

PHIL 256 GOD, SUFFERING, AND NARRATIVE

Dr. Christopher E. Franklin

T/R 1-2:15pm, HAL 215

Fall 2017

CONTACT INFORMATION

Office: HAL 300J

Office Hours: M 12:50-1:50; T (by appt.) 10-12, 4-5; W&F 12:50-1:50, 4-5; R (by appt.) 11-12, 4-5

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“A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate.”

—Flannery O’Connor

“Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not me.”

—John Milton

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

—St. Peter

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an unconventional philosophical investigation into the problem of suffering—the problem of reconciling an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God with the existence of horrendous human suffering. Philosophers (particularly those known as “analytic philosophers”) tend to focus exclusively on the role of dialectics and argumentation as a guide to truth. After a brief survey of analytic treatments of the problem of suffering, we will compare and contrast argument and narrative as a means to acquiring knowledge. A premise of this course is that narrative is just as much a guide to truth as argument. Indeed, a theme of the course is that narrative is sometimes a *better* way of accessing truth. Thus, the course approaches the problem of suffering through the lenses of dialectics and story-telling. Our guide through this complex terrain is Eleonore Stump’s magisterial *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. The course will grapple with questions about the nature of God and suffering, theories of human flourishing, the connection between suffering and flourishing, the sources of knowledge, the relationship between love and the will, the fragmented self, the biblical narratives of Abraham and Job, and C.S. Lewis’s story of Orual and Psyche.

TEXTS

Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (New York: Harcourt, 1956)

Supplemental readings will be either posted on my.gcc or hyperlinked to the syllabus below.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Through the course, students will:

1. Demonstrate ability to distinguish the three main responses to the problem of suffering: theodicies, skeptical theism, and defenses (#2, 3, 7; exam)
2. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the philosophical significance of narrative (#2, 3, 7; exam, critical reading response 1)
3. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the Stump's defense, including her account of love (#2, 3, 9; exam, critical reading responses 2 and 4)
4. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the Stump's interpretations of Job and Abraham (#2, 3, 7; exam, critical reading response 3)
5. Develop critical analysis and reasoning skills (Department objectives 4, 6, 8, 9; paper, critical reading responses 1-5)

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENTAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Demonstrate the ability to understand and evaluate philosophical questions from a Christian theistic framework. This will require the student to see the relationship between faith and learning and how such a perspective applies to the critical and analytical questions posed by humans in the great search for wisdom.
2. Demonstrate ability to read, comprehend, and evaluate the thought of great philosophers of the past and present in terms of the presuppositions and historical contexts of their claims about the philosophical task as well as the implications of such thought in terms of ethical and social practice. This will require observation of and interaction with primary source texts that approach the great questions and concerns that philosophers have been asking for many millennia.
3. Demonstrate ability to comprehend the major issues in philosophy from the aforementioned Christian theistic perspective as well as the ability to interact with the concerns and perspectives of other philosophies, religions, and worldviews in order to develop the skills necessary to think through what one believes and why. This will require the development of

skills necessary to evaluate an argument or a belief critically in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

4. Demonstrate basic and maturing research skills. This will include the ability to state theses, show those theses through analysis of primary texts, discuss the possible weaknesses of one's own analysis, and test those theses against the best scholarship.
5. Articulate a worldview that integrates knowledge of philosophy with other disciplines in order to see the consequences of a consistent Christian theistic worldview. Students will recognize the tensions in this integration process rather than accepting simplistic answers and thus will be helped to grow into mature and thoughtful persons.
6. Demonstrate basic research and writing skills. This ability will be assessed through the evaluation of the assigned paper, both in draft and completed versions.
7. Demonstrate basic knowledge of philosophical concepts.
8. Demonstrate ability to research, write, and speak in the content area of Philosophy.
9. Be competitive and prepared for graduate school and seminary opportunities, as assessed by placement data and alumni surveys.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Each student will be allowed 2 unexcused absences. Beyond this, each unexcused absence will result in a 2% loss of the student's total course grade. Excessive or frequent tardiness will count as an unexcused absence. If the student arrives late it is his responsibility to make sure he is marked 'present.' Excused absences are restricted to authorized college activities, loss of immediate family member, and illness/injury. See the Academic Policies Section of the *College Bulletin* for more information.

Participation—10%

For each class meeting, students are expected to have carefully read all the assigned reading and to be prepared for class discussion. Students really will be evaluated for their participation. If a student never says anything in class, the student will receive a 0 for participation.

Movie Viewings—5%

We will view two movies in this course during special evening classes. Students are required to attend the viewings and participate in the post viewing discussion. The movies are also on course reserve in the library.

Critical Reading Responses—30%

Students will turn in five critical reading responses. Each of the five responses is to be 550-600 words, typed, double-spaced, with the word count appearing under your name at the top, with appropriate

citation, and turned in at the beginning of the class it is due. In the written response, students should raise and pursue *one* issue from the assigned reading. **The response is not a summary, but a critical engagement with the reading.** Students should summarize only those aspects of the reading that are **essential** to understanding their critical engagement. Critical engagement should take one of the following three forms: (i) critical interpretation of the author, (ii) an objection to the author, and (iii) a defense the author. As Stump's book is divided into four parts, the first four critical reading responses must respond to, and only to, the portion of the book we have just completed. The fifth critical reading response must respond to Lewis's book, though you are welcome to pursue themes from Stump's book as they connect to Lewis.

Paper—30%

Students are to select an idea, argument, or puzzle covered in any part of the course reading that they so choose. *The topic must come from the reading.* The first part of the paper should set out to explain the central argument or puzzle that the student is engaging. The second, and most important, part of the paper should, in the case of an idea or argument, seek to defend or critique the idea or argument or, in the case of a puzzle, offer a solution or explain why you think there is no solution. This part of the paper is not to be a summary of someone else's thought/argument, but is to be something of *your own creation*. This is difficult and success requires time. Thus, you should select your topic as soon as possible and consider and cultivate your response over a couple of weeks. If you wait to the last minute it will be impossible for you to articulate any *well-developed* thought of your own. You are welcome and encouraged to discuss all parts of this paper with me in office hours.

The paper is due on 12/12 at the beginning of lecture and must be submitted in hard-copy form. The assignment should be typed, double-spaced, and between 2000-2500 words (excluding notes and bibliography). The word count should appear at the top of the paper, under the student's name. Any of the major forms of citation (e.g. APA, MLA, CMS, etc.) are permitted, but the student must be consistent in formatting.

You are welcome and encouraged to discuss your paper topic, thesis, and argument in office hours. My rough draft policy is as follows: any student interested in receiving feedback on a rough draft should come to office hours with two copies of the rough draft. We will work through the paper as time permits.

See my **minimal standards handout** posted on my.gcc concerning formatting requirements. Any work that fails to meet *any* of the minimal standards will automatically receive a third of a letter grade penalty and will receive an additional third of a letter grade penalty for each 24 hour period until the student turns in a properly formatted paper.

Final—25%

There will be a final cumulative exam given during finals week. Prior to the exam I will post *the exam* on my.gcc. The exam will consist of 10 numbered (1-10) essay questions. On the day of the final exam, I will roll a ten-sided die twice: whatever numbers the die lands on will be the essay questions students write on. If I roll the same number twice, there will be a surprise.

Consult the exam schedule now, and make appropriate travel preparations in light of the exam schedule published by the Registrar's office. College policy is that final exams may only be

administered during finals week, in accordance with the times scheduled by the Registrar's office, and may not be changed or eliminated to suit the convenience of either the instructor or the students. Students who have 3 exams on a particular calendar day during the final exam period may request permission to change the exam time, but I cannot guarantee that there will be a time that will work for the student.

Policy on late assignments:

Once I have collected the assignment at the beginning of lecture, any assignment turned in after that is late. I only accept late work in cases of serious illness/injury or loss of immediate family member.

Computer Policy

Students are welcome to use computers to take notes (though see [this](#) for research that suggests you are better off taking notes by hand), but must sit in the back row.

Honesty

College policies with regard to honesty in taking quizzes and tests will be strictly followed. The college administration and faculty are very concerned about cheating and take active steps to prevent it. See the college's policy on Academic Integrity in the 2017-2018 college *Bulletin*. The use (or possession) of former examinations from this course in preparing for tests is considered a violation of the GCC honesty in learning policy as stated in the college *Bulletin*.

Any student caught cheating on *any* element of this course will receive an automatic F for the *entire* course. Sound harsh? Good.

Disability

Accessibility & Accommodations: It is Grove City College's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on a disability, please let me know immediately so that we may discuss options. You are also welcome to contact the disability services office to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations. The Disability Services Coordinator may be reached at 724-264-4673 or DisabilityServices@gcc.edu

Counseling

If you are experiencing undue personal or academic stress at any time during the semester or need to talk to someone who can help, you should contact the Counseling Center at 724-458-3788 or email Mrs. Hummel, staff assistant, at mhummel@gcc.edu.

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS (schedule subject to change)

8/29 Course Introduction

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

8/31 The Problems of Suffering

Reading: Chapter 1; [‘The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism’](#) by William Rowe

9/5 Theodicy, Defense, and Skeptical Theism

Reading: ‘God, Evil, and Suffering’ by Howard-Snyder (my.gcc)

EPISTEMOLOGY OF NARRATIVE

9/7 Franciscan Knowledge

Reading: Chapters 2-3

9/12 Franciscan Knowledge (cont.)

Reading: Chapter 4

Critical Reading Response 1 due 9/12

LOVE AND LONELINESS

9/14 The Nature of Love

Reading: Chapter 5

9/19 The Nature of Love (cont.)

Reading: N/A

9/21 Union and Loneliness

Reading: Chapters 6-7

9/26 Union and Loneliness (cont.)

Reading: N/A

9/28 Other Worldly Redemption

Reading: Chapter 8

10/3 Other Worldly Redemption (cont.)

Reading: N/A

Critical Reading Response 2 due 10/3

9/27 Movie Night 7:30-10:30pm (HAL 214): *Birdman (or the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*

NARRATIVE AND SUFFERING

10/5 Job

Reading: Chapter 9; Job (entire book)

10/10 Job (cont.)

Reading: N/A

10/12 Abraham

Reading: Chapter 11; Genesis 12-22

10/17 Abraham (cont.)

Reading: N/A

Critical Reading Response 3 due 10/17

10/19 Fall Break

AQUINAS'S THEODICY AND STUMP'S DEFENSE

10/24 Suffering and Flourishing

Reading Chapter 13

10/26 **Suffering and Flourishing** (cont.)

Reading: N/A

10/25 Movie Night 7:30-10:30pm (HAL 214): *Tree of Life*

10/31 **Suffering and the Desires of the Heart**

Reading Chapter 14; 'Leaf by Niggle' by JRR Tolkien (my.gcc)

11/2 **Suffering and the Desires of the Heart** (cont.)

Reading: N/A

11/7 **Evaluating Stump's Defense**

Reading: Chapter 15; '[Divine Love and Human Suffering](#)' by Jeff Jordon

11/9 **Evaluating Stump's Defense**

Reading: 'Light in Darkness? Reflections on Eleonore Stump's Theodicy' by William Hasker (my.gcc)

Critical Reading Response 4 due 11/9

11/14 **Alternative Responses to the Problem of Suffering**

Reading: 'Supralapsarianism, or O Felix Culpa' by Alvin Plantinga (my.gcc)

11/16 **Alternative Responses to the Problem of Suffering** (cont.)

Reading: '[The Inductive Problem of Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition](#)' by William Alston

11/20-11/24 **Thanksgiving Break**

TILL WE HAVE FACES

11/28-12/5

Reading: *Till We Have Faces* (finish entire book by 11/28 lecture)

Critical Reading Response 5 due 11/28

12/7 **No Class: I will be away at Moral Responsibility Workshop at the University of Arizona**

12/12 **Final Reflections**

Paper Due 12/12

12/14 **Study Day**

Final Exam Friday December 15, 7pm