

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fall 2015, T/Th 1:00-2:15 pm
Fleming Hall, Seminar Room 208

2001 W. Seminary Drive
Fort Worth, TX 76115

God and Evil

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate course aims to get you thinking philosophically about the widespread, pervasive, and seemingly gratuitous instances of evil and suffering in the world. We will principally examine the contemporary philosophical literature regarding the question of whether horrendous evil and suffering provide grounds for a cogent intellectual objection to Christian belief. The first part of the course will explore the logical and evidential arguments from evil against Christian belief, as well as some of the most prominent philosophical responses in defense of Christian belief. The second section of the course aims to unite a philosophical response to the problem of evil with a robust Christian theology of suffering, one that is biblically grounded and has a rich historical precedent in the medieval Christian tradition.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS

- [WD] Stump, Eleonore. *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010.
- [SG] Paul K. Moser, *The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- [POE] Speak, Daniel. *The Problem of Evil*. Polity, 2015.
- [Online] Selected online readings on Blackboard

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION

There is a difference between “doing philosophy” and reading philosophy. To understand how to go about evaluating, interpreting, and applying various philosophical texts and arguments one must philosophically engage the material and not just passively read it.

Therefore, this course will be evaluated primarily through class participation, active reading assignments, an essay exam, and written assignments.

Writing Assignments

All written assignments must be double-spaced, have 1” margins, and use 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Instead of using a cover paper, simply type in the upper corner: Student name, the title of the assignment, and the student email address.

1. Class Participation (15%)

Class participation is not equivalent to class attendance. Because of the topic and the advanced nature of the course, the class will be discussion-oriented and will strongly emphasize student-participation. Contributions from each student are not only expected in an advanced seminary-level course, but are crucial to the overall success of the course. The student will earn participation points by contributing, in a relevant way, to the class discussion at hand. It is imperative that the assigned material is read before class each day and that the students are prepared to engage the reading(s) in class.

2. Reading and Reading “Takeaway” Assignments (20%)

Students are required to thoughtfully engage the assigned reading material in its entirety. Students should be prepared to discuss and interact with the reading material upon each class meeting and will report percentage (in increments of 10, e.g., 70%, 80%, etc.) of reading completed at the end of the semester.

For every assigned reading, you are to write at least 5 substantive “takeaways” (i.e., insights, probing or clarificatory questions, evaluation, etc.) related to the text (make sure you always mark a page number with each takeaway). These should represent the span of the reading rather than coming from only a few pages. Reading assignments must be completed and submitted to Blackboard before the class session on which the assigned readings are to be discussed. Reading assignments will be graded for accuracy, thoroughness, and substance.

3. Précis Assignments and Presentations (20%)

Students will write two, 850-900-word précis assignments covering two selected readings on the problem of evil from our assigned course material. A précis is a concise explanatory summary consisting of no more than 300 words of critical evaluation. Précis assignments must be completed and submitted to Blackboard before the class session on which the reading is to be discussed.

Each student will deliver two 10-minute informal précis presentations in class on the day that we discuss the assigned reading. Presentations must be accompanied by a handout (hard-copy). Presentations and handouts must include the following elements:

- A. *The Theme of the Reading*: the central claim, major theme, or point made, or purpose of the work being read, along with a concise statement of the way that

the author promotes the idea, argues the case, makes this point, or fulfills the purpose that you have identified.

- B. *Criticism*: an evaluation of the author's claims and defense of those claims in the reading.
- C. *Questions*: at least 5 substantial questions designed to initiate class discussion.

At the beginning of the semester, students will select from the reading schedule **two** of the assigned readings for their précis presentations, at which point they will then be responsible for presenting their précis on those readings to the class for discussion. Students who miss their scheduled time of presentation will not be allowed to make up this assignment.

4. Midterm Exam (15%)

One midterm essay exam will be given during the semester (3/10). The exam will be “closed book” and will consist of two essay questions relating to a selected portion of the course material that we have covered in class up to the time of the exam. The exam will be timed and you will have the duration of the class period to complete the exam. A brief study guide will be provided for the midterm outlining four possible exam essay questions. A thoughtful reading of the assigned material, as well as active participation in each class should suffice for an exemplary exam grade.

5. Reflection Paper (10%)

The aim of the reflection paper is to offer a 700-900 word pastoral reflection on evil and suffering in the life of the believer, both on the intellectual as well as the emotional problem of evil. Imagine a follower of Christ that is a part of your ministry or congregation coming to you and expressing anger, bitterness, and resentment for God's having allowed some instance of horrendous suffering in their own life or the life of a loved one. This individual offers the above instance of horrendous evil and suffering as a good intellectual reason for doubting the existence of an all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. The reflection paper should be your thoughtful pastoral response to this particular example of the emotional and the intellectual problem of evil in the life of a Christian.

6. Research Paper, Outline, and Annotated Bibliography (20%)

The research paper should be 13-15 pages in length, and written on a topic directly related to the problems of evil as discussed in the course material. The aim of the research paper is to present a thesis or argument, explain the thesis, and then either (1) offer an argument in support of it, (2) offer an objection to it, (3) defend against an objection to it, (4) evaluate the arguments for and against it, (5) discuss what consequences it might have, (6) determine whether some other thesis or argument commits one to it, or (7) determine whether some other view can be held consistently with it. For a basic illustration of a properly formatted philosophy paper, see the handout “A Brief Guide to Writing a Philosophy Paper” that is available on the course website.

In advance of writing the Research Paper, the student will also turn in a proposed outline (including a thesis statement) and *annotated* bibliography with at least 7 research references. This assignment is to get you thinking about your research paper in advance and is solely for your benefit. I will offer comments on your outline, thesis statement, and annotated bibliography. Paper topics must be approved by the professor.

***Extra Credit Opportunity* (3%)**

Read C.S. Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain* and John Wesley’s essay “An Address to the Clergy” and write a 4-5 page biblical and pastoral reflection as to how one might implement philosophy and apologetics in one’s pastoral ministry, particularly as it pertains to clarifying and defending the Christian faith (2 Cor. 10:5; Titus 1:9; Jude 3; 1 Peter 3:15). What might the ministerial use of philosophy in the service to the Gospel look like from the pulpit, Sunday school class, or in youth/kids ministry? Do you agree or disagree with the vision of the role of philosophy in pastoral ministry outlined by Wesley? In what sense are philosophy and apologetics important for pastors as spokespersons for Christ and the Gospel in today’s culture? What might this look like in your own ministry? What might this look like as it pertains to addressing the intellectual and emotional problems of evil in your ministry? The extra credit assignment is due the last day of class on April 26th.

Summary of Graded Components and Due Dates:

Précis Assignments & Presentations	TBD	20%
Reflection Paper	3/1	10%
Midterm Exam	3/10	15%
Research Outline and Bibliography	3/24	
Research Paper	4/26	20%
Participation	ongoing	15%
Reading & Reading Assignments	ongoing	20%
Extra Credit (Optional)	4/26	3%

IV. COURSE GRADING

Course Grading: The final grade is based on the percentage of total possible points to be awarded, and the total earned by the student.

A+ (4.3) = 98-100%	C+ (2.3) = 78-79%
A (4.0) = 93-97%	C (2.0) = 73-77%
A- (3.7) = 90-92%	C- (1.7) = 70-72%
B+ (3.3) = 88-89%	D+ (1.3) = 68-69%
B (3.0) = 83-87%	D (1.0) = 63-67%
B- (2.7) = 80-82%	D- (0.7) = 60-62%
	F (0.0) = below 60%

V. ACADEMIC POLICIES

Academic Honesty

The following is the school's policy on academic dishonesty:

“Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the College at Southwestern are educational institutions committed to a high standard of academic integrity. As such, any student who submits work as part of the requirements for a course thereby asserts that the student personally has done that work and that it has not been submitted for credit in any other course without permission. Unless credit is explicitly given to sources, the student is asserting that the words and/or the thoughts are the student's own original work. Falling short of these standards is academic dishonesty. Students should refer to the full discussion on plagiarism located in the appendix of The Southwestern Seminary Manual of Style.”

Academic dishonesty will result in at minimum a report made to Administration and the student receiving no credit for the assignment or exam. SWBTS Administration will determine whether further disciplinary action is warranted.

VI. COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Reading	Assignments Due
Thurs, Jan. 21	Course Syllabus/Introduction to Course	
Tues, Jan. 26	A Bird's-Eye View of Problems of Evil - [POE] ch. 1 “The Problem(s) of Evil” - Michael W. Hickson, “A Brief History of Problems of Evil” [online]	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Jan. 28	The Logical Problem of Evil: - [POE] ch. 2 - Alvin Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense” [online]	Reading Assignment
Tues, Feb. 2	The Evidential Argument from Evil	Reading Assignment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism” [online] - [POE] ch. 3 	
Thurs, Feb. 4	<p>Rebutting Strategies to the Evidential Argument</p> <p><i>Christian Theism and Gratuitous Evil</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kirk R. MacGregor, “The Existence and Irrelevance of Gratuitous Evil” [online] - Ross D. Inman, “Gratuitous Evil Unmotivated” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Tues, Feb. 9	<p><i>The Way of Counterbalancing Evidence</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alvin Plantinga, Selection from “Foundations of Theism: A Reply” [online] - Alex Pruss and Trent Dougherty, “Evil and Anomaly” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Feb. 11	<p>The Way of Theodicy</p> <p><i>Free Will and Soul-Making Theodicy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [POE] ch. 5 - John Hick, “Evil and Soul-Making” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Tues, Feb. 16	<p><i>Natural Consequence Theodicy I</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter van Inwagen, “The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Feb. 18	<p><i>Natural Consequence Theodicy II</i></p>	Reading Assignment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peter van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil” [online] 	
Tues. Feb. 23	<p><i>Person-Centered Theodicies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil” [online] - Marilyn McCord Adams, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Feb. 25	<p><i>Natural Law Theodicy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Garry Deweese, “Natural Evil: A “Free Process” Defense” [online] - Richard Swinburne, “Natural Evil” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Tues, Mar. 1	<p><i>Warfare Theodicy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greg Boyd, <i>Satan and the Problem of Evil</i> [online] 	Reading Assignment Reflection Paper Due
Thurs, Mar. 3	<p><i>“O Felix Culpa” Theodicy: Alvin Plantinga</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa’” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Tues, Mar. 8	<p><i>Theodicies of Animal Suffering</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michael Murray, “Animal Suffering and the Fall” from <i>Nature Red and Tooth and Claw</i> [online] 	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Mar. 10	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam

March 14-18	Spring Break (Classes Dismissed)	
Tues, Mar. 22	<p>Undercutting Strategies to the Evidential Argument</p> <p><i>Evolution as Undercutting Defeater to POE</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thomas Crisp, “An Evolutionary Objection to Argument from Evil” [online] 	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Mar. 24	<p><i>Skeptical Theism I</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Justin McBrayer, “Skeptical Theism” [online] - Stephen Wykstra, “Rowe’s Noseum Arguments from Evil” [online] 	<p>Reading Assignment</p> <p>Research Outline & <u>Annotated</u> Bibliography</p>
Tues, Mar. 29	<p><i>Skeptical Theism II</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - William Alston, “Some (Temporary) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil” [online] - Michael Rea, “Skeptical Theism and the “Too Much Skepticism” Objection [online] - 	Reading Assignment
Thurs, Mar. 31	<p>Divine Severity, Human Suffering, and Christian Soteriology</p> <p>Eleonore Stump’s <i>Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [WD], ch. 1,3,5 	Reading Assignment
Tues, April. 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [WD] chs. 6-8 	Reading Assignment

Thurs, April. 7	- [WD] ch. 9	Reading Assignment
Tues, April. 12	- [WD] ch. 10	Reading Assignment
Thurs, April 14	- [WD] ch. 13	Reading Assignment
Tues, April. 19	- [WD] chs. 14-15	Reading Assignment
Thurs, April 21.	Paul Moser's <i>The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived</i> - [SG] Intro & Ch. 1	Reading Assignment
Tues, April 26	- [SG] ch. 2 & 4	Reading Assignment Research Paper Due Extra Credit Due

* The reading schedule may be changed at the professor's discretion to best suit the course's needs.

26 Class Session Total