



## Introducing Philosophy of Religion through *Battlestar Galactica* and *Philosophy: Knowledge Here Begins Out There*

### For Courses Such As

*'I Am an Instrument of God': Religious Belief, Atheism, and Meaning*. Introduction to Philosophy; Philosophy of Religion; any course in which the instructor wishes to discuss the question of whether or not God exists.

### Resources

#### OTHER READINGS

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae, Prima Pars, Question 2, Articles 2 and 3*

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Parts 2 and 11*

Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship" from *Mysticism and Logic* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917)

#### FILM

"33" from *Season One of Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi Channel, 2004)

### Learning Objectives

- Students will learn and critically evaluate Aquinas's classical five arguments for the existence of God based on principles of Aristotelian logic and metaphysics.
- Students will learn and critically evaluate David Hume's criticism of the "argument from design" for God's existence.
- Students will learn and critically evaluate the "problem of evil" raised by both David Hume and Bertrand Russell against the idea that the world was created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God.
- Students will reflect upon and discuss the question of whether human existence and morality continue to be meaningful if God does not exist.

### Rationale

*Battlestar Galactica* presents a group of human beings (not from Earth) who have survived the destruction of their home-world by a race of intelligent machines (Cylons) whom humanity had created and enslaved until the Cylons rebelled. Among the survivors is a scientist, Dr. Gaius Baltar, who has visions of a Cylon (Head-Six) with whom he had a relationship before discovering her true nature. Head-Six believes in one all-powerful and loving God, whereas Baltar is an atheist. When a passenger on one of the ships in the fleet of human survivors presents a threat to Baltar, Head-Six tells him that God is "watching out" for him and will save Baltar if only he repents of his sins. When Baltar repents, the ship, with its threatening passenger, is destroyed because it is believed to present a danger to the rest of the fleet. Eberl and Vines's chapter addresses the questions raised by this episode (as well as others) of *Battlestar Galactica* concerning whether (1) God exists, (2) God justifiably causes or allows evil to occur, and (3) there is meaning or value to human life if God does not exist.



## Class Structure

### 1. ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

- Open the class by showing the *Battlestar Galactica* episode "33" or selected scenes therefrom depending upon available class-time.
- Discuss Gaius Baltar's claim that he believes in a "rational universe." What does it mean to describe the universe in this way? Does it imply a strictly *reductive materialist* worldview that excludes the possibility of God's existence?
- Present and discuss Aquinas's arguments for God's existence based upon his Aristotelian understanding of what constitutes a "rational universe."
- Present the "argument from design" for God's existence from the Hume text.

### 2. ARGUMENTS AGAINST GOD'S EXISTENCE

- Present and discuss Hume's critique of the "argument from design."
- Discuss Head-Six's claim that God wants Baltar to repent of his sins and the fact that, once he does, a ship with over 1,300 innocent people aboard is destroyed in order to protect Baltar. Is it justifiable that God apparently *caused* or at least *allowed* these deaths for the sake of one individual? Could other interpretations of this event either exonerate God or show that God had nothing to do with what transpired?
- Present and discuss the "problem of evil" referenced by both Hume and Russell.

### 3. THE MEANING OF LIFE IN A GODLESS UNIVERSE

- Present and discuss Russell's claim that, while life is devoid of any intrinsic, divinely-ordained meaning, value can be found in life through the pursuit of truth as well as human relationships.
- Relate Russell's thesis to the plight of the human survivors fleeing the Cylons: What meaning or value does life hold for them after their world has been destroyed?

## Suggested Homework

- Students write a 2-3 page paper critically engaging either one of Aquinas's five arguments for God's existence, Hume's critique of the "argument from design," or the "problem of evil."
- In writing the paper, students should consult at least one external course to help them either to understand better the argument or problem they are analyzing, or to assist them in formulating their response.