

## BELIEF IN GOD

*Times* MWF 10-12, Maryland 217

*Instructor* Tammo Lossau (jlossau1@jhu.edu)

*Office hours* Mo+Fr, 12-12:45, Gilman 267

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Historically, many philosophers have tried to provide arguments to establish the existence of God. While these arguments are often extremely interesting, they fail when understood as proofs and face problems even as supportive arguments. Even worse, defenders of religious belief face the *Problem of Evil*: why would a benevolent God create a world that allows for such things as the Holocaust and the bubonic plague? This is a serious objection, but some have at least provided some considerations how it might still be possible that God would create the world like this. If these ideas are convincing, this opens the door for considerations whether and how it might at least be rationally *permissible* to believe in God. In this course, we will read and discuss some of the most famous texts from both sides of these debates. A background in philosophy is not required, but participants are presumed to be willing to work through complex and "hard" readings.

### GOALS

The primary goal of this course is to introduce participants to some classical arguments and ideas from the philosophy of religion. By way of doing this you will hopefully also gain some understanding of philosophical activity and of what constitutes a good argument in general. A specific aspect of this topic is that religion may personally mean a lot to some participants – either because they are themselves religious, or because they have strong feelings about things like violence or discrimination in the name of religion. I would like for everyone to focus on the question how the different sides can have a fair discussion about belief in God without either side being personally attacked or offended. The ability to have such discussions is useful outside the classroom, too.

### REQUIREMENTS

This class is graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory for all students. A satisfactory grade requires regular attendance (miss no more than two classes) and participation as well as completion of both steps of the reading excerpts. These are papers that summarize the main line of reasoning of one of our papers and should indicate both which questions you have and (very briefly) which potential problems you might see with it. As a rough approximation, an excerpt should be 10-15% of the original text's length. As the first step, you pick one course reading (to be decided on in the first meeting) and submit your excerpt to me by email before 7pm on the day before we discuss this text in class. For Jan 12, pick one of the readings (Aquinas or Hume). As a second step, you rewrite that paper after that class, taking into consideration the key takeaways of our class discussion of that reading. You do not need to (and should not) include discussions of other authors or biographical details I might bring in, but you should try to use the class to get clearer on the reading itself. The rewritten excerpts are due at 7pm the day before the next meeting. (For example, if you write on Anselm, the first version is due Jan 9, 7pm, and the final version is due Jan 11, 7pm.) I will post one of these excerpts on Blackboard after each class to make revisiting classes easier – if you would *not* like me to post your excerpt, please flag this in your message.

ACADEMIC  
INTEGRITY

Don't cheat! It is your responsibility that within your papers, any idea that is not your own is clearly credited to that source. This includes any rephrased version, and it entails that you not only cite the source within the paper, but at every occasion when you discuss material originating from that source, marking clearly what the extent of that overlap is. If you plagiarize, I will find you and I will fight you!

ACCOMMODA-  
TIONS

If you are a student with a disability or believe that you might have a disability that requires special accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services to obtain a letter from a specialist: Garland 385; (410) 516 4720; studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu

CLASS  
SCHEDULE

Readings in [brackets] are not required but will be in the background of discussions and are listed for easier reference. For most classes, there is a chapter in Mackie which is usually a very good guide to the text.

**Jan 8: Housekeeping; What is God?**

**Jan 10: The Ontological Argument**

Anselm of Canterbury. Prologion. In id., *The Major Works*. Edited by Brian Davies and G.R. Evans. Translated by M.J. Charlesworth. Oxford University Press 1998. Ch. 1-4, pp. 82-89.

[Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. *Pro Insipientie (On Behalf of the Fool)*. Ibid., pp. 105-110.]

[Anselm of Canterbury. *Reply to Gaunilo*. Ibid., pp. 111-122.]

[Alvin Plantinga. *God Freedom and Evil*. Eerdmans 1969. Pp. 83-112.]

[John Mackie. *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford University Press 1982. Ch. 3, pp. 41-63.]

**Jan 12: The Argument From Design**

Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae I 1-13*. Translated by Brian Shanley. Hackett 2006 (originally published 1274). Pars I, Quaestio 2 [especially article 3, the "fifth way"], pp. 17-24.

David Hume. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Ed. by Dorothy Coleman. Cambridge University Press 2007 (originally published 1779). Pt. 3, par. 1-10 (pp. 29-32) and pt. 7-8 (pp. 52-62).

[Mackie, ch. 8, pp.133-49.]

Jan 15: MLK day

**Jan 17: The Problem of Evil**

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *Real-Life Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil*. Translated by Jonathan Bennett (2006, originally published 1695). Available online at <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/leibniz1695a.pdf>.

[Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *Theodicy*. Translated By E.M. Huggard. BiblioBazaar 2007 (originally published 1710). Part One, par. 1-26, pp. 126-142.]

[Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Selections, transl. by Richard Popkins, The Bobbs-Merrill Company 1965 (originally published 1697). Pp. 166-193 (article on Paulicians).]

[Plantinga, pp. 7-65.]

[Mackie, ch. 9, pp. 150-76.]

**Jan 19: Kant on the Failure of Theodicy.**

Immanuel Kant. On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy. In id., Religion and Rational Theology (Cambridge edition to the works of Kant), transl. and ed. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (pp. 21-37). Cambridge University Press 1996 (originally published 1791).

**Jan 22: Hume's argument against belief based on miracles**

David Hume. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Ed. by Peter Millican. Oxford University Press 2007 (originally published 1748). Ch. 10 ("Of Miracles"), pp. 79-95.

[Mackie, ch. 2, pp. 13-29.]

**Jan 24: Pascal's Wager and The Will to Belief**

William James. The Will to Believe. In id., The Will to Believe and other essays in the popular philosophy (pp. 1-31). Dover 1956 (originally published 1898).

[William James. Pragmatism. In: id., Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth. Harvard University Press 1975 (originally published 1907). P. 124.]

[Blaise Pascal. Pensées. Translated by T.S. Eliot. Dutton 1958 (originally published 1669). Nr. 233, pp. 65-69.]

[Mackie, ch. 11, pp. 199-229.]

**Jan 26: Wrap-up Class**

Possible topics: faith without reason, ramifications for non-monotheistic religions,...