



THTH8303: The Problem of Evil and Suffering

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Professional Doctoral Seminar / T&H Division
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Note 1: Any time you email the professor make sure to copy my assistant Terrica White (twhite@nobts.edu) in on the email and make sure you include the course number.

Note 2: You are certainly able to take this seminar remotely, but if at all possible, students are encouraged to come to campus for each session.

Seminary Mission Statement

Our mission is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Course Description

This course exposes students to classical and contemporary treatments of the so-called problem of evil and explores their significance for the Christian worldview and ministry in the local church. Issues addressed include the nature of evil and suffering, the cause of evil, the intelligibility and coherence of the Christian concept of God in light of evil, solutions offered by various world religions to the problem of evil, and an assortment of philosophical and apologetic responses to the problem at hand.

Statement on Biblical Authority

In order to develop competent ministry leaders for the twenty-first century church and academy, students in this course will be exposed to important works in theology and philosophy from a wide array of worldviews, including the influential works of many prominent non-Christian and non-evangelical philosophers and theologians. Students are expected to become familiar with and demonstrate advanced, biblically guided critical engagement with the works of these thinkers.

The course instructors operate under the assumption that the Bible is the inspired, totally true and trustworthy Word of God which is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for

training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Baptist Faith and Message (2000) provides the confessional framework in which the instructor leads the course.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will become familiar with issues related to evil and the Christian concept of God.
2. Students will explore the practical significance of this topic for pastoral ministry, apologetics, and evangelism.
3. Students will apply what they learn to specific ministry tasks and reflect on the value of this kind of study for everyday ministry.
4. Students will train individuals in their ministry context how to address concerns related to the problem of pain and suffering.

Teaching Methodology

Students will approach issues related to the problem of evil through assigned readings in philosophy and apologetics, seminar lectures, group discussion, class presentations, and the completion of a ministry project related to the course content.

Course Texts (Required)

Evans, Jeremy. *The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013.

Meister, Chad, and James K. Dew, Jr., eds., *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017.

Meister, Chad, and James K. Dew, Jr., eds., *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013.

Ministry Book Review Texts (Sign Up on GoogleDocs)

Boyd, Gregory. *Moving Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003.

Carson, D. A. *How Long 'O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Claypool, John. *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: How to Handle Grief*. Waco: Word, 1974.

Feinberg, John S. *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Kaiser, Walter C. *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God*. UK: Christian Focus, 2004.

Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001.

———. *The Problem of Pain*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001.

Stackhouse, John G., Jr. *Can God Be Trusted? Faith and the Challenge of Evil*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Lament for a Son*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Wright, N. T. *Evil and the Justice of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006.

Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment with God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Ziglar, Zig. *Confessions of a Grieving Christian*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004.

Course Schedule and Assignments

Pre-seminar Assignments (Due November 7, 2021)

1. Each student will read Jeremy Evans's *The Problem of Evil* and Jamie Dew's *God and the Problem of Evil* and write two-page (single-spaced) summaries of each book. **Students are encouraged to read this Evans first, Dew's book second.**
2. Each student will read Jamie Dew's *God and Evil* and choose the view that is closest to their own in order to write a reflection and application of that view to their life and ministry. Reflect on an example of the problem of evil that you have experienced with someone in your ministry and explain how your chosen view would inform the way you counsel, comfort, and encourage facing this evil. If you would adjust this view, how would you do so?
3. Each student will read and review a book from a pre-approved list of texts that relate the **problem of pain/suffering/evil/grief to practical ministry**. The review should include (1) a bibliography entry, (2) a brief biographical data about the author(s) (e.g., his or her position, degrees, research interests, and books), (3) an assessment of the main purpose and/or thesis of the book, (4) a concise summary of the book's contents, (5) a thorough critical analysis of the book, and (6) a conclusion with a recommendation or dismissal. The reviews should be between **4-6 single-spaced pages** and should conform to **Turabian** style. Because book reviews are primarily about one source, use **parenthetical citations** for the primary text and footnotes only for external sources.

In-seminar Assignments

1. Students will develop and deliver presentations based on the ministry text they reviewed. They will (1) summarize the argument of the book, (2) address points of practical concern for ministry in the local church, and (3) relate the content of the book to Christian apologetic and evangelistic ministry. **The professor will e-mail a schedule to students prior to the seminar meeting.**
2. Students are expected to participate in classroom discussion and to read **all required materials** prior to class attendance.

Post-seminar Assignments (Due November 28, 2021)

1. Each student will write a 7-10 page **personal reflection paper** summarizing his or her views on the problem of evil and suffering.
2. Each student will have an **evangelistic encounter** with a non-believer struggling with questions related to evil and suffering and write a 2-3 page **reflection of their experience**.
3. Each student will prepare *and* preach/teach an apologetic **sermon manuscript/ Bible-study manuscript** (5-6 pages) related to the problem of evil, suffering, and grief. Students will also include a brief written reflection describing their experience and the reception of and response to their message.

Course Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	5%
Evans & Dew Chapter Summaries	10%
<i>God and Evil</i> Reflection and Application	10%
Ministry Book Review	20%
In-class Presentation	15%
Personal Reflection Paper	10%
Sermon Manuscript and Reflection	20%
Evangelistic Encounter Reflection	10%

Additional Bibliography

Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.

———. “Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers.” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 121-43.

———. “Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil.” In *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, 248-67.

———. “Theodicy Without Blame.” *Philosophical Topics* 16 (Fall 1988): 215-45.

Adams, Robert M. “Existence, Self-Interest, and the Problem of Evil.” *Nous* 13 (1979): 53-65.

———. “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 109-17.

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Ahern, M. B. *The Problem of Evil*. New York: Schocken, 1971.

- Basinger, David. "Christian Theism and the Free Will Defense." *Sophia* 19 (July 1980): 20-33.
- . "Determinism and Evil: Some Clarifications." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1982): 163-64.
- . "Divine Omniscience and the Best of All Possible Worlds." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 16 (1982): 143-48.
- . "Human Freedom and Divine Omnipotence: Some New Thoughts on an Old Problem." *Religious Studies* 15 (1979): 491-510.
- . "In What Sense Must God Do His Best? A Response to Hasker." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985): 161-64.
- . "Must God Create the Best Possible World? A Response." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1980): 339-42.
- Boyd, Gregory. *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001.
- Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.
- Coughlan, Michael L. "The Free Will Defense and Natural Evil." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 20 (1986): 93-108.
- Davies, Brian. *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- Davis, Stephen T. *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*. Atlanta: Knox, 1981.
- . "Why Did This Happen to Me? The Patient as a Philosopher." *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 65 (1972): 61-67.
- Draper, Paul. "Evil and the Proper Basicity of Belief in God." *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): 135-47.
- . "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists." *Nous* 23 (1989): 331-50.
- . "Probabilistic Arguments from Evil." *Religious Studies* 28 (1993): 303-17.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.
- Fales, Evan. "Antediluvian Theodicy: Stump on the Fall." *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 320-29.
- . "Should God Not Have Created Adam?" *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 192-208.
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- Flew, Antony. "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom." *Hibbert Journal* 53 (January 1955): 135-44.
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- Griffin, David Ray. *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- . *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976.
- Hartshorne, Charles. "A New Look at the Problem of Evil." In *Current Philosophical Issues: Essays in Honor of Curt John Ducasse*, ed. F. C. Dommeyer. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1966, 201-12.
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- . "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil." *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 23-44.
- . "Providence and Evil: Three Theories." *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 91-105.
- . *The Triumph of Good over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- . *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
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