

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Segal, e-mail: Aaron.Segal@yu.edu

Office Hours: Belfer 1514A, Monday and Wednesday 5:45 – 6:45 PM, and by appointment. Please do avail yourselves of office hours!

Course Description: This course will explore foundational questions in the epistemology of religion. Some of the questions are very old: can we know that God exists, and if so, how? Can we reasonably believe in God in the absence of evidence, and if so, why? Is it better to know that God exists or to accept it “on faith”? What is faith, anyway? Some of the questions are of more recent vintage: does the fact of religious disagreement between apparently reasonable people undermine everyone’s religious knowledge? How about the fact that if religious folks had been raised in a non-religious home, they very likely would not be religious? The readings will be drawn from both the Western and the Jewish philosophical and theological corpora.

Evaluation:

- Paper (30%)
- Final Exam (30%)
- Twenty Pre-Class Question Submissions (1.5% each, 30% total)
- Attendance & Participation (10%)

Paper: You are required to write a paper (~ 12 pages), the subject of which can be any topic closely related to one we cover during the semester. (Note: every topic is closely related to itself.) Although the choice of topic is yours, you need to run it by me first for approval. The paper is due the day of the final exam.

Twenty Pre-Class Question Submissions: You are required to submit twenty-four hours in advance of (nearly) every class session two questions about the readings you are assigned for that class. I say ‘nearly’ because there are twenty-six class sessions and you are required to submit questions before only twenty class sessions. (You decide on which occasions not to submit questions.) These questions will be submitted through Angel, and will be available to all participants in the class. They will form the basis of part of our in-class discussion.

Attendance & Participation: Attendance is required. A student is permitted two unexcused absences. Good participation includes, but is not limited to, asking questions, attentively following the class, and meeting with me during office hours.

Disabilities: Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, (646) 592-4280, akelsen@yu.edu, during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.

Academic Integrity: The Yeshiva College Policy on Academic Integrity will be strictly enforced. The policy is available here: <http://www.yu.edu/yeshiva-college/academic-integrity/>. You may not consult anyone other than the instructor when writing your paper.

Schedule:

DATE	TOPIC	REQUIRED READING	RECOMMENDED	VISITOR
PART 1: THEISTIC BELIEF AND EVIDENTIALISM				
1/22	Introduction	Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"		
Theistic Belief without (Sufficient) Propositional Evidence				
1/27	Foundationalism and Deontologism	Plantinga, <i>WCB</i> , ch. 3		
1/29	Rationality	Plantinga, <i>WCB</i> , ch. 4		
2/3	Warranted Theistic Belief	Plantinga <i>WCB</i> , chs. 5 – 6		
2/5	Virtues of Arguments	<i>Emunot V'deot</i> , Introduction: §4 and Wolterstorff, "The Migration of the Theistic Arguments..."		
2/10	Awe, <i>Yir'at Shamayim</i> , and Religious Experience	Wettstein, chs. 3,7		Howard Wettstein
Theistic Belief without (Sufficient) Evidence, Period				
2/12	Absence of Evidence and Evidence of Absence: Divine Hiddenness	Schellenberg, "What the Hiddenness..." and Ross, "The Hiddenness of God"	van Inwagen "The Hiddenness of God"	
2/17	Presumption of Atheism?	Russell, "Is There a God?" and van Inwagen, "Russell's China Teapot"	Flew, "The Presumption of Atheism"	Peter van Inwagen
2/19	Pragmatic Arguments	Pascal, <i>Pensees</i> §233 and James, "Will to Believe"	Hacking, "The Logic of Pascal's Wager" and SEP article on Pascal's Wager	
2/24	Many Gods Objection	Jordan, "The Many Gods Objection" and Schlesinger "A Central Theistic Argument"		
2/26	Mixed Strategy Objection	Hajek, "Waging War on Pascal's Wager"		
3/3	Pragmatic Argument for being a Religious Jew	Golding, "The Rationality..."		Joshua Golding
PART 2: FAITH				
3/5	Faith in Kierkegaard: Part 1	Kierkegaard, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript"		
3/10	Faith in Kierkegaard: Part 2	Adams, "Kierkegaard's Arguments..."		Robert Adams
3/12	Faith and Belief	Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith"	Howard-Snyder, "Propositional Faith..."	

3/17	Faith and Inquiry: Part 1	Buchak, "Can it be Rational to Have Faith?"		Lara Buchak
3/19	Faith and Inquiry: Part 2	Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, "The Clever Man and the Simple Man"	Green, "Excursus I: Faith, Doubt, and Reason"	
3/24	Faith and Intellectual Faithfulness	C.S. Lewis, "On Obstinacy in Belief" and Shatz, "So What Else is Neo: Theism and Epistemic Recalcitrance"		
3/26	Faith and Doubt: Part 1	<i>Emunot V'deot</i> Introduction §1,2		
3/31	Faith and Doubt: Part 2	Lamm, "Faith and Doubt," and Golding "Faith and Doubt Reconsidered"		
INTERLUDE				
4/2	The Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga	Re-read selections from Plantinga		Alvin Plantinga
PART 3: RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES				
4/7	Religious Elders and Authorities	Lichtenstein, "Source of Faith..." and Zagzebski, "Religious Authority"		
4/9	Religious Disagreement: Part 1	Hick, "Religious Pluralism..."		
4/28	Religious Disagreement: Part 2	Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" and Gellman "In Defense of a Contented Religious Exclusivism"		
4/30	Inter-religious Dialogue	Soloveitchik, "Confrontation" and Shatz, TBA	Articles found here:	David Shatz
5/5	Etiology of Belief	White, "You Only Believe That Because..."		

Readings: The following readings will be available on Angel.

- Adams, Robert. "Kierkegaard's Arguments Against Objective Reasoning in Religion," in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford University Press.
- Alston, William P. "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Buchak, Lara. "Can it be rational to have faith?" in *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford University Press.
- Clifford, W.K. "The Ethics of Belief," in *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays*, Prometheus Books.
- Flew, Antony. "The Presumption of Atheism," in *The Presumption of Atheism and other Philosophical Essays on God, Freedom, and Immortality*, Barnes and Noble.
- Gellman, Jerome. "In defence of a contented religious exclusivism," *Religious Studies*, 36(4).
- Golding, Joshua. "The Rational Defensibility of Being a Traditional Religious Jew," *Religious Studies*, 35(4).
- Golding, Joshua. "Faith and Doubt Reconsidered," *Tradition*, 26(3).
- Green, Arthur. *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav*, Excursus I.
- Hacking, Ian. "The Logic of Pascal's Wager," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 9(2).
- Hajek, Alan. "Waging War on Pascal's Wager," *Philosophical Review*, 112(1).
- Hick, John. "Religious Pluralism and Salvation," in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, Oxford University Press.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. "Propositional Faith: What it is and what it is not," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 6th ed.
- James, William. "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, Dover.
- Jordan, Jeff. "The Many Gods Objection," in *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager*, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. "Concluding Unscientific Postscript".
- Lamm, Rabbi Norman. "Faith and Doubt," in *Faith and Doubt*, Ktav Publishing.
- Lewis, C.S. "On Obstinacy in Belief," *The Sewanee Review*, 63(4).
- Lichtenstein, Rabbi Aharon. "The Source of Faith is Faith Itself," in *Leaves of Faith*.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees*.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford University Press. Chs. 3 – 6.
- Plantinga, Alvin. "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, Oxford University Press.
- Rav Nachman of Bratslav. "The Clever Man and the Simple Man," in *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, Koren Publishers.
- Rav Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Hackett Publishing Company. Prolegomena.
- Ross, Jacob Joshua. "The Hiddness of God: A Puzzle or a Real Problem," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, Cambridge University Press.
- Russell, Bertrand. "Is There a God?"
- Schellenberg, J.L. "What the Hiddenness of God Reveals: A Collaborative Discussion," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, Cambridge University Press.
- Schlesinger, George. "A Central Theistic Argument," in *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager*, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Shatz, David. "So What Else is Neo? Theism and Epistemic Recalcitrance," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 37(1).
- Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B. "Confrontation," *Tradition*, 6(2).
- van Inwagen, Peter. "Russell's China Teapot," in *The Right to Believe: Perspective in Religious Epistemology*.
- van Inwagen, Peter. "The Hiddenness of God," in *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford University Press. Available here.
- Wettstein, Howard. *The Significance of Religious Experience*, Oxford University Press. Chs. 3,7.
- White, Roger. "You just believe that because..." *Philosophical Perspectives*, 24(1).
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. "The Migration of the Theistic Arguments; From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, Cornell University Press.
- Zagzebski, Linda. "Religious Authority," in *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Authority, Trust, and Autonomy in Belief*, Oxford University Press.