

Note: Last Updated on 4/19/14

45.351 Problem of Evil (GEN ED AHED)

Spring Semester 2014

TU TH 3:30pm-4:45pm

Professor Eric S. Nelson

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Spring Office Hours: T TH 11:45 am- 12:30, 2:00-3:15 pm, and by appointment

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DESCRIPTION

What is evil? Why is there evil and suffering in the world? How can humans respond to experiences of evil and suffering? This course will offer us the opportunity to consider various philosophical and religious explanations of evil and suffering that have arisen in the world and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Prerequisites for the course: None

Students for whom course is intended: All levels

Course Goals and Objectives

1. The goals of this course are to promote:

(a) Familiarity with a wide-range of positions and arguments concerning questions of evil and suffering, and

(b) Interdisciplinary and critical reasoning and reflection through considering a variety of cultural-historical, philosophical, and religious issues and approaches.

2. The objectives of this course are for students to develop their ability and skills in:

(a) **Interpreting** texts by accurately and fully describing concepts and arguments and placing them in their social-historical contexts

(b) **Reasoning** about ideas by (i) evaluating the content, structure, and strategies of philosophical and religious works, (ii) reflecting on their contexts by considering information and scholarship from the historical and social sciences, and (iii) applying concepts and arguments to contemporary issues and their own lives, and

(c) **Collaborating** with other students, and presenting and supporting their ideas in public through class participation.

Course Requirements

Students are required to: 1. Complete all assigned readings 2. Maintain regular attendance
3. Participate in class discussion 4. Complete all written assignments on-time

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Attendance and active participation: 25% of final grade.

Note that missing classes and not participating in class and group discussions will result in a lower final grade; attending and participating in classes will improve your final grade. There will be oral and written, individual and group, in-class assignments and take-home assignments based on the readings and class-discussion.

2. Three Exams: 75% of final grade.

Grading will be based on (1) knowing the texts and our class discussions and (2) being able to make your own arguments and interpretations.

All Required Texts are Available Online

SCHEDULE

I. The Moral Anthropological Question of Evil

1. Jan. 21, T: The Ring of Gyges - Introduction to the Course and the Question of Evil
Additional reading: Plato, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plato/rep/rep0201.htm>
2. Jan. 23, TH: Evil as Ignorance. Reading: Plato, *Meno* 77a-78b, <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus/cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=GreekFeb2011&getid=1&query=Pl.%20Men.%2077e>
3. Jan. 28, T: Evil as Weakness (incontinence). Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7. 1-10, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.7.vii.html>
4. Jan. 30, TH: Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XIII–XIV, <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-c.html#CHAPTERXIII>
5. Feb. 4, T: Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, Part one, http://www.constitution.org/jjr/ineq_03.htm or <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/rousseau/inequality/ch01.htm>
6. Feb. 6, TH: Is Human Nature good? Reading: Mengzi, <http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Mengzi3.pdf>
See also: <http://courses.umass.edu/pols294p/documents.html/mencius.pdf>
7. Feb. 11, T: "Human Nature is bad." Reading: Xunzi, <http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/~phalsall/texts/hsun-tse.html>
8. Feb. 13, TH: The "Four Seven Debate" in Korean Neo-Confucianism. Reading: <http://faculty.uml.edu/enelson/documents/FourSevenDebate.pdf> and <http://ctext.org/mengzi>
9. Feb. 18, T: **MONDAY CLASS SCHEDULE, NO CLASS**
10. Feb. 20, TH: **In-Class Exam 1!**

II. The Religious and Onto-Theological Question of Evil

11. Feb. 25, T: *The Book of Job*. Reading: *Job*, <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2701.htm>
12. Feb. 27, TH: **No class - video assignment. Judaism and the question of suffering. Dr. Avivah Zornberg, *Black Sun: Moses and Job*: <http://youtu.be/uOEZAXCnR-0>**
13. March 4, T: St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*: chapters 9-15, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm#C3
14. **March 6, TH: No class - video (and writing assignment on TU March 11):**
Leibniz and Malebranche on the problem of evil: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN8EV5yxcUQ>
Need to hear more? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2BYBVI Fs uE>
- 15-16. March 11 and 13, T and TH: The best of all possible worlds? Reading: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/leibniz1686d.pdf>
Additional Reading: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz-evil/> and <http://archive.org/stream/theodicy17147gut/17147.txt>

March 18 and March 20: Spring Break - NO CLASSES

- 17-18. March 25 and 27, T and TH: David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, parts 10 and 11;

19. April 1, T: In-Class Exam 2

III. Suffering and Evil

20. April 3, TH: The Buddha on Dukkha and the four noble truths. Read:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca1/index.html>

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca2/index.html>

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca3/index.html>

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca4/index.html>

21. April 8, T: The Buddha on kamma (karma). Read:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nanamoli/wheel248.html>

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/kamma.html>

22. Suffering, Karma, and Evil - A Korean Debate between Confucianism and Buddhism. Read:

Reading 1: Jeong Dojeon, sections 2 and 19, http://www.acmuller.net/jeong_gihwa/bulssijapbyeon.html

Reading 2: Gihwa, sections, 2, 10, and 16, http://www.acmuller.net/jeong_gihwa/hyeonjeongnon.html

23. April 15, T: Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Sufferings of the World*.

<http://www.graycadence.com/OntheSufferingoftheWorld.pdf>

24. April 17, TH and 25. April 22, T: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Part One,

<http://home.sandiego.edu/~janderso/360/genealogy1.htm>

26. April 24, TH: Hannah Arendt on the Banality of Evil.

Reading one, Judith Butler on "Hannah Arendt's challenge to Adolf Eichmann":

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/29/hannah-arendt-adolf-eichmann-banality-of-evil>

Reading two, Adam Kirsch and Rivka Galchen on the continuing controversy over Hannah Arendt's classic study of the nature of evil: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/books/review/fifty-years-later-why-does-eichmann-in-jerusalem-remain-contentious.html>

Documentary (disturbing): Hannah Arendt: Dialog with Evil, <http://vimeo.com/10017729>

Additional viewing: <http://www.dw.de/banality-of-evil-hannah-arendt-on-film/av-16475873>

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27. April 29, T: Reflections, conclusions, evaluations, and Take-Home Final / Exam 3 due before Midnight on turnitin.com on May 7.