

Theodicy and Early Modern Theology: The emergence of the historically concrete
Instructor: Ephraim Radner, Wycliffe College
Level: 5000

This seminar course reflects on the emergence of one of the key elements of modern thinking, that is, the focus upon the historically concrete. In theology, this was linked to questions about God’s providence, evil, and suffering that took on a specific profile by the end of the 16th century in Western Europe, in the face of actual events and experiences. Having looked at treatments of these elements in the early and medieval church, and on challenges from the 16th century, we concentrate on the 17th and 18th century, first looking at discussions of violence, then natural history, and finally circling around the debate over “theodicy” as Leibniz articulated it, and critiques of his scheme by Voltaire and others. The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 proved a key event crystalizing concerns. After a brief foray into Jewish Hasidism, we end with a contemporary reflection on theology’s responsibility to “theodical” challenges. The readings deal with both “natural” and “human-caused” evil, and will try to root discussions in aspects of the historical context of the writers studied.

Target students: Those interested in the history of Western theology, especially in its transition into modernity; those seeking to gain an understanding of the intellectual context in which many contemporary ethical concerns about suffering and evil arose; those interested in how key thinkers in the Christian and early modern philosophical tradition engaged questions of historical life.

Goal: to engage in a wide-ranging study of Scriptural interpretation, as rooted in its Christian ecclesial context; readings and discussions will cover some key writers as well as biblical texts (Psalms and Revelation)

Course Outcomes:

COURSE OUTCOMES	COURSE ELEMENT	PROGRAM OUTCOMES
<i>By the end of the course, students will be able to</i>	<i>This outcome will be demonstrated through these course elements</i>	<i>This course outcome corresponds to these aspects of Wycliffe’s statement of outcomes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe key elements of the “theology of history” that have informed classic Christian understandings of human existence, as well as with their standard critiques that informed modern 	Written overviews of readings, presentations, class discussion	PhD: 1.1; 2 (M.Div/MTS: 1.1; 1.2; 1.3)

rejections of classical Christian theism.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze ways in which theological arguments have shaped and been shaped by the human and social experience of suffering and evil. 	Written assignments on reading and discussion	PhD: 1.1; 2; 5 (M.Div/MTS: 1.1-5; 2:1,2 [MTS: 2.3])
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articulate a personal theological vision about these matters that is responsible to these classical and modern arguments 	Discussion and Final Paper	PhD: 1.1; 2 (M.Div/MTS: 1.1-5; 2:1,2 [MTS: 2.3])
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply this knowledge by closely analyzing a particular early modern theological text on the topic of theodicy. 	Final paper.	PhD: 1.1; 2; 5; 6 (M.Div/MTS: 1.1-5; 2:1,2 [MTS: 2.3])

Requirements: critical reading precis (15%), presentations (done in pairs, 2x -- 25%), discussions (20%), and a final research paper (40%).

Course syllabus by topic and day (out of 8):

Day 1

1. *The Early Church*

Lactantius *On the anger of God* (online)

Salvian, *Of the Government of God*, Book V. (online)

Augustine, *City of God*, Bks 1, 3-4; 9; 20-2; *Against Two Letters of Pelagians* Book II. (online)

2. *Classic Thomism*

Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, (Oxford University Press, 2011) – online at UoT

Day 2

3. *New encounters*

Fernando Cervantes, “The Idea of the Devil and the Problem of the Indian in the case of Mexico in the 16th century” (Institute of Latin American Studies, Research Papers, 24 (London: 1991), online.

B. de las Casas *A short account of the Destruction of the Indies* (New York: Penguin, 1992; or the 1652 translation of John Philips, online at UoT).

J. de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* – edited by Jane E. Mangan ; with an introduction and commentary by Walter D. Mignolo ; translated by Frances M. López-Morillas.selections (pdf.). Or online 19th c. version.

Agrippa d’Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, selections in English (trans. Jesse Zeldin), online.

Day 3

4. Religious and political struggle

Milton, *Samson Agonistes* (online: Dartmouth College Milton Reading Room)

Anne Conway’s *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Edited by Allison P. Coudert and Taylor Corse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1996. (online, UoT)

Day 4

5. The mysterious natural world

Thomas Burnet, *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684-90; London, 1759) – online (UoT); Bk. I:12; Bk. II: 1-3, 6, 10-11; Bk. III. 1. 12; Bk. IV:1,9,10.

John Woodward, *An Essay Towards a Natural History of the Earth* (1702) – online (Uot); Parts I, II, and VI.

Day 5

6. Moral repugnance

Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, articles on “Manichéens” and “Pauliciens”, in Pierre Bayle, 1734 (2nd ed.), *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr Peter Bayle*, trans. P. Desmaizeaux, London: Knapton *et al.* – online (UoT)

Day 6

7. The great claim

G.W. Leibniz’s Theodicy, Edited by E.M. Huggard (Chicago, IL: Open Court), 1990.

8. Sceptical sail-trimming and reaction

Pope, *Essay on Man* (online)

Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (online)

Day 7

9. *The Lisbon earthquake of 1755*

Luis A. Mendez-Victor et al. (eds.), *The 1755 Lisbon Earthquake: Revisited* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), cc. 1-9 on historical background (online)

Voltaire, *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* (1756), McCabe Translation, online.

Candide (trans. Burton Raffel, Yale U. Press, 2005): online, UofT.

B. Stillingfleet, "Some thoughts occasioned by the late earthquake", 1750; online U.oT.

Anonymous, "A Poem on the Late Earthquake in Lisbon" (1755) – online.

10. *Reacting to reaction*

Rousseau, *Lettre à Monsieur de Voltaire* (online)

Theodore Braun and John B. Radner (eds.), *The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755: Representations and Reactions* (Oxford: Voltaire Fdn, 2005). pdf.

John Wesley, "Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Earthquake at Lisbon" (London: 1756), online.

Day 8

11. *18th-century Jewish Hasidism and beyond*

Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, at

http://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/6237/jewish/Lessons-in-Tanya.htm

The holy fire : the teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto
Nehemia Polen. Northvale, N.J. : J. Aronson, c1994 (pdf selections)

Susan Nieman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), chapters 1, 2, and opening of 3 (Lisbon). – recommended review

12. *A contemporary reflection on theology and theodicy*

Peter Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

Some Recommended Readings (not required):

Elmar J. Kremer and Michael J. Latzer (eds), *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy* (Toronto/Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto, 2001), online.

R. R. Dynes, "The Dialogue between Voltaire and Rousseau on the Lisbon Earthquake: The Emergence of a Social Science View", *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*

18:1 (2000), pp. 97-115.

Rita Goldberg, "Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Lisbon Earthquake," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 13 (1989): 1-20.

Example of our focus: Is this poem a case of theological irony?

Theodicy

By Czeslaw Milosz

Translated By Czeslaw Milosz And Robert Hass

No, it won't do, my sweet theologians.
Desire will not save the morality of God.
If he created beings able to choose between good and evil,
And they chose, and the world lies in iniquity,
Nevertheless, there is pain, and the undeserved torture of creatures,
Which would find its explanation only by assuming
The existence of an archetypal Paradise
And a pre-human downfall so grave
That the world of matter received its shape from diabolic power.

Czeslaw Milosz, "Theodicy" from The Collected Poems: 1931-1987. Copyright © 1988 by Czeslaw Milosz Royalties, Inc. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.