Course description: This course will explore classical and contemporary approaches to the problem of God and human suffering, including scriptural, theological, philosophical and literary sources.

Goals: Through readings, class discussions and written assignments, the course will discuss the issues involved in relating the power and goodness of God to the reality of evil and suffering. It will also explore various attempts to "solve" the problem of God and suffering (such as seeing suffering as a means of education, punishment, or personal growth).

Outcomes: Students will be able to articulate the fundamental question of God and human suffering. They will be able to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the question as found in philosophy, theology and literature. They will also be able to evaluate the relative merits of framing the question as a "problem" or as a "mystery." Finally, they will be able to write an informed account of their own views on the subject.

Feb 6      Introduction
Feb 13     Suffering in the Old Testament     [First assignment due]

*The Book of Job*
Ryan, 1-50

Feb 20     Suffering in the New Testament     [Assignment on OT and NT due]

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Feb 27     Boethius: The classical answer of reason

*Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy*, Books I-IV
Ryan, 82-115
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| **Mar 6** | Augustine & Irenaeus: The classical answer of faith | Augustine, *Confessions* Book VII, c.3-5, 7-8, 12-13  
Augustine, *City of God* Book I, c.7-11  
Book XI, c.17, 21-22  
Book XII, c.6-7  
Book XX, c.2-3  
Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book IV, c.37-39  
J. Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy"  
B. Davies, "A Modern Irenaean Theodicy: Professor Hick on Evil" |
| **Mar 13** | Thomas Aquinas: The classical answer of faith | Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*  
Part I, Question 19, article 9.  
Part I, Q.48, art.1-6  
Part I, Q.49, art.1-2  
H. McCabe, *God and Evil*, 111-29  
M. Dodds, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love"  
Brian Davies, "God and Evil: a Dialogue"  
Ryan, 116-139  
*Optional: Ryan*, 215-240 |
| **Mar 20** | Modern and Contemporary philosophical issues | D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Parts X and XI.  
J. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"  
A. Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense"  
M. McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God"  
E. Stump, "Knowledge, Freedom, and the Problem of Evil" |
| **Mar 27** | SPRING BREAK | |
| **Apr 3** | Dostoyevsky and Camus: The question restated | F. Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, Book V, Chapters. 4-5  
A. Camus, "Physical Suffering and the Justice of God" (excerpt from *The Plague*) |
| **Apr 10** | Wiesel, Heschel, and Lewis: Doubt and faith in face of suffering | Elie Wiesel, *Night*  
C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*  
Ryan, 166-191 |
| **Apr 17** | HOLY THURSDAY | (No class) |
| **Apr 24** | Sölle, Weil, Moltmann: Protest against and acceptance of suffering | S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 131-36  
"Evil" in *The Simone Weil Reader*, 381-90  
"The Love of God and Affliction" in *The Simone Weil Reader*, 439-68 |
D. Sölle, *Suffering*, 151-78
J. Moltmann, "The Passion of Life"
Ryan, 192-214

May 1  Process theology and suffering
   J. Cobb, *God and the World*, 87-102
   C. Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for our Time*, 116-25

May 8  Liberation theology and suffering
   G. Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*
   Optional: Ryan, 241-268

May 15  John Paul II and Desmond Tutu: Suffering and meaning
   John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*
   D. Tutu, *Hope and Suffering*, 74-87, 153-89
   Ryan, 295-317

May 22  Final week of semester: no class meeting

READINGS

**Books** (Suggested editions. You may also get a book from a library or possibly online.)

**Other readings:** All other readings are available on Moodle. Class password is *Aquinas*.

ASSIGNMENTS

Please type all assignments. You may submit them in class or through Moodle.

First assignment (Due Feb. 13):

Write a two- to three-page essay (no longer, please) on the expectations and experience that you bring to this course. A few vague suggestions that you might (or might not) want to touch on in this paper include:

What are some of the questions and assumptions that you bring to the course? Out of what experiences do they arise? Would you characterize your interest more as "speculative" (seeking an intellectually satisfying "solution"), "pastoral" (looking for pastorally useful insights), or "personal" (looking for insights that may be useful in your own faith journey)? Indicate whether you think an "answer" of sorts is possible or not and what shape such an answer might take or in what direction it might lie.

Weekly assignments:

Keep a (turn-in-able) journal of your reactions/thoughts on the readings.

Write a brief (about 300-500-word) statement each week about the assignment for that week. (Write more if you find that personally useful, but try to distill about 500 words to hand in
weekly.)

The journal need not (should not) be just a summary of the assignment or a series of "I agree" or "I disagree" statements, but should rather include whatever the reading leads you to reflect on. While your reflections should show evidence that they build on or at least are informed by a careful reading of the assignment, you need not comment on all the readings assigned for a given class.

These assignments should be turned in each week and will be returned to you the following week.

Because the initial reflection paper is due on February 13, you do not need to do one of these "journal papers" on the *Book of Job*. Instead, you may submit a "journal paper" on February 20th, based on both the Old Testament and New Testament readings (accenting whichever set of readings you prefer).

Final assignment:

On May 23, turn in a 10-15 page paper drawing all of your reflections together- a kind of "reflection on your reflections." This paper might be a retrospective look across the semester to your first paper, reviewing again the ideas that you expressed there and any modification of them that has occurred, new questions that have arisen, etc. Particularly, you might indicate what you believe to be the most positive or coherent (true, useful) approach(es) to the problem of God and suffering and what you see as the least coherent approach(es). You should indicate your understanding (based on the class readings and discussions and your own personal reflections) of the heart of the problem and should indicate what you consider to be the necessary or indispensable elements in any authentic approach to the problem. You might note any principles or notions which you see as "non-negotiables" (where you would be unwilling to compromise) in any approach toward the problem and indicate your reasons for seeing them in this way. You might also note any principles or notions where you find some compromise to be possible or necessary.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students will be graded on class participation (30%), written weekly assignments (30%) and the final paper (40%). Written work will be graded on evidence of thoughtful engagement with the readings, clarity of expression, and care in execution.