Friedrich Nietzsche’s madman famously declared to the marketplace, "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" For many today the idea of "God" and/or the utility of religion is dead or dying. "God" has come to represent an antiquated relic of an unsophisticated period in human history. Like Zeus and the gods of Mt. Olympus, the "God" of western civilization is best set aside as another myth overcome. In popular culture, politics, and education, "God" and religion have often been neutered to the point of irrelevance and/or demonized as simply dangerous. For some of the participants of the debates about "God" and religious belief, if "God" is not yet dead, s/he should be. How did we get here? What contributed to this shift in western intellectual history?

The objective for this course will be to consider the intellectual tributaries that have contributed to the current debate about "God." Among other topics, the course will discuss the notion of "God" as it was understood in ancient and medieval times, as well as the intellectual shifts that impacted this understanding as western culture entered the modern period. The readings will include works from early Christian writers (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, Ephrem the Syrian), medieval thinkers (e.g., Thomas Aquinas), as well as works from both contemporary atheism (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens) and theistic responses to those writings (e.g., David Bentley Hart, Ed Feser). Questions to be discussed include, Who/What do we mean by "God"? Is "God" just another thing in the world? Is "God" the best explanatory hypothesis to make sense of the world? What do we make of religious violence? What is freedom? What counts as knowledge? The guiding question for the course, which sums up the trajectory for the course, will be, Is "God" dead?