

God and Suffering
STPH 2209
Spring, 2020

Thursdays, 12:40-3:30 p.m., DSPT 2

Office hours: By appt., or Thursdays, 3:30-4:30 (DSPT 201)

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DSPT

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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 approaches to the problem (e.g., suffering as a means of education, punishment, or personal growth).

Outcomes: Students will be able to articulate the fundamental issues involved in the 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. 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 [Initial assignment due]

The Book of Job (esp. Chapters 1-21, 28-31, 38-42)

Ryan, 1-50 (esp. 34-42)

Feb 20 Suffering in the New Testament [Reflection on OT and/or NT due]

Lk	9:22	2 Cor	12:7-10	Jas	1:2-4
	13:1-5	Phil	1:27-30		1:12-18
	17:25		3:8-11		5:7-11
	22:14-28	Col	1:21-9	1 Pt	1:1-12
	24:13-53	2 Thes	1:3-12		2:18-25
Rom	5:1-5	2 Tim	1:8-14		3:13-4:6
	8:12-17		3:10-4:8		4:12-19
1 Cor	12:26-7	Heb	2:5-18		5:6-11
2 Cor	1:3-11		4:14-5:10	2 Pt	2:4-10
	5:16-6:13		9:15-28	Rev	7:13-17
	7:2-13		12:1-11		21:1-4

Ryan, 51-81

Feb 27 Boethius: The classical answer of reason

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Books I-IV

Ryan, 82-115

Mar 5 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 12 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
 E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 724-30.
 H. McCabe, *God and Evil*, 111-29
 M. Dodds, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love"
 Ryan, 116-139, 215-40
- Mar 19 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 26 SPRING BREAK
- Apr 2 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 9 HOLY THURSDAY
 (No class)
- Apr 16 Wiesel and Lewis: Doubt and faith in face of suffering
 Elie Wiesel, *Night*
 C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*
 Ryan, 166-180
- Apr 23 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
- Apr 30 Process theology and suffering
 J. Cobb, *God and the World*, 87-102
 C. Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for our Time*, 116-25
 A. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342-51
 D.B. Hart, "No Shadow of Turning: on Divine Impassibility"
- May 7 Liberation theology and suffering
 G. Gutierrez, *On Job*, xi-xix, 1-30, 51-103
 Ryan, 241-268

May 14 John Paul II, Desmond Tutu, and Abraham Heschel: Suffering and meaning

John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*

D. Tutu, *Hope and Suffering*, 74-87, 153-89

A. Heschel, "The Divine Concern," "The Divine Pathos," "The Problem of Evil"

Ryan, 294-317

May 21 Final week of semester: no class meeting

READINGS

Books (suggested editions)

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Orbis, 1987) [ISBN 978-0883445525].

Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed* (HarperOne, 2001) [ISBN 978-0060652388].

Ryan, Robin, *God and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Paulist, 2011) [ISBN 978-0809147137].

Wiesel, Elie. *Night* (Hill & Wang, 2006) [ISBN 978-0374500016].

Other readings: All other readings are available on **Moodle**.

ASSIGNMENTS

Initial assignment (Due Feb. 13):

Write a two- to three-page essay on the expectations and experience that you bring to this course. Suggestions: You might mention some of the questions and assumptions that you bring to the course and comment on the experiences out of which they arise. You might say whether your interest in the course is more "speculative" (seeking an intellectually satisfying approach to the question), "pastoral" (looking for pastorally useful insights), or "personal" (looking for insights that may be useful in your own faith journey). You might indicate whether you think an "answer" to the question of God and suffering is possible and what shape it might take.

Weekly reflection papers:

Write a brief (300-500-word) reflection paper each week on the reading assignment.

Your reflections should be informed by a careful reading of the assignment, but you do not need not comment explicitly on each of the readings. These assignments should be turned in by class time each week on moodle. Be sure to bring a copy to class with you for your use in class discussions. Because the initial assignment is due on February 13, the first reflection paper will be due on February 20. It can include reflections on the readings for Feb. 13 and/or Feb. 20.

Final assignment:

On May 22, 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. You should indicate your understanding of the basic question of God and suffering (based on the class readings and discussions) and what approaches to it you find most (and/or least) helpful or promising.

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.