

Religion, Vulnerability, Resilience and the Enhancement of Life

Instructor:

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In addition to teaching at Meadville Lombard, Dr. Hogue has taught at DePaul University, Loyola University, St. Xavier University, and the University of Chicago. He has served as President of the American Theological Society (Midwest) and is currently the Vice President of the Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought. He is the Editor of the *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* and is on the Editorial Boards of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* and *Religion, Science and Culture*. He has published articles and books in the areas of religious and environmental ethics and American philosophy of religion. Dr. Hogue's current writing project develops a political theology of American immanence. He is currently a fellow with the [Enhancing Life Project](#).

I. OVERVIEW

We live in a globalizing world of increasingly complex and entangled systems—human and nonhuman, planetary and political, individual and institutional. With this context in mind, this course uses the transdisciplinary theoretical discourses of vulnerability and resilience to engage questions related to the enhancement of multiple levels and contexts of life.

The course is guided by two interrelated claims. The first is that theories of resilience and vulnerability provide a subtle hermeneutical framework through which to interpret the perils and possibilities of contemporary life. The second is that the application of this framework to individual, communal, and institutional contexts of life can enhance our capacity to live creatively in a complex world.

By using case studies, readings, lectures, discussions, and group work, the course will interpret resilience and vulnerability in theoretical and applied perspectives as well as in religious and theological terms. Examining these concepts at individual, institutional, and systemic levels, we will explore topics related to moral and spiritual development and interpersonal relationships; organizational and institutional vulnerability and resilience; and the relevance of vulnerability and resilience as social justice and theopolitical categories.

While the enhancement of individual, communal, and systems levels life provides an integrative theme for the course, we will not assume that the moral valences of vulnerability and resilience are fixed. In other words, we will question whether the recognition and integration of vulnerability at different levels of life can be morally enriching and politically empowering. For instance, is awareness of one's own and others' diverse forms of vulnerability integral to a flourishing personal life? To what degree, for instance, do religious traditions, texts, and spiritual practices attune us to our own and others vulnerabilities in morally positive ways. Conversely, we will explore the degree to which the resilience of some forms and contexts of life can be morally degrading and socially unjust. Questions such as these will therefore compel us to critically engage the correlations and contradictions between our evaluative normative

categories, including our moral concepts, and the analytic and descriptive normativity of vulnerability and resilience.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*Through readings and lectures, students will gain an introductory understanding of various theories of vulnerability and resilience and learn to critically apply those theories to the enhancement of individual, institutional and systemic contexts of life.

*Through case analyses and case development, students will learn how to correlate theories of vulnerability and resilience to practical questions of moral and spiritual development, organizational and institutional leadership, and systems theory and social analysis.

*Through readings, lectures and discussion, students will become acquainted with historical, comparative, and theological interpretations of vulnerability and resilience, and potential analogues, and acquire facility thinking across disciplinary frameworks and diverse forms of normative discourse, moral and scientific.

*Through textual study and small group dialogue, students will deepen their knowledge of other religious traditions and become acquainted with religious resources for thinking through questions of resilience and vulnerability.

III. EXPECTATIONS

Learning Strategies: This class combines seminar and workshop styles of teaching and learning. In addition to readings assigned in advance, it will include lectures, discussion, paired and small group learning, case studies, and student presentations.

Learning Resources: This course includes study texts, which provide theoretical background for our work, and religious texts, which we will use in relation to cases and theories. Many of the readings will be provided as PDFs and made available to students online.

Learning Deliverables: In addition to completing the reading in advance and participating in the class sessions, students will be expected to submit *a case study of approximately 3000 words (10-12 double spaced pages) as their final assignment*. Although this final assignment does not need to be submitted until the end of the term, we will be working on the case assignment throughout the class. With this in mind, ***students are expected to bring a draft of the narrative section of the case with them to the first day of class, as well as some ideas about religious resources relevant to the case.*** Some time each day will be given to students to integrate their learning into their cases. This case study should include four main parts (each containing approximately 750 words).

Case Narrative: The first part should provide a narrative description of some challenge (e.g. stress, change, trauma) in religious and community leadership. Preferably this challenge would be one about which the student has some intimate knowledge. The case could focus on any of the levels we're

working on in this class: individual/interpersonal, organizational/institutional, or systemic/structural. The case narrative should roundly describe a situation of stress, change, trauma, or some other kind of anticipated or actual change. For example, the case could explore how a particular community or organization is responding to environmental and social impacts related to climate change such as flooding, crop failure, or economic hardship caused by climate-induced natural disaster. The case could focus on how the community was unprepared for such an event and how it then adapted; it could focus on how a community is anticipating the likelihood of such an event and is planning to mitigate its most negative impacts; it could also focus on how the community is critically intervening within the larger political and economic systems that contribute to climate change.

Hypothesis and Theory: The second part should hypothesize how a theory of vulnerability and resilience explored in class relates to the case. After stating the hypothesis, the student should summarize the theory [and of course properly cite the scholarly literature (Chicago style; footnotes; author/title/publisher/date)]. The choice of theory should be relevant to the level of focus in the case. For instance, if the case has an individual focus, the theory should probably also be about individual vulnerability and resilience. However, it may be that the student would like to hypothesize that there are important ways that a systemically focused theory is relevant to a case focused on individuals or communities, or vice versa. Regardless of whether the case and theoretical levels match, the student's hypothesis should provide at least 2 reasons for exploring the selected theory in relation to the case summarized in the first section.

Hypothesis and Religious Text: The third part of the case parallels the second but summarizes a religious text, symbol or religious practice instead of a theory of resilience and vulnerability. The student should first articulate a hypothesis that provides at least 2 reasons for thinking the religious text, symbol or ritual practice is relevant to the case. Then the student should summarize the text, ritual, or practice. For example, let's say the case has to do with the death or illness of the religious leader in a religious community. The student then might choose to summarize a religious text, ritual, or practice related to mortality and death. For instance, the student might summarize "The Charnel Ground Contemplations" in the Buddha's discourse on "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness" [from the Satipaṭṭhana Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya / The Middle-length Discourses]. After summarizing the text and practice, the student would then reflect on how the ritual contemplation of death has or could support resilient communal responses to death and illness. For instance, the student might argue that familiarizing community members with their own and others' bodily vulnerability is conducive to the community's anticipation of and adaptive response to illness or death in the community.

Conclusion: In the fourth and concluding section of the case, the student would summarize the efficacy of theory and the religious text in relation to the case, and then suggest how the theory and the religious text (or ritual or event) could be useful for future cases of a similar kind.

IV. Grading

Since this course includes both seminar and workshop components, and incorporates case study, significant student participation is expected each day. With that in mind, 40% of your grade will be based on your case study (described above). Participation will account for the remaining 60% of your grade.

Grade/Assignment	A	B	C
Case Study (40%)	Students complete the Case Study assignment by addressing all four dimensions. The case narrative is grammatically sound and well written. The theory and theological (textual) sections are creatively coordinated, the hypotheses are justified and the analyses are insightful. The concluding discussion critically connects the previous sections and articulates the broader relevance of the case.	Students complete the Case Study assignment by addressing all four dimensions. The case narrative is grammatically and syntactically sound. The theory and theological (textual) sections are well coordinated and the hypotheses are justified. The concluding discussion clearly connects the previous sections and articulates the broader relevance of the case.	Students complete the Case Study assignment by addressing all four dimensions. The case narrative is poorly written and includes numerous grammatical errors and syntactical infelicities. The theory and theological (textual) sections are insufficiently connected and the hypotheses are missing or insufficiently justified. The concluding discussion is superficial.
Participation (60%)	Students are well prepared for class discussion and have read and critically engaged all course materials. They contribute regularly to discussion with thought provoking points and analysis that contributes to others learning. They treat colleagues and instructors with respect and maintain focus on the breadth of questions at hand.	Students are prepared for class discussion and have read all course materials. They contribute regularly to discussion with relevant points and analysis. They treat colleagues and instructors with respect and maintain focus on the specific questions at hand.	Students do not provide evidence that all materials have been read closely. They contribute regularly to discussion. They treat colleagues and instructors with respect.

V. Schedule of Topics and Bibliography

A. Day 1: Introduction and Orientation

- a. William E. Rees, "Thinking 'Resilience'," *The Post Carbon Reader*, Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, eds. (posted as PDF)
- b. Judith Rodin, *The Resilience Dividend*, 1-3
- c. David Chandler, "Resilience: Putting Life to Work," *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity* (posted as PDF)

- d. Peter A. Hall and Michèle Lamont, "Introduction: Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era," *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*, Hall and Lamont, eds. (posted as PDF)
- B. Day 2: Individual Vulnerability and Resilience
- a. Kenneth Pargament, "An Introduction to the Concept of Coping" and "The Flow of Coping," *The Psychology of Religion and Coping* (posted as PDF)
 - b. Brene Brown and Eric Greitens (readings to be provided in class)
 - c. Martha Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* (2008) 20:1
<http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1277&context=yjlf>
 - d. Leanne S. Son Hing, "Stigmatization, Neoliberalism, and Resilience," *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*, Peter A. Hall and Michèle Lamont, eds. (posted as PDF)
- C. Day 3: Institutional and Organizational Vulnerability and Resilience
- a. Post Carbon Institute, "Six Foundations for Building Community Resilience" (posted as PDF)
 - b. Judith Rodin, *The Resilience Dividend*, Chs. 9-11
 - c. Peter Senge, selections from *The Fifth Discipline* (posted as PDF)
 - d. Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas, "Crucibles of Leadership," *From Geeks to Geezers* (posted as PDF)
- D. Day 4: Systemic Vulnerability and Resilience
- a. Judith Butler, "Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitional Politics," *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (posted as PDF)
 - b. Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, and Politics," *Precarious Life* (posted as PDF)
 - c. William E. Connolly, "Steps Toward an Ecology of Late Capitalism," *The Fragility of Things* (posted as PDF)
 - d. Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*
 - e. Thomas Homer-Dixon, "Tectonic Stresses" and "Catagenesis," *The Upside of Down* (posted as PDF)
 - f. Thomas Homer-Dixon, "Our Panarchic Future,"
<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/6008>
 - g. C. S. Holling, "Understanding the Complexity of Economic, Ecological, and Social Systems," *Ecosystems* (2001) 4: 390-405 (posted as PDF)
- E. Day 5: Critiquing and Assessing of Vulnerability and Resilience
- a. Judith Rodin, *The Resilience Dividend*, Ch. 12
 - b. Melinda Cooper and Jeremy Walker, "Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation," *Security Dialogue* (2011) 14:2 (posted as PDF)
 - c. Wanda Vrsti and Nicholas Michelsen, "Resilience and Solidarity: A Forum,"
<https://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/01/07/solidarity-and-resilience-a-forum/#more-9497>

- d. Rhys Kelly and Ute Kelly, "Why We're Not Ditching Resilience Yet," <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/01/09/why-were-not-ditching-resilience-yet/>
- e. Dozios, Langlois, and Blanchet-Cohen, *A Practitioner's Guide to Developmental Evaluation* (2010). Read introductory pages 10-15 and "How" chapter, pages 25-52. (posted as PDF)
- f. Kien Lee, *Ensuring a Cross-Culturally Competent Evaluation* (2009). Report prepared for The Colorado Trust. Read Introduction p.4-6 and select one of the four case scenarios. (posted as PDF)
- g. Recommended resource: University of Wisconsin, *Facilitator Toolkit: A Guide for Helping Groups Get Results* (2007), pp. 1 – 41. (posted as PDF). Especially pages 7-17.