

## Seminar on the Problem of Evil (Rel. 370): Fall 2011

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday 10 am-11am, Wednesday 4pm-5pm and by appointment.

**Lectures:** MW 2:35pm- 3:45pm, Main St. Campus, Priscilla Payne Hurd Academic Complex, 301.

### **Course Description:**

Theistic God is conceived as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. But if God is truly good, then why does He allow the existence of evil in the world? This question is known as the Problem of Evil, and it is probably the most important case against the existence of theistic God. There are at least three different versions of this Problem: (1) the logical version, (2) the evidential version, and (3) the existential version. According to the logical version, there is a *logical inconsistency* between certain theistic claims about God and evil. In other words, it is claimed that it is logically impossible that both God and evil exist. According to the evidential version, the existence of evil somehow counts against the existence of God, although it is not inconsistent with the existence of God. For example, some non-theists argued that evil makes the existence of God improbable or unlikely. According to the existential version, the problem of evil is a practical or psychological problem, rather than a pure theoretical one. Many people find themselves gripped at the core of their being by the horror of evil and this awareness is profoundly transforming. Those who have this kind of perception of evil often report that they cannot experience the universe as theistic- that they could never manifest attitudes of praise, adoration, gratitude, and worship toward God.

There are at least three very different types of responses to the Problem of Evil: (1) Total Refutation, according to which, there are no facts about evil in the world that make it unreasonable to believe in the existence of God; (2) Defense, which aims at establishing that a given formulation of the argument from evil fails; and (3) Theodicy, which offers an account or explanation of why God allows suffering and evil.

In this course, we discuss in details some important cases of the logical, evidential, and existential arguments from evil against the existence of God, and some important responses to those arguments in classic and contemporary theistic theology and philosophy of religion.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To develop a substantial understanding of major versions of the problem of evil presented by non-theists philosophers.
- To develop a substantial understanding of major responses to the problem of evil presented by theistic philosopher and theologians.
- To develop skills of analyzing and evaluating arguments for and against different views on the problem at hand vigorously, fairly, and with sympathy.
- To exercise scholarly fairness, sympathy, and tolerance toward different conflicting views, and expand our intellectual horizon.
- To diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes our mind against speculation.
- To enrich our intellectual imagination.
- To learn how to think and write explicitly, clearly, and succinctly.
- To think creatively, and to be able to imagine alternatives to familiar view and situations.
- To improve our understanding of the complexities of the problem, and the rationale behind different position has been taken on this issue.

### **Required Text:**

*The Problem of Evil*, edited by Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

(Some other articles will be posted on Blackboard throughout the course.)

This book is available at Moravian College Book Store.

**Note:** You will find that you get the most out of the course if you read each assignment before lecture and then re-read the assignment after the lecture.

### **Lecture attendance:**

It is not possible to perform well in the course without attending lectures regularly. We will cover substantial amounts of material in the lectures not necessarily included anywhere in the readings. It is highly unlikely that you will learn this material adequately by, e.g., borrowing your friend's lecture notes. You have two class sessions you can miss with no question asked. Beyond those two class sessions, any further missed classes without a really good excuse (involving a note from your doctor, psychiatrist, parole officer, etc.) will cost you 2% of your final grade.

**Important Note:** Please turn off your cell phones before walking into class! If you are having an emergency that requires you to have your cell phone on, please tell me at the beginning of class. No text messaging is allowed during the class, and the use of computers should be strictly confined to the things directly related to the class.

### **Academic honesty:**

Students are required to honor academic integrity. The course imposes the application of Moravian College's Academic Honesty Policy. The policy is to be found at Moravian College's *Student Handbook*.

### **Course requirements:**

- (1) A regular final exam, scheduled for **Wednesday, December 14, 2011, 8:30AM**. You will receive a Study Guide for the Final Exam prior to the exam to know what kind of questions you should expect on the Final. Make up final exam will be administered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances, and only in light of appropriate supporting documents.
- (2) One paper (1500- 2000 words). On Wednesday, October 19, 2011, you will receive the paper topic. The paper due is **Wednesday, November 2, 2011**. Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. You are responsible to submit a hard copy of your paper. In some exceptional cases, you may be allowed to submit your paper through email. If so, you must receive a confirmation email from me, otherwise, you must assume that I have not received your paper. If the paper is turned in late without prior permission, the grade will be adjusted downwards by a third of a grade for each day the paper is late (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.). It is always helpful to discuss the draft of your paper with your friends, roommates, or classmates so as to solicit feedback.
- (3) You will be required to write weekly short paragraphs (not more than two pages) consist of your critical evaluation of the material to be discussed in the class. In the paragraphs, you should concentrate on a specific concept, theme or question. You are required to complete 10 assignments of this sort by the end of the semester, that is, you have the option of choosing 10 out of roughly 13 assignments I am to assign throughout the semester. Every week, by the end of our Wednesday class, the

assignments should be submitted. (There would be no assignment due on Wednesday August 31.)

- (4) Starting November 16, 2011, you would be divided into four groups, and each group is required to present and discuss one of the major perspectives in theodicy as listed under "Tentative Lecture Schedule", Section V. The details would be announced in the class and on the Blackboard.

**Important note:** *By the end of the semester, all four above-mentioned requirements (midterm exam, final exam, weekly assignments, paper, and class presentation) must be completed in order to pass the course. In other words, if you miss at least one of the above requirements, we will fail the course automatically.*

**Grading:**

Final Exam: 30% - Paper: 25% - Weekly Paragraphs: 25%- Class Presentation: 20%.

The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Grade	4-point conversion
95-100	A	4
90-95	A-	3.7
87-90	B+	3.3
84-87	B	3
80-84	B-	2.7
77-80	C+	2.3
74-77	C	2
70-74	C-	1.7
67-70	D+	1.3
64-67	D	1
60-64	D-	0.7
0-60	F	0

## **Tentative Lecture Schedule:**

### **I. Preliminary Remarks:**

(1) **General Remarks on the Problem of Evil, and Its Place in Human's life:** August 29, 31.

*Readings:*

- *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky (the relevant pages will be posted on Blackboard.)
- *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (the relevant pages will be posted on Blackboard).

(2) **General Remarks on Argument and Philosophical Reasoning:** September 7.

### **II. The Logical Problem of Evil:**

(1) **The Problem:** September 12, 14, 19.

*Readings:*

- "Evil and Omnipotence", by J. L. Mackie, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 25- 37.
- "Hume on Evil", by Nelson Pike, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 38-52.
- "The Defeat of Good and Evil", by Roderick M. Chisholm, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 53- 68.

(2) **The Response:** September 21, 26, 28.

*Readings:*

- "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom", by Alvin Plantinga, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 83- 109.
- "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil", by Robert Merrihew Adams, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 110- 125.

### **III. The Evidential Problem of Evil:**

(1) **The Problem:** October 3, 5, 12, 17.

*Readings:*

- "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism", by William L. Rowe, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 126- 137.
- "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists", by Paul Draper, in *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, Edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder, Indiana University Press, 1996. (Will be posted on the Blackboard).

(2) **The Response:** October 19, 24, 26, 31

- "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: on Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance' ", by Stephan J. Wykstra, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 138-160.
- "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra", by William L. Rowe, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 161-168.

### **Paper Assignment: October 19**

### **IV. The Existential Problem of Evil:**

(1) **The Problem:** November 2, 7.

*Reading:*

- "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", by Marilyn McCord Adams, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 209- 221.

### **The Paper Due: November 2**

(2) **The Response:** November 9, 14.

**Reading:**

- “On Regretting the Evils of This World”, by William Hasker, From *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 425-37. (Will be posted on Blackboard).

**V. Perspectives in Theodicy (Students’ Presentations)**

**(1) Augustinian Theodicy:** November 16

**Readings:**

- “A Good Creation’s Capacity for Evil”, St. Augustine, from *City of God*, Book XI, Chaps. 17, 18, 21, 22, and Book XII, chap. 3. (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- “Augustine and the Denial of Genuine Evil”, David Ray Griffin, From *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp.55-71. (Will be posted on Blackboard)

**(2) Leibniz’s Best Possible World Theodicy:** November 21, 28

**Readings:**

- Passages from *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, trans. E. M. Huggard from C. J. Gerhardt’s edition of the *Collected Philosophical Works (1875- 1890)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- “Must God Create the Best?”, by Robert M. Adams, from *The Philosophical Review* 99 (1990): 131- 155. (Will be posted on Blackboard).

**(3) Irenaean Theodicy:** November 30

**Readings:**

- “Soul-Making and Suffering”, by John Hick, in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 168-188.
- “The Loving God: Some Observations on Hick’s Theodicy”, by Roland Puccetti, from *Process Studies* 2 (1972): 44-48. (Will be posted on Blackboard)

**(4) Process Theodicy:** December 5

**Readings:**

- “Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good”, by Lewis Ford, from *The Christian Scholar* 50 (Fall 1967): 235-50. (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- “Evil and Persuasive Power”, by Peter Hare and Edward Madden, From *Process Studies* 2 (1972): 44-48. (Will be posted on Blackboard).

**Study Guide for the Final: December 5.**

**VI. Review and Reflections:** December 7.

**The Final Exam will be held on Wednesday , December 14, 2011, 8:30AM, Main St. Campus, Priscilla Payne Hurd Academic Complex, 301.**

**Important Note:**

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510).
- The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392. The Writing Center tutors will make arrangements with the student who needs tutoring services to meet in an accessible location, such as the library or a study/conference room in PPHAC.