

PHIL 2065G: EVIL
W 6-9 p.m.; Talbot College 303



Doré, Gustave. *Satan*. 1890. Engraving. *Divine Comedy*.
By Dante Alighieri. New York: Cassell Publishing Company.

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Office hours: 4:30-5:30 p.m., Quotes Café (Weldon Library)

Course Description:

The Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the events of 9/11, the actions of serial killers such as Ted Bundy. Many have used the term ‘evil’ to describe these events and their perpetrators, suggesting that we can’t capture the seriousness of these harms merely by calling them ‘very bad’ or ‘very wrong.’ Rather, we need the concept of evil to emphasize the severity of their badness and wrongness. But what is evil? What distinguishes it from ordinary wrongs? Is evil a kind of chaos and disorder, a privation of goodness, or even a lack of originality? Can evil be done only by humans, or are animals and natural forces capable of evil as well? What makes a person evil, and what is the relationship between evil actions and evil characters? Are some evils forgivable, while others are not? Is evil a useful moral concept or is it an outdated one that should give way to other forms of analysis?

This course explore evil as a philosophical concept, drawing on a rich array of historical, theological, literary, dramatic, and psychological literature. We will begin by considering the question “what is evil?” and then trace the rich and complex history of the concept through Western thought beginning with the Egyptians. We will then explore varieties of evil, including wickedness, sin, cruelty, vice, aggression, and malevolence. We will then turn to the metaphysics of evil, and the ‘problem of evil’ in particular, as well as possible solutions to it. The course will conclude with a look at the political and criminal dimensions of evil. Throughout the course, we will consider evil from the perspective of both the perpetrator (the evil-doer) and the victim (the sufferer).

Course objectives:

This course has two main objectives. The first is to give students the historical background needed to understand how evil developed as a concept over time, and how the concept operates in different domains: theological, literary, political, etc.

The second is to help students to think critically about evil as a philosophical concept, encouraging them to develop their own reasoned analyses of the concept, and expressing those thoughts concisely and clearly orally and in writing.

Course Prerequisites and Antirequisites:

None. Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor during the first week of classes.

Texts

The following text is required and is available at the UWO Bookstore:

Oksenberg Rorty, Amélie, ed. *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Additional required and suggested readings can be found on the course Owl site under “Resources.”

Course Requirements:

1. **Two short papers** (25% each): 900 words each (including notes, bibliography and title page); one due after reading week and one due closer to the end of the course. (See reading list for due dates.) The late penalty is 3% per day (weekends to count for 5%).
2. **Final exam** (30%): Cumulative exam, consisting of short and long essay questions, to be held during the final exam period.
3. **10 short (10 minute) ‘quizzes’** to be held at the beginning of each class (20% in total): Quizzes will assume knowledge of the required readings for the class during which they are held and will be reflective. For example, a question might be “Do you find Arendt’s view of evil to be compelling? Why or why not?”

Accommodation for Medical Illness:

Students should make themselves aware of the university’s Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>). Medical

documentation is required for papers submitted more than one week past the due date and for missed exams. Such documentation must be submitted directly to your home Faculty Dean's office. The Dean's office will determine if accommodation is warranted.

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices:

Studies consistently show that the availability of a mobile phone and/or Internet connection during class is disruptive to a student's ability to concentrate and negatively effects grades by as much as two letter grades (changing a potential 'A' to a 'C,' for example). Also, using these devices can be distracting to others, constituting a form of harm to others in the classroom.

For this reason, the use of electronic devices such as laptops, mobile phones, I pads, etc. is discouraged but not prohibited. ***PowerPoint slides, and review/summary notes will not be made available and so students are strongly encouraged to take a good set of notes.***

Policy on Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Support Services:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options.

1. Statement on Use of Plagiarism Software:

Turnitin.com: It is the policy of the Department of Philosophy that all written work for this course must be submitted through Turnitin.com on Owl. As such, essays must be submitted electronically to Turnitin.com via the Owl course site. Hard copies will not be accepted. Essays will be returned electronically, with an electronic set of comments using the "Track Changes" function in Word. All references must be in APA or MLA style.

Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Additional Links:

Students may also find useful information on the following sites:

Registrarial Services (<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>)

Student Support Services (<http://westernusc.ca/services/>)