

Evil, Suffering, God (TS734)

Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo

Dates: 25 May–5 June 2020

Instructor: Dr. Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

Email: kyle.gingerichhiebert@utoronto.ca

Phone: 416-978-6078

Office hours: Online daily from 25 May to 5 June between 3–4pm EDT and/or by appointment any time during the Spring term.

Description

In a world that appears racked with violence—from catastrophic tsunamis to horrendous acts of terror and much more besides—*Evil, Suffering, God* will confront one of the most enduring and perplexing questions that continues to haunt the human experience: how can we reconcile belief in a loving and omnipotent God with the existence of evil and suffering in the world? The course will approach this question from historical, theological, and pastoral angles not to solve it once and for all but rather in an attempt to enter ever more deeply into the mysteries of the challenge that it continues to pose.

Much of the thinking about the so-called “problem of evil” has been dominated by work that broadly falls under the disciplines of systematic theology and philosophy of religion. This is both curious and troubling because it has the unfortunate consequence of often proceeding in abstraction from concrete and practical lived experiences of evil and suffering. This course will attempt to resist this artificial separation and, with Sarah Coakley, will ask: [can systematic theology can become pastoral again?](#)

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course students should be able to:

1. Recognize and distinguish between a variety of different approaches to the articulation of evil and suffering in the Christian tradition.
2. Explain key historical moments in the development of the problem of evil and suffering.
3. Articulate and critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to evil and suffering.
4. Develop and/or refine your own ways of thinking about evil, suffering, and God and their relation through critical engagement with the Christian tradition.
5. Develop skills in interpreting different kinds of texts.

Expectations

The course will be offered online in a primarily asynchronous format and will make extensive use of LEARN. Students are expected to check the LEARN site regularly, to be familiar with all course material **before** the day for which it is scheduled, and to actively participate in the LEARN discussion forums.

Two synchronous videoconference sessions with guest speakers are planned and will be arranged in consultation with the class and recorded for those that may not be able to attend.

Assessments

1. Discussion forums (15%). The LEARN discussion forums will be the primary place where course material is digested and where we create a community of learning together. There is much flexibility here but at a minimum you should expect to offer at least one paragraph length post that responds in some way to the readings/discussion prompt(s) as well as at least five replies to posts made by your fellow classmates per “class”. Additional engagement is encouraged. Grades will be based on evidence of having read and absorbed the material, being prepared to engage in discussion, and willingness to listen, hear, and respond to other voices.
2. Critical engagements (25%). Five 500 word critical engagements (i.e. not simple summaries or personal reflections) on any **one** of the assigned readings (5% ea.). Submissions should be made on the day the readings in question will be discussed to the “Critical engagements” dropbox in LEARN. If you wish to submit more than five critical engagements you are welcome to do so and your best five will count toward your final grade.
3. Comparative analysis (30%). One 2500 word essay that critically interrogates two texts from different historical periods with the goal of investigating some aspect of the changes that have occurred in the development of the problem of evil and suffering. Your essay should go beyond a simple compare and contrast exercise to develop a thesis that makes a definite and limited assertion that is explained and supported by evidence. Given the ongoing library limitations, this is a good opportunity to enhance your online research capacities. The attached selected bibliography and the footnotes from course readings are good places to start. Both texts should be cleared with the instructor prior to beginning. Submissions should be made to the “Comparative analysis” dropbox in LEARN by **Monday, 13 July**.
4. Integrative assignment (30%). One 2500 word written assignment that may take any number of forms (e.g. sermon, op-ed, engaged reflection, etc..) that draws on both course material and concrete lived experience—whether your own or that of others—of evil and suffering. Whereas the comparative analysis is an analytic exercise that dissects and compares highly specific arguments this integrative assignment is designed to be a synthetic exercise that draws together themes explored in the course within a lived framework in an effort to refine your own ways of thinking about evil, suffering, and God. Submissions should be made to the “Integrative assignment” dropbox in LEARN by **Monday, 13 July**.

General notes about assessments:

- All footnotes should be in Chicago Style and a bibliography should be included. A helpful [citing and writing guide](#) developed for Theological Studies is available on the UW Library website.
- The rubric that will be used for grading written work gives equal weight to each of the following areas: (1) structure and argument, (2) knowledge and understanding, (3) use of sources, and (4) style and presentation.
- Late assessments will be penalized 3% per calendar day if other arrangements have not been made in advance.

Required Texts

Swinton, John. *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. [WLU BT160.S95]

This text is available for purchase at the UW Bookstore or at your favorite online retailer. All other readings will be available on LEARN.

Course Schedule

Date	Readings
Monday, 25 May	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weil, Simone. "The Love of God and Affliction." In <i>Waiting for God</i>, 117–36. Translated by Emma Craufurd. New York: Harper, 1973. • Kilby, Karen. "Evil and the Limits of Theology." In <i>New Blackfriars</i> 84, no. 983 (January 2003): 13–29. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 1–29.
Tuesday, 26 May	<p>Biblical Perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book of Job • Gutierrez, Gustavo. "Sorry Comforters." In <i>On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent</i>, 21–30. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987. • Burrell, David. "Job Mediating Two Opposing Views of Theodicy." In <i>Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering</i>, 107–122. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 30–45.
Wednesday, 27 May	<p>Beginnings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Augustine. "Book VII." In <i>Confessions</i>, 312–61. Translated by Henry Chadwick. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. • Augustine. "Chapter IV." In <i>Confessions and Enchiridion</i>, 343–46. Edited by Albert Cook Outler. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006. • Williams, Rowan. "Insubstantial Evil." In <i>Augustine and His Critics</i>, edited by Robert Dodaro and George Lawless, 105–23. London: Routledge, 2000. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 46–68.
Thursday, 28 May	<p>Suffering, Sin, Love</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julian of Norwich, <i>Revelations of Divine Love</i>, chapters 27, 32, 45, 49–51, 63, 85. Edited by Dom Roger Hudleston. Westminster: Newman Press, 1952. • Hall, Amy Laura. "Truth: Divine Delight." In <i>Laughing at the Devil: Seeing the World with Julian of Norwich</i>, 41–60. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. • Turner, Denys. "'Sin is Behovely' in Julian of Norwich's 'Revelations of Divine Love.'" <i>Modern Theology</i> 20, no. 4 (July 2004): 407–422. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 69–89.
Friday, 29 May	<p>The Rise of Theodicy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leibniz, G. W. <i>Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil</i>, 126–40. Translated by E. M. Huggard. Chicago: Open Court, 1985. • Pope, Alexander. "An Essay on Man." In <i>The Major Works</i>, 270–80, 298–309. Edited by Pat Rogers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Date	Readings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voltaire, "The Lisbon Earthquake." In <i>Candide, or Optimism</i>, 97–108. Translated by Theo Cuffe. New York: Penguin, 2005. • Neiman, Susan. "Fire from Heaven." In <i>Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy</i>, 14–36. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 90–129.
Monday, 1 June	<p>Radical Evil and the Banality of Evil</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant, Immanuel. "Concerning the indwelling of the evil principle alongside the good, or, Of the radical evil in human nature." In <i>Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i>, 45–73. Translated and Edited by Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. • Arendt, Hannah. "From <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i>." In <i>The Portable Hannah Arendt</i>, 313–65. Edited by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin, 2000. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 130–178.
Tuesday, 2 June	<p>After Auschwitz?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metz, Johann Baptist. "Suffering Unto God." <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 20, no. 4 (1994): 611-22. • Metz, Johann Baptist. "The Church After Auschwitz." In <i>A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity</i>, 121–132. Translated by J. Matthew Ashley. New York: Paulist Press, 1998. • Metz, Johann Baptist. "Facing the Jews: Christian Theology After Auschwitz." In <i>Faith and the Future: Essays in Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity</i>, 38–48. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 179–212.
Wednesday, 3 June	<p>Does God Suffer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bauckham, Richard. "'Only the Suffering God can Help': Divine Passibility in Modern Theology." <i>Themelios</i> 9, no. 3 (1984): 6–12. • Hart, David Bentley. "No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility." <i>Pro Ecclesia</i> 11, no. 2 (2002): 184–206. • Swinton, <i>Raging with Compassion</i>, 213–247.
Thursday, 4 June	<p>Suffering and Disability with guest Dr. Jason Reimer Greig</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creamer, Deborah Beth. "Theology and Chronic Pain: Some Initial Reflections." <i>Journal of Religion, Disability & Health</i> 17, no. 2 (April 2013): 212-219. • Vanier, Jean. <i>Befriending the Stranger</i>, 1–6, 83–101. Ottawa: Novalis, 2005. • Young, Frances. "The Cross and Redemption." In <i>Arthur's Call: A Journey of Faith in the Face of Severe Learning Disability</i>, 96–121. London: SPCK, 2014.
Friday, 5 June	<p>Pastoral Perspectives with guest Rev. Dr. Eleanor Epp-Stobbe</p>

Date	Readings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epperly, Bruce, and Katherine Gould Epperly. "Pastoral Care as Healing Presence." In <i>Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry</i>, 87–118. Herdon: Alban Institute, 2009. • Jones, Dorie. "Ministry in Times of Crisis." • Nouwen, Henri. "Ministry by a Lonely Minister." In <i>The Wounded Healer</i>, 79–96. New York: Doubleday, 1979. • Willimon, William. "The Priest as Pastor: Worship as the Content and Context of Pastoral Care." In <i>Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry</i>, 91–108. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016.

University of Waterloo Policies

Academic Integrity

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage](#) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties>).

Plagiarism Software

Plagiarism detection software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. This is being done to verify that use of all material and sources in assignments is documented. In the first week of the term, details will be provided about the arrangements for the use of Turnitin® in this course.

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72>).

Note for Students with Disabilities

The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Selected Bibliography

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Films

- A Hidden Life*. Directed by Terrence Malick. Los Angeles: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2019.
- A Serious Man*. Directed by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen. Universal City: Focus Features, 2009.
- God on Trial*. Directed by Andy de Emmony. London: Hat Trick Productions, 2008.
- Munich*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Universal City: Universal Pictures, 2005.
- Silence*. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2016.
- The Tree of Life*. Directed by Terrence Malick. Los Angeles: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2011.