

**RELS 101 Approaches to Religion: Evil and Suffering**  
**Spring 2019**

**Louise M. Doire, M.Div.**

Office: 4C Glebe Street

**Mailbox: 4A Glebe St. (RELS Lounge)**

Office hours: M 12:00-2:00 T 12:15-2:15 and by appointment

Phone: (843) 953-5939 Email: [doirel@cofc.edu](mailto:doirel@cofc.edu)

**Course Description:**

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion through a particular theme. In this course we focus our study on the topics of good and evil, and human suffering.

Our examination will incorporate theological (when applicable) understandings and cultural constructions of these themes as they have been presented in Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. The student will be introduced to some basic tenets of each tradition. The methodology will include analysis through historical, literary and comparative criticism. Both primary and secondary texts will be utilized.

The human experience of evil and suffering has been and continues to be a fundamental element of theological, religious and cultural ideology. As we proceed in our academic study, each student will be challenged to examine the theological, religious and cultural influences that have shaped and informed their own understanding of the universal experience of evil, the "Good," and human suffering.

**Course Objectives:** The following course objectives echo the learning outcomes established by the RELS department: Students will understand the implications of a text's rhetorical strategy and recognize meanings beyond the author's explicit message. Students will recognize that the power to shape prevailing responses to evil and suffering is linked to specific identities (race, gender, class, national identity, etc.). Students will reflect upon their own judgments in their encounters with diverse traditions. This competency will be assessed through their ability to articulate an academic approach to the study of religion in their written work.

**This course also satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Learning Outcomes:** 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

**Students will demonstrate successful mastery of the General Education Learning Outcomes #1 and # 2 by writing a well-organized, analytical, three-page paper that identifies relevant references to the "problem of evil" in a selection from the primary text, *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky and further, by interpreting how these references represent the values expressed in the text. The signature assignment is worth 25 points.**

**Required Texts:**

*The Problem of Evil*, Mark Larrimore, ed. (designated in the syllabus by ML)

*Night*, Elie Wiesel

Selected electronic readings on OAKS

**Course Requirements:**

Three Exams (3 X 100 points)

Three 2-3page papers on \*\* (asterisked) readings (75 pts.)

One quiz on *Night* (25 pts.)

## **Grading:**

Each set of 100 points will be worth 25% of the final grade.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale:

	A	100-92	A-	91-89	
B+	88-86	B	85-82	B-	81-79
C+	78-76	C	75-72	C-	71-69
D+	68-66	D	65-62	D-	61-59
F	-58				

## **Course Schedule and Reading Assignments\***

***“You’ll never know the hurt I suffered nor the pain I rise above,  
And I’ll never know the same about you, your holiness or your kind of love,  
And it makes me feel so sorry.”*** ~~Bob Dylan, “Idiot Wind”

***“I am not some stone commission, like a statue in a park  
I am flesh and blood and vision, I am howling in the dark.”***

~~Joni Mitchell, “Come In From the Cold”

01/08 Introduction and Course Requirements

01/10, 01/15 The study of religion and course methodology/ Discussion

Jef Rouner, *No, It’s Not Your Opinion. You’re Just Wrong*, Houston Press, July 2015 (OAKS)

Russell T. McCutcheon, *What Is the Academic Study of Religion?* (OAKS)

**An Analysis of Good and Evil: “Good and bad, I define these terms quite clear, no doubt, somehow.  
Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.”**

~~Bob Dylan, “My Back Pages”

01/17 - Aristotle from *Nicomachean Ethics*, (OAKS)

**Homework assignment:** Bring to class one paragraph each on the noblest character you have ever encountered and on the most evil character you have ever encountered. Choices may come from fiction or history, animation, movies, novels or your own lives. Explain how these characters exhibit the qualities of nobility/evil.

**The Problem of Evil: “Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”**

~~Epicurus (341-270BCE)

01/22 G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* (ML 191-200)

John Hick, *The Fountainhead* (59-69) (OAKS)

## **\*\*01/24 Paper #1 on Voltaire, *The Lisbon Earthquake* (ML 204)**

Rousseau, *Letter to Voltaire* (ML 210- Read, but do not include in your paper)

## **Classical Theodicy**

**Guy #2: Black Frost is the only beer.**

**BUFFY: My mother always said that beer was evil**

**Guy #1: Evil. Good. These are moral absolutes that predate the absolution of malt and fine hops. You see, wait, where was I?**

**BUFFY: I’m really not sure:**

**Guy#4: Well, Thomas Aquinas said...**

**All the other guys: NO!**

**Guy #2: There will be no Thomas Aquinas at this table.**

~~Scene at a bar, from “Beer Bad” episode, “Buffy, the Vampire Slayer”

01/29, 01/31 Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* (ML 95-102)  
*The Vale of Soul-Making Theodicy* (ML 355-361)

**In the Beginning...** *"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!"*  
~~Sojourner Truth, 1851 Women's Convention, Akron Ohio

02/05, 02/07 *Genesis 1-3* (OAKS)

**\*\*02/12 Signature Assignment -Paper #2 on Dostoyevsky, from *The Brothers Karamazov* (ML 277-282)**

### **02/14 First Exam**

#### **Suffering: Judaism**

*"Show your face! Help me understand! What is the reason for your heavy hand? Was it the sins of my youth? What have I done to you? That you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true?"*  
~~Joni Mitchell, *The Sire of Sorrows* (*Job's Sad Song*)

*"The justification of the neighbour's pain is certainly the source of all immorality."*  
~~Emmanuel Levinas, from *Useless Suffering*

02/19, 02/21 Book of Job and traditional responses to suffering  
Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Job* (ML 293-297)

#### **Post-Holocaust Reflections**

*"No One kneads us anew from earth and clay, no one addresses our dust. No One."* ~~Paul Celan, *Poet and Holocaust survivor*  
*"No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children."* ~~Irving Greenberg, *Cloud of Smoke: Pillar of Fire*

#### **READ *Night*.**

02/26, 02/28 Richard L. Rubenstein and Elie Wiesel, *An Exchange*"(OAKS)  
Kurt Shaw, *When Child Soldiers Become Filmmakers* (OAKS)

03/05 Film: *First Person Singular: Elie Wiesel*

03/07 Quiz and discussion of *Night* by Elie Wiesel

**\*\*03/12 Paper #3 on *Useless Suffering*, Emmanuel Levinas (ML 371-380)**

### **03/14 Second Exam**

### **03/16-03/24 SPRING BREAK**

**Suffering: Christianity** *"Oh I am a lonely painter, I live in a box of paints. I'm frightened by the devil, and I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid."*  
~~Joni Mitchell, *Case of You*

03/26, 03/28, 04/02 Introduction to suffering in Christianity  
Augustine, *City of God* (ML 53-61)

04/04 Dorothee Soelle, *A Critique of Christian Masochism* (ML 365-370)  
Nancy E. Neinhuis, *Faith in the Face of Abuse* (OAKS)

**Suffering: Buddhism** “*Letting go gives us freedom, and freedom is the only condition for happiness. If, in our heart, we still cling to anything - anger, anxiety, or possessions - we cannot be free.*” ~Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*

04/09 The Life of Siddhartha

### **The Four Noble Truths**

04/11, 04/16 Dalai Lama, *Ethics and Suffering*, (OAKS)

### **04/18 Last Day of Class- Course Reflection**

**Third Exam: 9:25 class Thursday 4/25 @ 8:00**  
**10:50 class Tuesday 4/30 @ 8:00**

### **Please Note:**

From the Faculty Administration Manual, Section VIII. A. 11  
11. Final Examinations and Final Course Grades

Prior to each final examination period, an examination schedule is published by the Registrar's Office. Final examinations must be administered only at the time and place stated on the Examinations Schedule, except by written permission of the relevant campus authority.

\* This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

### **Additional Course Notes**

**Attendance Policy:** Class attendance and participation in group discussions are mandatory. Four absences will be allowed. Five or more absences may result in a lower final grade for the course. Seven absences will result in your being dropped from the class, which will earn you an F for the course for your GPA. Absences may be excused with proper documentation or notification from Health Services. Please note: Final decision for an excused absence always lies with the Instructor.

**SNAP:** If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodation and the SNAP program, see: <http://www.cofc.edu/~cds/index.htm>.

**Honor Code:** The Code of Honor found in the Student Handbook will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and WILL be reported to the Honor Board. According to the Student Handbook plagiarism *includes but is not limited to:*

\* The verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author. All significant phrases, clauses, or passages, taken directly from source material must be enclosed in quotation marks and acknowledged either in the text itself or in footnotes/endnotes.

\* Borrowing without acknowledging the source.

- \* Paraphrasing the thoughts of another writer without acknowledgement.
- \* Allowing any other person or organization to prepare work which one then submits as his/her own.

### **Classroom Code of Conduct**

—Selections taken from the Student Handbook, published by the President's Advisory Committee in cooperation with the Office of the President.

Your professor expects that you as a student:

1. Will be attentive and courteous during class.
2. Will complete the assigned work according to the course schedule.
3. Do not cut classes, come in late, or leave early. If you ever are late for class, enter in complete silence and do not walk between the class and the professor. Never leave during class unless you absolutely must. Leaving for a short break and then returning is not acceptable. The professor is not a TV set, but is a person addressing the class, and it is rude to leave when someone is addressing you.
- 4. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices.**  
**Should you need to leave the classroom during an exam, you will be required to leave your cell phone with the Instructor.**
5. Visible and noisy signs of restlessness are rude as well as disruptive to others. If you cannot sit still or stay awake, you should not be taking a college class. Do not begin packing your book bag or otherwise indicate that you think it is time for class to come to an end; wait for the professor to dismiss class. If the class period has ended but the professor has not finished and you cannot stay any longer, leave in complete silence.
6. Come to class prepared to work. Your professor expects you to prepare for class by completing reading and homework assignments. If you are unprepared for class, this may prevent you from participating in a class activity. Do not present your lack of preparation as a problem for the professor to solve or excuse.