



UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Core Curriculum

Faith, Reason, and Revelation

PARTNER DEBATES

Corey Stephan, Ph.D. ~ Fall 2022

Directions are being drafted during this semester. For clarifications, please write to Dr. Stephan.

Each student will be in a partnership to produce a debate about 1 aspect of traditional Christian belief, specifically one in which there is an apparent clash between faith and reason.

I expect that each pair will choose a sub-topic within one theme from the class, most likely Unit 2: Apparent Clashes Between Faith and Reason. For example, a pair might elect to choose the Problem of Evil as its theme with St. Irenaeus's soul-making theodicy as its special sub-topic. Using the assigned reading from Irenaeus, one member of the pair would argue in favor of the position that Irenaeus takes in that excerpt, whereas the other member of the pair would argue against it.

Each debate should fit the following parameters:

- Full video recording showing each partner's name and face
- 10 minutes in duration (7 minutes minimum, 10 minutes maximum)
- Approximately 1 minute opening statement from each side (including a clear introduction, that is, "My name is So-and-So, and I will be arguing such-and-such"), 3-9 minutes of back-and-forth, and 1 minute closing statement from each side

- New thread in the "Debates & Discussions" forum in Blackboard (that is, 1 new thread per 1 debate)

To fit these parameters, I highly recommend that partners work together before the time of recording to script your debates. Using a shared document writing platform to which you already have access is a good idea.

We live in a twenty-first century American context in which even high-ranking elected officials who ought to conduct themselves with the loftiest honor refuse to address each other with a bare minimum of courtesy, such as by saying "Mr. President," "Madam Secretary," "Senator," etc., and far be it from such persons to address each other with genuine respect. Yet, at the University of St. Thomas, we take pride in maintaining a culture of deep civility. One of my main purposes in requiring these partner debates is to foster in our freshmen and sophomores a spirit of civility that you will take with you throughout your lives -- an ability to debate with a smile rather than disparage with a scowl. To that end, each partner is expected to refer to his/her adversary by his/her formal title, that is, "Mr. / Miss So-and-So," as well as "Sir / Ma'am."

After uploading the debate, partners should work together to provide critical feedback to **3 other pairs' debates in their own respective threads**. To be graded properly, you must sign *both* of your names to each response that you write. Each response must contain:

- 1 tangible point of praise for something argued (e.g. "The person who argued for A was right about B because of X and Y.")
- 1 point of critical feedback about something argued (e.g. "The point that each of you made about X contradicts points Y and Z that we have encountered elsewhere in class, specifically in...")
- 1 question for the original pair to consider, to which the original pair may choose to respond

Pairs will be graded **together** for *both* your prepared debate recordings *and* your joint responses to 3 other pairs. My target is that the original debate be worth 20% of the class grade and the responses be worth 5% with entirely separate gradebook categories, but the practical realities involved in using the Blackboard gradebook may require me, for example, to grade everything together as one 25% set.

You will be graded chiefly for two categories: 1. Engagement with class materials 2. Effectiveness of teamwork

You will *not* be graded for argumentative merits (e.g. *Does Dr. Stephan agree?*). What matters is that you are *working together to consider the materials of the class in a deeper manner than you would be able to do without preparing a formal debate*.