Online Book Launch & Discussion: The Grammar of 'God' in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
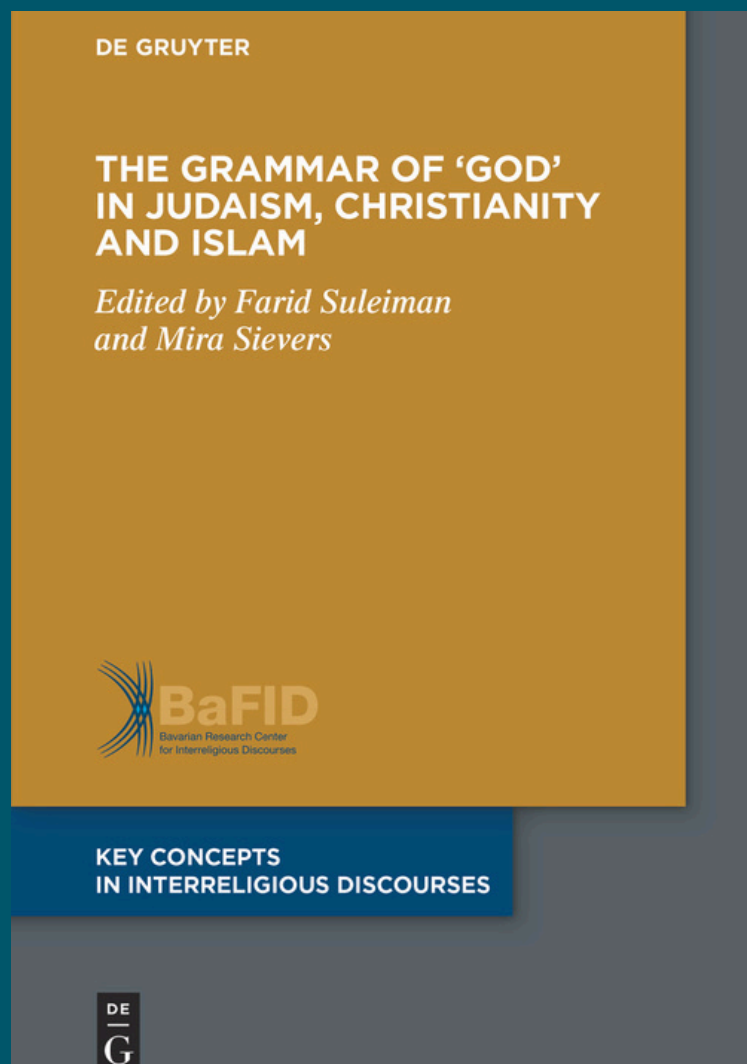
Date: Tuesday, 1st July 2025, at 6 pm (Berlin time)

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THE GRAMMAR OF 'GOD' IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Edited by Farid Suleiman and Mira Sievers

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KEY CONCEPTS IN INTERRELIGIOUS DISCOURSES

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Book Launch Event with the Editors and Contributors

moderated by Nadeem Khan (AIWG)

Professor Mira Sievers

Mira Sievers is a Professor of Islamic Theology at the University of Hamburg. She specializes in Qur'anic Studies, Kalām theology, and Islamic Ethics, with a focus on gender and interfaith issues. She studied Islamic Theology, Islamic Studies, and Linguistics at Goethe University Frankfurt and SOAS, University of London. She earned her PhD from Goethe University Frankfurt in 2018 and later served as the academic coordinator of the Linked Open Tafsīr research group. From 2020 to 2024, she was Junior Professor for Islamic Foundations of Belief, Philosophy, and Ethics at Humboldt University of Berlin. She has been a Senior Fellow at the University of Graz (2023–2024) and a Visiting Scholar at the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies in Amman (Winter 2024/25). Her publications include Schöpfung zwischen Koran und Kalām: Ansätze einer Koranischen Theologie (2019).

Dr Farid Suleiman

Since 2021, Dr. Farid Suleiman has served as a Lecturer (Akademischer Rat) in Islamic Theology at the University of Greifswald, Germany. His academic focus spans Islamic philosophy and theology, both historical and contemporary, with particular attention to the question, how to reform the traditional kalam. Some of his recent publications include Ibn Taymiyya and the Attributes of God (Brill 2024) and "Westliche Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung als Wissens(t)richter: Überlegungen mit Wittgenstein zur akademischen Debatte über den Status der Philosophie in der islamischen Welt". In: Religionsphilosophie nach Wittgenstein (Metzler 2024, pp. 379-415).

Professor Genia Schönbaumsfeld

Genia Schönbaumsfeld is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southampton. Her research interests include Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, scepticism and the philosophy of religion. She is the author of A Confusion of the Spheres – Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion (2007), The Illusion of Doubt (2016), and Wittgenstein on Religious Belief (2023). In 2023, she was awarded a highly prestigious 2.5m European Research Council Advanced Grant for her project entitled 'The Ethics of Doubt – Kierkegaard, Scepticism and Conspiracy Theory'. Genia is Associate Editor of Philosophical Investigations, Editorial Board member of Philosophies, Advisory Board member of The Nordic Wittgenstein Review, Editorial Board Member of Anthem Studies in Wittgenstein, and elected Member of Council of the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

Dr Daniel Weiss

Daniel Weiss is Polonsky-Coexist Senior Lecturer in Jewish Studies, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. He is author of Paradox and the Prophets: Hermann Cohen and the Indirect Communication of Religion (2012) and Modern Jewish Philosophy and the Politics of Divine Violence (2023), among other publications, and co-editor of multiple books, including Scripture and Violence (2020) and Tsimtsum and Modernity (2021). Actively involved in the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, he is a recent recipient of a Humboldt Research Fellowship for Experienced Researchers.

ABSTRACTS

Dr Farid Suleiman
The Grammar of 'God' – Muslim Perspectives

My contribution to the volume is based on the observation that the modern concept of religion, in its dominant forms, proves to be an impediment when it comes to exploring the meaning of religious language. I situate the modern concept of religion within the paradigm of the "God of the philosophers" and then demonstrate, through the questions "Does God exist?" and "Is God good?", how this approach becomes entangled in pseudo-problems. As an alternative and, in my view, more constructive approach to religious language, I present a Wittgenstein-inspired "Theology as Grammar" and discuss it using the example of the aforementioned second question. Additionally, I highlight parallels between the Islamic tradition and the grammatical approach.

Professor Genia Schönbaumsfeld
An Equation Entirely Unlike Any of the Familiar Curves': Wittgenstein
on the Grammar of 'God,' the Trinity, and the Meaning of Religious Language

Although there is little overt discussion of religious themes in Wittgenstein's magnum opus, Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein's later philosophy has significant implications for understanding religious belief and language. A fuller picture emerges, if what is said in the latter work is supplemented by additional material gleaned from Wittgenstein's various Cambridge lectures, his conversations with Rush Rhees, and the collection of remarks known as Culture and Value. This material shows not only that religious questions were of the first importance to Wittgenstein, it also reveals that he grappled with these questions in a manner reminiscent of his general approach to philosophical problems. That is to say, in both philosophy and religion, Wittgenstein eschews metaphysical theorizing in favour of gaining clarity through the method of a grammatical investigation of our concepts. In this essay, I will start by giving a general overview of some relevant themes from Wittgenstein's later philosophy before moving on to an in-depth examination of what a grammatical investigation of the concept of "God" involves, and what problems it enables us to dissolve. I will then move on to a consideration of what implications Wittgenstein's conception has for an understanding of the meaning of religious language. By way of concluding, I briefly consider and respond to a common objection.

ABSTRACTS}

Dr Daniel Weiss

Wittgenstein and the Rabbinic Grammar of God's Name

My essay, "Wittgenstein and the Rabbinic Grammar of God's Name," explores the theological implications of ascribing a specific name to God, through a Wittgenstein-inspired analysis of classical rabbinic literature and modern Jewish philosophy of religion. The Hebrew Bible presents God as having specific proper name (YHVH), but humans are told to avoid wrongful use of it. By contrast, some later Christian and Jewish traditions suggest that God, as the "creator of all," should be regarded as nameless or "beyond names." The classical rabbinic sources, however, retain the idea of God's name, but restrict its pronunciation to the Temple in the past, while ordaining a substitute term (Adonai) outside the Temple and in the present. To address objections related to anthropomorphism, I draw upon Wittgenstein's methodology of "looking" rather than merely "thinking," in order to highlight the problems in the assumption that God having a name would necessarily cast God as created rather than creator. This analysis shows how Wittgenstein's approach can liberate theologians and philosophers from undue concerns surrounding the concept of God's name.