



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY School of Continuing Studies

PROBLEM OF GOD (THEO 130)

Dates: June 02-July 25, 2025

Location: This course is fully asynchronous. Students will participate in the course using Georgetown University's online learning management system called Canvas. To learn more about Canvas, please go through the Canvas Guide for Students.

Professor: Mehmet S. Sayilgan, Ph.D.

Professor Contact Information: mss249@georgetown.edu

Virtual Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course engages with the problem of evil and suffering which has been one of the most challenging issues facing both religious and non-religious. On the one hand, it is believed that faith in God provides the best explanation to the question of evil and comforts those who suffer because of various reasons such as losing loved ones to death, sickness or natural disasters. On the other hand, many philosophers have been pointing out that the idea of a powerful, just and loving God cannot be reconciled with the evil and suffering that exist in the world. We will examine various perspectives developed by world religions and put both religious and non-religious views in conversation. The course does not claim to solve the problem, but will engage with the issue creatively and critically.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Name conceptual issues and controversies around the problem of evil and suffering.
- Articulate arguments for and against the existence of God based on the problem of evil and suffering.
- Explain various perspectives of the problem of evil and suffering in major world religions.
- Identify major concepts and rituals in world religions in relation to the problem of evil and suffering
- Provide a historical background for religious traditions to contextualize their views of evil and suffering.
- Recognize non-religious approaches to the problem of evil and suffering

COURSE READINGS

Required

- Huston Smith, *World Religions* (New York: HarperOne, 2009)
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Deborah E. McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Some of the readings are available on Canvas. They can be accessed through the following link: <http://canvas.georgetown.edu>.

Recommended

- Mark Larrimore, *The Problem of Evil: A Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000)
- Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser, *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)
- Michael L. Peterson, *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017). Second Edition
- Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World* (New York: HarperOne, 2011)
- Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006)
- Jackson, Sherman A., *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2004).
- Elaine Pagels, *Why Religion?: A Personal Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020)
- Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I Have Loved* (New York: Random House, 2019)
- Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006)

- Chad Meister, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, Continuum, 2012)

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA

Graded Assignments

- **Discussion Board (40%):** Students are expected to log into Canvas on a regular basis in order to run the course smoothly. The grade for the participation will be based on the student's contribution to the discussion board. Students are required to post their own response/reflection (200–300 words) of the readings for the discussion board once a week, which is due every Thursday by 11:59 pm. In addition, each student will be required to submit at least two responses (100–200 words) to their classmate's discussion board posts. This is due every Sunday by 11:59 pm. The grading rubric is posted on Canvas.
- **Weekly Journals (20%):** Each student is required to post a journal (300–500 words) on Canvas. This is basically the student's response to a material specified by the instructor on Canvas each week. Journals are due on Fridays by 11: 59 PM. The grading rubric is posted on Canvas.
- **Weekly Reading Quizzes (10%):** Each week students will take a timed quiz once they completed weekly course readings and viewed recorded lectures. Quizzes are non-cumulative and it will take ten minutes to complete each of them. The quizzes are due on Sundays by 11:59 pm.
- **Group Video Presentation (10%):** Students will do a recorded zoom video presentation (10–15 min.) of a case study concerning evil and suffering based on one of the course readings. For this assignment, the class will be divided into small groups. Students will post their presentations to the group that they are part of and the other members of the group will write a constructive comment (100–200 words) on the posted video. The presentations are due on Mondays by 11:59 pm and the comments are due every Friday by 11:59 pm. More guidelines and grading rubric are posted on Canvas.

Final Paper (20 %): For their final assignment, students will write a response paper (1500 – 2000 words) to Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in light of one of the religious traditions discussed in the course. In their response, students should engage with Douglass' story creatively and focus on the themes of God, suffering, and evil. Papers should be turned in as Word document or pdf on Canvas. It is due by 11:59 pm on Friday, July 25.

Grading Scheme

94 - 100 % = A

- 90 - 93 % = A-
- 87 - 89 % = B+
- 83 - 86 % = B
- 80 - 82 % = B-
- 77 - 79 % = C+
- 73 - 76 % = C
- 70 - 72 % = C
- 67 - 69 % = D+
- 60 - 66 % = D
- Below 60 % = F

COURSE SCHEDULE

This course is divided into **eight** modules. Below is an outline describing the course structure. Each Module will be released on a weekly basis every Sunday at 11:59 pm (ET). Students are required to move through each module in sequential order.

ORIENTATION: 11 am-12 pm, Monday, June 3 (optional synchronous zoom meeting)

The orientation provides an overview of the course and introduces you to your instructor and peers. You will also learn about the technology requirements and where to get support.

MODULE 1: June 2-8 Conceptual Issues and Controversies

Module Level Objectives:

- Explain the definitions of evil and suffering
- Differentiate between a wide range of positions and arguments concerning evil and suffering
- Identify major traditional theodicies

Course Materials:

- Watch: Introduction to the course by the instructor
- Read: Meister, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (p. 1-47) (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, What is Evil?
- Watch: Lecture 2, Problems of Evil

Assignments and Activities

- Introduce yourself with a short video on Canvas
- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz
- Sign up for group video presentation

MODULE 2: June 9-15 Hindu Perspectives

Module Level Objectives

- Outline the history of Hinduism and its basic concepts
- Analyze the problem of evil and suffering in Hinduism

Course Materials:

- Read: Smith, Hinduism, pp. 12-81
- Read: Willet, “Hinduism on Evil and Suffering” (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, Introduction to Hinduism
- Watch: Lecture 2, Major concept of Hinduism
- Watch: Lecture 3, Hinduism on Evil and Suffering

Assignments and Activities

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz

MODULE 3: June 16-22 Buddhist Perspectives

Module Level Objectives:

- Explain Buddhism, its history, and basic concepts
- Examine how Buddhism addresses the problem of evil and suffering.

Course Materials:

- Read: Smith, Buddhism, pp. 82-153
- Read: Anbeek, “Evil and Transformation of Evil in Buddhism” (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, Introduction to Buddhism
- Watch: Lecture 2: Buddhism on Evil and Suffering

Assignments and Activities:

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz

MODULE 4: June 23-June 29 Taoism and Confucianism

Module Level Objectives:

- Demonstrate major concepts and rituals in Confucianism and Taoism
- Compare and contrast the problem of evil and suffering in Confucianism and Taoism

Course Materials:

- Read: Smith, Confucianism, pp. 154-95
- Read: Smith, Taoism, pp. 196-220
- Read: Cheung, Confucianism on Evil and Suffering (on Canvas)
- Read: Lagerwey, Taoism on Evil and Suffering (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, Introduction to Confucianism
- Watch: Lecture 2, Confucianism on Evil
- Watch: Lecture 3, Taoism and Its Approach of Evil

Assignments and Activities:

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz
- Group video presentation
- Comment for the video presentation

MODULE 5: Jun3 30-July 6 Jewish Perspectives

Module Level Objectives

- Characterize Judaism, its history and major concepts
- Illustrate Jewish perspectives on the problem of evil and suffering

Course Materials:

- Read: Smith, Judaism, pp. 271-316
- Read: Goodman, “Judaism and the Problem of Evil” (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1: Introduction to Judaism
- Watch: Lecture 2: Judaism on Evil and Suffering

Assignments and Activities:

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz
- Group video presentation
- Comment for the video presentation

MODULE 6: July 7-13 Christian Approaches

Module Level Objectives:

- Recognize Christianity and its major theological concepts
- Interpret Christian perspectives on evil and suffering

Course Materials:

- Read: Smith, Christianity, pp. 317-64
- Read: Fiddes, “Christianity, Atonement and Evil” (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, Introduction to Christianity
- Watch: Lecture 2: Christian Perspectives on evil and suffering

Assignments and Activities:

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz
- Group video presentation
- Comment for the video presentation

MODULE 7: July 14-20 Islamic Perspectives

Module Level Objectives

- Outline the history of Islam and its major concepts
- Critique the problem of evil and suffering according to Islamic tradition

Course Materials:

- Read: Smith, Islam, pp. 221-70
- Read: Winter, “Islam and the Problem of Evil” (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, Introduction to Islam
- Watch: Lecture 2, Islam on Evil and Suffering

Assignments and Activities:

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz
- Group video presentation
- Comment for the video presentation

MODULE 8: July 21-25 Non-Religious Approaches

Module Level Objectives

- Identify major aspects of atheism
- Illustrate how people address the problem of evil and suffering without religion

Course Materials:

- Read: Prothero, A Brief Coda on Atheism, pp. 317-30
- Read: Case Studies of grief without religion (on Canvas)
- Watch: Lecture 1, Religiously Unaffiliated
- Watch: Lecture 1, Grief without Religion

Assignments and Activities:

- Discussion Post
- Journal
- Quiz
- Final paper

INFORMATION ABOUT TOOLS AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

As a Georgetown student your online classroom experience will be very different but just as rigorous as your residential student experience. You can expect to:

- Communicate with your professor and classmates regularly via email, discussion boards, and other technologies available.
- Navigate the internet using a web browser (note that certain tools may require a specific browser).
- Use applications such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs to create documents and work on projects.
- Submit assignments in Canvas.
- Upload and download saved files (including text, audio, and video).
- Use a microphone to record audio.
- Use a webcam to record video.

In this course we will use the following tools:

- Zoom
- Panopto

Computer Requirements

- You will need access to a computer (Windows or Mac) and adequate Internet service to complete this course. Although you can use other devices such as smartphones and

tablets for some online coursework, please note that some tools, such as Proctorio, do not work on tablets or smartphones.

- You will also need an internal or external microphone and camera to complete this course. While you can use any browser to access Canvas please note that some tools only work with certain browsers (e.g., Proctorio only works with Chrome).

The minimum requirements needed to use Canvas can be found in this [Canvas guide](#).

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Student Expectations

You are expected to complete all readings, assignments, and activities on time. You are expected to actively participate in discussions with your peers, and contribute to the group assignments. It is important to subscribe to the course discussion boards so that you receive notifications when new messages are posted. In order to get full credit for participation, you will have to complete all of your module assignments and quizzes on time. Late assignments will incur an immediate penalty of 10 % off the grade it would have earned if it were on time and an additional 5 % reduction for each additional day. If you are unable to submit any of your assignments on time, please notify me by e-mail as soon as possible. Late submissions because of illness, family emergency, or death of a loved one will be considered “excused.” In these cases, students are expected to provide documentation.

Time Expectations

Our remote learning courses are designed to meet the same academic standards as our place-based (face-to-face) courses. We will be doing a full 15-week semester course in 7.5 weeks. Students should plan on spending approximately 15-18 hours a week on assignments, readings, lectures, and projects.

Communication Expectations

Building an inclusive climate of mutual respect and inquiry in this class:

I respect your right to be called whatever you want to be called, because I understand that for all of us, social recognition of our sense of self is key to our own integrity and flourishing. I expect everyone in the class to do the same. **In particular, if you would like to be called by a specific set of pronouns or name that might not be obvious from your official school records, please let me know in any way that makes you comfortable.**

Georgetown’s Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Non-Conforming Resource Guide:
<https://lgbtq.georgetown.edu/resources/transatgu/>

Communication with Peers

You will be expected to engage with your peers via the discussion board and other required tools on a regular basis.

Communication with Professor

Please feel free to email me with your questions, concerns, and/or to schedule a time to meet over Zoom. You can expect a response from me within 24 hours.

Netiquette Guidelines

To promote the highest degree of education possible, we ask each student to respect the opinions and thoughts of other students and be courteous in the way that you choose to express yourself. Students should be respectful and considerate of all opinions.

In order for us to have meaningful discussions, we must learn to genuinely try to understand what others are saying and be open-minded about others' opinions. If you want to persuade someone to see things differently, it is much more effective to do so in a polite, non-threatening way rather than to do so antagonistically. Everyone has insights to offer based on his/her experiences, and we can all learn from each other. Civility is essential.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with Disabilities

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services among others. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the [Academic Resource Center](#), the office that oversees disability support services, (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability/>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the [Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website](#). Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

Accessibility and Inclusion

One of the central tenets of Georgetown's educational mission is *cura personalis*, a Latin phrase meaning "care of the whole person." Georgetown is committed to showing care and concern for

each student by creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment that follows universal design principles to meet the needs of its diverse student body.

I am committed to creating a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). If your name or pronoun needs to be corrected, please let me know early in the semester so that I can make the appropriate changes to my records.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students at Georgetown University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity. Although most Georgetown students conduct themselves in accordance with these standards, occasionally, there are students who violate the code of conduct. Cheating harms the University community in many ways. For example, honest students are frustrated by the unfairness of cheating that goes undetected and students who cheat can skew the grading curve in a class, resulting in lower grades for students who worked hard and did their own work.

Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are expected to fully adhere to the policies and procedures of [Georgetown's Honor System](#) and to take the Honor Code Pledge.

Honor Code Pledge

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system:

- *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and*
- *To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

Plagiarism

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in the workplace, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the [Gervase Programs](#). If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing, and the need to credit, check out [Plagiarism.org](#).

All submissions must be your original work. Any submission suspected of plagiarism will be immediately referred to the Honor Council for investigation and possible adjudication. All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. If you have not done so, please read the honor code material located online at the [Honor Council website](#).

SUPPORT SERVICES

Georgetown recognizes that COVID-19 has a significant impact on everyone in the Georgetown community. Georgetown offers a variety of support services for students that can be accessed online and has put together [this newsletter](#) which aims to provide you with information about well-being resources and virtual meetings that can connect you with mental health professionals on and off campus during this time. Below are some resources available to you:

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
- [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#)
202-687-6985
- [Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action \(IDEAA\)](#)
(202) 687-4798

Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator.

If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. [Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator.]. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter>.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: confidential email sarp@georgetown.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985 or after hours, call (833) 960-3006 to reach Fonemed, a telehealth service; individuals may ask for the on-call CAPS clinician.

More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website.

Title IX/Pregnancy and Parenting Accommodations

Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. Specific adjustments will be handled on a case by case basis and will depend on medical needs and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out on the [Title IX website](#).

Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO)

Confidential | Independent | Impartial | Informal

The Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) serves all undergraduate and graduate students, including SCS and BGE, on the main campus. Consider contacting the Student Ombuds when you want to talk to a caring professional about a University-related issue but don't know where to turn. The OSO is a confidential and safe space that is independent of formal university organizations or structures where students can discuss their concerns, share their experiences, ask questions and explore their options. The student ombuds can help you problem-solve, identify your goals, and empower you to think through ways to navigate complex situations. Some reasons for you to visit the office may be to address academic concerns, clarify administrative policies, discuss interpersonal conflicts, seek coaching, mediation or facilitation to handle a sensitive situation, advise you on the process to file a formal complaint if you are experiencing bias, harassment, bullying or other forms of intimidation, identify other appropriate campus resources, and allow you to safely express your frustrations and concerns.

Request an in-person or zoom appointment with the Student Ombuds by writing studentombuds@georgetown.edu or calling 202-784-1081. The OSO is located in Room 207 of the Reiss Building (across from Arrupe Hall). Find more information at <http://studentombuds.georgetown.edu>.

Georgetown Library

If you have a question for a librarian you can go to their [“Ask Us”](#) page where you will have the option to chat online, send an email, or schedule a Zoom appointment to discuss a research topic, develop a search strategy, or examine resources for projects and papers. Librarians offer an overview of and in-depth assistance with important resources for senior or master's theses, dissertations, papers and other types of research. This service is available to currently enrolled students who need assistance with Georgetown-assigned projects and papers. Please review the [Services & Resources Guide for Online Students](#) for additional information.

eResources

Students enrolled in courses have access to the University Library System's eResources, including 500+ research databases, 1.5+ million ebooks, and thousands of periodicals and other multimedia files (films, webinars, music, and images). You can access these resources through the [Library's Homepage](#) by using your NetID and password.

Learning Resources

Georgetown offers a host of [learning resources](#) to its students. Two that you might find particularly helpful in this course are the [Writing Center](#) and [Refworks](#).

- [The Writing Center](#) offers peer tutoring by trained graduate and undergraduate students who can assist you at any point in the writing process. They help at any stage of your writing process, from brainstorming to revision. Tutors can offer advice on thesis development, use of evidence, organization, flow, sentence structure, grammar, and more. The Writing Center will not proofread or edit papers; rather, they will help to improve your proofreading and editing skills to become a better writer. Appointments can be booked online through their website.
- [Refworks](#) is an online research management tool that aids in organizing, storing, and presenting citation sources for papers and projects.

Technical Support

All students have 24/7 access to Canvas technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including live chat and a support hotline at 855-338-2770. Use the 'Help' icon in the lower left of your Canvas window to view all available support and feedback options. If you're looking for help on a specific feature, check out the [Canvas Student Guide](#).