

# Evil

Spring 2014  
TTh 1:30 – 2:50 p.m.  
50:730:333:01 and  
50:840:333:01  
Classroom: Atg. 101

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course examines the nature and meaning of evil, particularly moral evil as visited upon human beings by one another. Through close readings and discussions of a range of philosophical, religious, literary, and political texts, the course asks the following kinds of questions: Is there such a thing as “evil”? Why might humanity be capable of it? Is evil a characteristic of only some or of all? How is it experienced differently by its perpetrators and its victims? What kind of language could make evil available to understanding? Is evil in the world compatible with the existence of a good God? How can one judge the difference between evil and good? Is the concept of evil outdated, or can it help in understanding phenomena today such as terrorism, genocide, sexism, racism, greed, injustice, climate change, and poverty?

This course fulfills the General Education requirement in Ethics and Values, as it asks students to interpret significant systems of value across history and today, analyze ethical assumptions, make applications to practical situations, and formulate and communicate effective arguments.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

The following are all required for the course and can be purchased either at the Rutgers bookstore, other new or used bookstores, or online. Except for the Bible, please get the exact translation or edition listed below.

1. *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (New Revised Standard Version) or another version of the Bible.
2. Sophocles, *Antigone*, translated by David Grene, in *Sophocles I*, Second Edition (The University of Chicago Press, 1991).
3. *The Bhagavad-Gita*, translated by Barbara Stoler Miller (Bantam Books, 1986).
4. Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Penguin Books, 1961).
5. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Revised and Enlarged Edition (Penguin Books, 1994).
6. Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* (Routledge, 2003).

## COURSE SAKAI WEBSITE

The course Sakai website will be used for various purposes, including handing in papers. To access the site, go to [sakai.rutgers.edu](http://sakai.rutgers.edu), log in using your Rutgers user id (the first part of your Rutgers email address) and password, and click on the tab “Evil - Spring 2014.”

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

1. *Class Participation.* Because the purpose of this course is to help you think more critically about evil, class participation is a major portion of your grade. Class time is your opportunity to try out ideas, practice responding to the ideas of others, and advance the discussion. Class participation is graded on a combination of (1) frequency of class attendance, (2) frequency of class contributions, and (3) quality of those contributions. You will receive a poor grade for participation if at any time you are disruptive to the class (for example, putting down someone else's point of view, or repeatedly arriving late). Class absences can be excused in the case of an emergency, provided you inform the instructor.
2. *Reading Questions.* Each student is required to bring a reading question to two Tuesday class meetings over the semester. A reading question is some issue from the readings for that day to which you would like to know the answer and about which there could be reasonable disagreement. Reading questions are not handed in. They are posed orally by students during class, and then discussed by the other students and the professor. Students who fail to raise two reading questions will have their Class Participation grade lowered by one full letter (for example, from A to B).
3. *Small Group Discussions.* During most Thursday meetings, we will break into small groups during class time for about half an hour to examine a concrete contemporary issue related to the readings for that week. You are responsible during one Thursday of the semester for (1) leading a small group of classmates in discussion, and (2) making a short, informal presentation to the class of your group's findings. You are *not* graded for this. However, if you fail to lead a group, your grade for the course as a whole will be reduced by one full letter (for example, from A to B).
4. *Papers.* There is one 4-5 page midterm paper and one 8-10 page final paper. Their relative values for the course grade are listed below. Papers will be handed in on the course Sakai web site (see instructions above). Cheating and plagiarism are most definitely evil and will result in an F for the course and possible disciplinary action by the University.

## GRADING

*Criteria for final course grades are as follows:*

- A (90 points or higher): outstanding
- B+ (85 points) or B (80 points): good
- C+ (75 points) or C (70 points): satisfactory
- D (60 points) or F (< 60 points): poor or failing

*The final course grade is based on the following:*

- Class participation: 25 points
- Midterm paper: 25 points
- Final paper: 50 points

## SCHEDULE

*Please complete all readings before class*

### INTRODUCTION

- Tu 1/21 Introduction to the course.  
Th 1/23 Video: "Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero" (no reading).

### I. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES: EVIL AS PRIMORDIAL

- Tu 1/28 Genesis 1:1 – 3:24 (i.e. chapter 1, verse 1 to chapter 3, verse 24).  
Th 1/30 Small group discussion: Does Genesis shed any light on the evil of 9/11?  
  
Tu 2/4 Job 1:1 – 10:22, 20:1 – 21:34, and 32:1 – 42:17.  
Th 2/6 Small group discussion: Does Job help explain what is evil about the clergy sex abuse scandal?

### II. AN ANCIENT GREEK PERSPECTIVE: EVIL AS BLINDNESS

- Tu 2/11 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 1 – 1001 (pp. 161 – 197).  
Th 2/13 No small groups. Video: "Antigone."  
  
Tu 2/18 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 1002 – end (pp. 197 – end).  
Th 2/20 Small group discussion: Does *Antigone* explain the evil of the financial crisis?

### III. A HINDU PERSPECTIVE: EVIL AS ATTACHMENT

- Tu 2/25 *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Introduction and Teachings 1 – 6 (pp. 1 – 13 and 21 – 69).  
Th 2/27 Small group discussion: Is there something evil about global warming?  
  
Tu 3/4 *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Teachings 9 – 12 and 15 – 18 (pp. 83 – 113 and 127 – 154).  
Th 3/6 No small groups. Discussion of midterm papers.

***Sunday 3/9 at 5:00 p.m.: Midterm papers due on Sakai.***

### IV. A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: EVIL AS PRIDE

- Tu 3/11 Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I – II (pp. 21 – 53).  
Th 3/13 Small group discussion: Are babies evil?

***Spring Break***

- Tu 3/25 Augustine, *Confessions*, Books V and VII – VIII (pp. 91 – 110 and 133 – 179).  
Th 3/27 Small group discussion of short in-class video “A Good Man in Hell” on the Rwandan genocide.

#### **V. A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE: EVIL AS BANALITY**

- Tu 4/1 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chapters I – III (pp. 3 – 55).  
Th 4/3 No small groups. Video of Eichmann’s trial.
- Tu 4/8 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, ch.s VII – VIII and XIV – XV (pp. 112 – 150 and 220 – 252).  
Th 4/10 Small group discussion: What was “evil” about the Nazi Holocaust?
- Tu 4/15 No readings. Preliminary discussion of final papers.

#### **VI. A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE: EVIL AS SCAPEGOATING**

- Th 4/17 Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*, Introduction and chapter 1 (pp. 1 – 43).  
Tu 4/22 Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*, chapters 3 and 5 (pp. 63 – 82 and 109 – 137).  
Th 4/24 Small group discussion: Is Kearney right about what was evil about 9/11?

#### **CONCLUSION**

- Tu 4/29 A look back. Discussion of final papers. (No reading or groups).  
Th 5/1 In-class exchange of final paper ideas.

***Sunday 5/11 at 5:00 p.m.: Final papers due on Sakai.***



**GOOD**