

HONR250F-01A: Philosophy of Religion: Theodicies

1-3-5 9:40-10:50, Quad 361

Office hours: 1-3-5: 11:00 – noon; 2:15-4:00; 2-4-6: 1:00-3:00 PM

Dennis Beach, OSB

other times & evenings (Mary 229) by appointment.

Description

One of the difficulties of attaining and maintaining a belief in God is the question of why the world God made is as it is, why individuals and peoples meet the fates that they do. This question arises especially in the face of personal or public disasters: Why has God done this to me? To us? Passionate thinkers have wrestled with this question throughout the ages, hoping either to justify the ways of God to humankind, or to justify their own rejection of belief in a God who cares for us mortals. We will read literature and philosophy from the Book of Job, Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Milton's dramatic poetry, Leibniz's Theodicy and Dostoevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor," ending with contemporary reflections that struggle with the problem of evil in a world created and ordered by a God we want to be good.

Texts

- Fyodor Dostoevsky. "The Grand Inquisitor," with related chapters from *The Brothers Karamazov*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993 (1879).
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993 (c. 397). Selected sections.
- Thomas Aquinas. Selections from *Summa Theologica* (12th century, available on the WWW).
- Bible*: selections. Use any standard Bible, preferably annotated.
- John Milton. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005.
- Voltaire, *Candide* and Related Texts, Ed. David Wooten. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000 (1759, 1761)
- Elie Wiesel. *Night*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1960, 2006. (Or use old Bantam Books paperback.)
- The Revolt of Job* (film). Directed by Imre Gyöngyössi and Barna Kabay. 1983.
- C. S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001 (1940).
- Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*. New York: Penguin (Great Ideas), 2006 (1843).
- Anne Dillard. *For the Time Being*. New York: Random House (Vintage), 2000.
- other photocopies as needed; perhaps other films.

Objectives

- To wonder, fruitfully.
- To gain some insight into the question of why things we experience as *evil* happen in a world most religious people believe was created and is maintained by a God who is *good*.
- To explore how religious faith can often transform the nature of such an inquiry, without eliminating serious questioning and thoughtful philosophy.

Method and Expectations

We are going to be reading some of the greatest thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition as they ponder one of the most vexed questions in that tradition. To do such thinkers and their question justice (as well as to do God justice—whether or not there is a God—for justice and God, after all, is our concern!), we must read them generously, believing that they burned deeply with something to say, and that the difficulty of their expression is often required to sound the depths of their insight. We must wrestle with their

questions and answers honestly, and venture our own thoughts willingly and searchingly, with faith that the question is no less important to our own spirits than it was to these thinkers of the past (and present).

So, ways to accomplish this. I want everyone to keep a distinct journal/notebook for this class—one that is kept separate from other notebooks so that you can hand it in from time to time. If you want to keep the journal electronically, that is fine. In this journal you will ponder the readings in writing, raising your own questions, and hazarding tentative but reflective answers. I will often assign specific questions, but just as often, I will leave you to choose what to write about. Periodically I will collect and check these journals, but I also expect them to provide a basis for class discussion, as well as a basis for more formal papers. I will also ask you, in groups, to post an extract from your journal or something that takes off from it, in a public folder to help generate discussion ahead of class. To accomplish this, we will work in four groups:

Group 1: Emily, James, Brittagh, Mike

Group 2: Michelle, Peter, Karla, Luke

Group 3: Elizabeth, Mya, Colman, Jordan

Group 4: Hue, Ellen, Pat, Kenan

Public Folder location: Public Folders - Academic - Philosophy - Dennis Beach - Philosophy of Religion.
For help on finding folders: <http://www.csbsju.edu/itservices/knowledgebase/data/email/foldersuse.htm>

When your group is assigned, each member must post a reflection to the Public Folder no later than 10:00 PM the night before class. These kick-off reflections should be a solid 200-250 words, more if you're inspired. The rest of you are then free to post follow-up responses—any length. I will expect that in the course of the semester each group will post about 5-6 kick-off entries, and will expect you to respond to others' electronic postings 10-12 times minimum during the semester.

I expect a small class such as this to be fully participatory. Not to participate vocally and attentively is to fall short of expectations (and to receive a grade that reflects this). Sometimes we will ask questions with more or less determinable answers: "What did the thinker mean in writing this?" Other times our questions may lead into less certain territory: "Is such a way of thinking about God true, helpful, disturbing, compatible with religious belief, inimical to belief?"

Attendance Policy: Faithful attendance is expected; participation in the above activities (as a class) can't happen without it. Therefore, I will harass you after a first unexcused absence and drop your final grade one level with each subsequent one. Only illness and serious family emergencies or official school activities are excused, but all absences, whether excused or not, should be communicated to me ahead of time (use phone/voice mail, e-mail, carrier pigeon) unless this is impossible, and then as soon as possible afterwards.

Grading

The grading for the class will be based on the following:

- Journal and Public Folder Postings: 20%.
- 4 essays (about 1200-1500 words each); 20% each essay.

Since active participation is expected, if you do not fulfill this expectation, you will find your grade lowered a level, but I don't expect to invoke this clause.