience;
- compare and evaluate several scientifically informed approaches to God;
- author an essay that conveys how metaphysics and science can point toward God.

This course addresses the following MA (Catholic Philosophical Studies) Degree Outcomes:

- understand the role and contribution of the Western philosophical tradition in the development and explication of Christian doctrine;
- interpret philosophical and theological texts in light of the broad Western Christian tradition;
- express arguments logically and concisely in written and oral form.

## TEXTBOOKS

Clarke, W. Norris. *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

Davies, Brian, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.

**ONLINE TEXTS**

Austriaco, O.P., Nicanor Pier Giorgio, James Brent, O.P., Thomas Davenport, O.P., and John Baptist Ku, O.P. *Thomistic Evolution*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cluny Media, 2019.

Barr, Stephen M. *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith*. New edition. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003.

Craig, William Lane, and Quentin Smith. *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. <https://archive.org/details/theismatheismbig0000crai>

Haight, John F. *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Phy-Olsen, Allene S. *Evolution, Creationism, and Intelligent Design*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010.

Ruse, Michael. *The Evolution Wars: A Guide to the Debates*. Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2014.

Shaver, Peter. *Cosmic Heritage: Evolution from the Big Bang to Conscious Life*. 2011 edition. New York, NY: Copernicus, 2011.

Spitzer, Robert J., SJ. *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

**GRADING**

<b>Class Participation</b>	30%	See policy below
<b>Paper: Introduction</b>	10%	Due October 14
<b>Paper: Cosmology</b>	10%	Due October 25
<b>Paper: Evolution</b>	10%	Due November 15
<b>Paper: Conclusion</b>	10%	Due December 02
<b>Paper: Complete</b>	30%	Due December 09

**CLASS PARTICIPATION POLICY (HQCQs)**

Students will submit a “High Quality Comment and Question” on BlackBaud once per week. A total of 10 HQCQs are expected during the course. Each HQCQ must be clearly based on the assigned reading for the day.

The instructor will give an opening lecture for each meeting, and then open the floor for discussion. The students who have prepared HQCQs for the day will offer their remarks first.

The student will address the Comment (100 – 300 words) to the **class**, and will indicate what he found to be the most important or interesting or challenging point of the reading assignment, and explain why. This should take no more than three minutes. Do not summarize the reading; rather, focus on a single point.

The student will address the Question (1 – 100 words) to the **instructor**, and will ask for clarification or elaboration on a particular section or sentence (cite the text). This should take no more than one minute.

## RESEARCH PAPER

Students will author a persuasive research paper of **4,000-5,000 words** that incorporates metaphysical and scientific sources to support the claims of classical theism. This comprehensive essay on natural theology will combine metaphysical proofs for the existence of God with a scientifically informed narrative of the unfolding of the cosmos. The aim of the paper is to make a persuasive, rigorous, and inspiring case for the existence of God as the creator of the universe.

The paper must explain basic elements of contemporary cosmology and evolutionary biology in terms that are understandable by the general public. The student must summarize and evaluate at least two approaches to the question of God's existence based on current scientific theories. The arguments of the paper will be philosophical, synthesizing the metaphysical concepts presented in the course. The paper will be written in stages, with opportunities for review and revision. The student must cite at least eight reputable sources. A sample outline is below.

## SAMPLE OUTLINE

Thesis: Although natural sciences cannot prove the existence of God as a supernatural creator, the "big history" of the universe fits into the metaphysical system of classical theism.

1. Explaining the "Big History" of the Universe
  - a. Summary of the naturalist version of "big history"
  - b. Question whether "big history" can grow a metaphysical dimension
  - c. Statement of the thesis, and plan of the paper
2. Big Bang Cosmology and Creation
  - a. The origin and status of the Big Bang theory
  - b. Trying to prove the existence of God from the Big Bang
  - c. Why natural cosmology cannot prove the existence of God
  - d. How a metaphysical proof for God's existence works with the Big Bang
3. Evolutionary Biology and Creation
  - a. The origin and status of evolutionary biology
  - b. Trying to prove the existence of God from "intelligent design"
  - c. Why "intelligent design" has scientific and philosophical problems
  - d. How a metaphysical proof for God's existence works with evolution
4. A Metaphysical Big History of the Universe
  - a. Sketch of a metaphysical version of "big history"
  - b. Metaphysics as the preamble of faith
  - c. Questions that remain for further pondering

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are to refer to the School's policy on academic integrity. All facts, concepts, arguments, and examples must be properly cited (Chicago system preferred), unless they are either the student's own original work, or common knowledge. When in doubt, make a citation. Written assignments are routinely checked for plagiarism.

**COURSE CALENDAR**

<b>Mtg</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1	08/30	God, Science, and Philosophy	
2	09/02	Metaphysics – The Science of Being	Clarke – Chs 2-3
	09/06	<b>No Class – Labor Day</b>	
3	09/09	Metaphysics – Essence/Existence, Form/Matter	Clarke – Chs 5-6
4	09/13	Metaphysics – Act/Potency, Substance/Accident	Clarke – Chs 7-8
5	09/16	Metaphysics – Synthesis of Concepts	Clarke – Ch 10
6	09/20	Proofs – Ontological Arguments	Davies – Chs 29, 30, 31, 35
7	09/23	Proofs – Cosmological Arguments	Davies – Chs 16, 17, 18, 22
8	09/27	Proofs – Design Arguments	Davies – Chs 23, 24, 27, 28
9	09/30	Science – Contemporary Cosmology	Shaver – Chs 1, 2, 3
10	10/04	Science – Contemporary Cosmology	Shaver – Chs 4, 5, 6, 7
11	10/07	Cosmology and Theism in Conflict	Craig, Chs 7-8
12	10/11	Theistic Cosmology – Cosmogogenesis	Spitzer, Ch 1
	10/14	<b>No Class – Stein Conference</b>	
13	10/18	Theistic Cosmology – Anthropic Principle	Barr, Chs 9-13
14	10/21	Science – Evolutionary Biology	Shaver – Chs 8, 9, 10
15	10/25	Science – Evolutionary Biology	Shaver – Chs 11, 12, 13
16	10/28	Evolution and Theism in Conflict	Ruse – Ch 5; Phy-Olsen – Chs 4, 5, 6
	11/01	<b>No Class – Solemnity of All Saints</b>	
17	11/04	Theistic Evolution – A Process Theology Approach	Haught, Chs 3, 6, 7
18	11/08	Theistic Evolution – A Thomistic Approach	Austriaco, Chs 19-28
19	11/11	Divine Attributes – Simplicity	Davies – Chs 50-52
20	11/15	Divine Attributes – Omnipotence	Davies – Chs 39-42
21	11/18	Divine Attributes – Omniscience	Davies – Chs 43-45
	11/22	<b>No Class – Thanksgiving Break</b>	
	11/25	<b>No Class – Thanksgiving Break</b>	
22	11/29	Divine Attributes – Goodness	Clarke – Chs 16-17
23	12/02	The Problem of Evil	Davies – Chs 53-54
24	12/06	The Problem of Evil	Davies – Chs 55-57
	12/09	<b>No Class – Complete Research Paper Due</b>	
	<b>12/17</b>	<b>Grades Due to Registrar</b>	