



**FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

**PHIL 399.7 L01 - Topics in Philosophy: “EVIL”
Summer, 2017**

Course Outline

Instructor: Ron Wilburn, Ph.D. (Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania)

Office Hours: For this online course there are no set office hours as such. But I will respond to any emailed inquiries or concerns within 24 hours of receiving them. Send queries to my address via the D2L email function. Moreover, I can arrange Skype sessions on request.

Course Description

“Evil,” has only been reprised as a serious topic for investigation by English-speaking philosophers (as well as scientists, journalists, political theorists and others) since the middle of the Twentieth Century. To a large degree, this was due to the Holocaust, which, despite not being the first genocide in modern times, was arguably the most ruthless, systematic and technological. People in the Western world felt overwhelmed by the Holocaust and other criminal events largely because they assumed that such heinous occurrences belonged to a bygone age, and that the social and psychological forces which had made them possible in the past had succumbed to the civilizing influence of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. The last major crusade against Muslims had occurred in 1272; the last major religious war in Europe had concluded in 1648; the last European executions of convicted witches had been in the 18th century. “Evil” seemed like a dead concept to many, a thoroughly superstitious concept whose time had come and gone. But since heinous acts on a mass scale didn’t stop in the 20th Century, people felt obliged to ask, “what the hell?” To call genocide or ethnic cleansing, or even senseless serial killing, merely “bad” or “very bad” or even “wicked” did not seem enough to many folks. Thus, they came to wonder if the category of “evil” still has some role to play in our descriptions of life and experience.

In this course, we will address a number of questions which have arisen, often repeatedly, during humanity’s efforts to figure out the role and character of “evil” in our moral discourse. Our approach will be historical, as we look at literary, religious and philosophical texts ranging from the 10th Century B.C. Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh to the mid-Twentieth Century works of Hannah Arendt. In between we will look at the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, works by Plato, Aristotle, Irenaeus, Plotinus, Augustine, Anselm, Dante and Milton, Kant and Arendt. The questions we will address will include the most perennial ones which people ask.

Our recurrent concern will be with two main questions:

1. **What** does the notion of “evil” amount to? Is there a single, univocal concept of “evil” in any case?
2. **Why** does evil occur? Or, more accurately, what do people have in mind when they ask “Why is there evil?”

Texts

Every single text I will be using in this class is in the public domain, and thus available online (and sometimes in the Readings folder available on the course content folder for this class).

Also, there will be various films I will suggest (but not require) that you look at from time to time. These are all available through free websites.

Course Requirements and Grading

The grading will be modular, not comprehensive (e.g., exam #2 will deal only with material covered since exam #1).

1. Three (3) essay exams, collectively worth 75% of the course grade. They will be paper assignments. However, they will be formatted in a way that allows you to submit them through the D2L test function. Each exam will require a set of responses *collectively* amounting to the equivalent of 10-12 pages of text (1 inch on all sides, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced).
2. Twenty discussion assignments, collectively worth 25% of the course grade.

Note that these discussion assignments consist of two parts:

- (a) For simply responding to each discussion question with an original thread of your own, you will receive four **(4) points** (if I judge your response to be reasonably sincere and reflective, which is to say no snow jobs and no bullshit). Each such question requires a response a couple of paragraphs long (or one very substantive paragraph). However, I leave paragraph length up to your own judgment. These are due at the very end of the academic week for which they are assigned. For instance, the Discussion Assignment #1 is assigned on Tuesday, July 4; thus it is due on Sunday, July 9 at 11:59 pm.
- (b) Reflective response commentary on at least two discussion entries by other students (or a single other student). This is a requirement for receiving full credit for your discussion assignments. These commentaries are each worth additional two **(2) points apiece**. These are also due at the very end of the academic week for which they are assigned.

So, in total, you can receive up to eight **(8) points** per discussion assignment.

Our grading scale, with appropriate plus/minus distinctions, will be a standard one (with appropriate plusses and minuses):

University of Calgary Academic Calendar F.1.1 Undergraduate Grading System:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-1-1.html>

Course Organization and Lesson Plan

The schedule below is organized around a simple organizational scheme. For each block of material, you are asked to

- 1) Read the assigned material (if any is assigned).
- 2) Think about and answer the correlated discussion assignment questions.

You can find these assignments and submit your responses through the discussion folder linked to the course desktop. These responses will be visible to me and all of your classmates. What I am looking for in the case of each of your submissions is a reasonable and honest effort which has been informed by the reading(s). That is, don't simply give me your opinions. Give me the considered and sincere opinions you form after doing the pertinent readings, and reviewing the pertinent lectures

- 4) Listen to and look at the correlated narrated PowerPoint lecture presentation.
- 5) Comment on each other's discussion assignment entries for that block.

Needless to say, I don't expect you to comment on all of the posted submissions, as this would take years and cost millions of lives. But I would like to see at least two commentary entries from each of you in connection with each discussion assignment. As much as anything else, my concern in this course is to encourage focused discussion of the issues we are dealing with. Thus, I take this commentary component seriously, and may occasionally send entries of my own (anonymously) to stir up discussion. To repeat once again, your submission of these commentary entries factors into your own discussion assignment grade. That is, you cannot receive full credit for your own discussion assignment submissions if you do not comment on at least two submissions by another student (or students), at which point I will rescore your submission.

Once you have submitted a given discussion assignment, look at the set of so-called "suggested responses" to these discussion questions located on your desktop. There will also be "suggested responses" provided for your exam questions once you have submitted the appropriate exam and I have graded it. For the most part, these "suggested responses" are not offered as sole possible or "correct" responses. They are intended, rather, to give you a sense of the sort of things I am looking for. They are intended to show you what an adequate answer looks like.

Agenda:

Week I (July 4 – July 9)

#1: Introduction

#2 The Near Eastern Combat Myth

- a) The Enuma Elish
- b) The Epic of Gilgamesh

Week II (July 10 – July 16)

#3 Plato on Evil as Ignorance

- a) The Metaphysical Background

- b) The Goodness in our Stars
- c) The Evil in our Souls

#4 The Hebrew Testament on Evil as Competition with God

- a) The Fall
- b) Cain and Abel
- c) The Tower of Babel

By this point, you need to take Exam #1 after having submitted Discussion threads #1 through #6. Exam #1 covers all the material in the course from Block I through Block III. Deadline for submission is July 16 at 11:59 p.m.

Week III – Week V (July 17 – July 30)

#5 Aristotle on Evil as Social Maladjustment

- a) The Metaphysical Background
- b) Evil as Opposed to Eudaimonia

#6 Evil in Early Christianity

- a) The Book of Revelation

Exam #2 covers all the material in the course from Block IV through Block V. You should take it after you have completed all this material and submitted an original thread for Discussion Assignment #9. Deadline for submission is July 30 at 11:59 p.m.

Week IV – Week V (July 30 – August 6)

#7 Medieval Evil

- a) Irenaeus
- b) Plotinus
- c) Augustine
- d) Anselm

Week VI (August 7 – August 13)

#8 Kantian Evil as Radical Selfishness

Week VI (August 14 – August 20)

#9 Totalitarian Evil

#10 Conclusions

Exam #3 covers all the material in the course from Block VII through Block X. You should take it after you have completed all this material and submitted an original thread for Discussion Assignment #15. Deadline for submission is August 21 at 11:59 p.m.

Final Deadline for all Work

All work must be submitted to me by Aug 21, 2017, at 11:59 p.m. No extensions, no exceptions.

IMPORTANT DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

Academic Honesty

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment, an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw from the University. See the relevant sections on 'Academic Misconduct' in the current University Calendar. Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about correct referencing, consult your instructor.

Academic Accommodation

The student accommodation policy can be found at: ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy.

Students needing an Accommodation because of a disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.

Students needing an Accommodation based on a Protected Ground other than Disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to their instructor.

D2L Help

Desire2Learn is UCalgary's online learning management system. Important information and communications about this course may be posted on D2L. Go to <https://ucalgary.service-now.com/it> for help.

General Academic Concerns and Program Planning

Have a question but not sure where to start? The Arts Students Centre is your information resource for everything in the Faculty of Arts. Drop in at SS102, call 403-220-3580, or email ascarts@ucalgary.ca. Advisors in the ASC can also provide assistance and advice in planning your program through to graduation. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate> for detailed information on common academic concerns

Advice on Philosophy Courses

You may find answers to your more specific questions about a philosophy degree on the Department of Philosophy's website <http://phil.ucalgary.ca>, or contact one of Philosophy's Undergraduate Advisors. Jeremy Fantl (jfantl@ucalgary.ca), Reid Buchanan (buchanan@ucalgary.ca), Megan Delehanty (mdelehan@ucalgary.ca).

Registration Overload/Prereq Waivers

If you are seeking to register in a Philosophy course that is full or to get permission to waive the prereqs for a course, email the Department Manager, Tram Nguyen (tram.nguyen1@ucalgary.ca). Include the specific course information and your UCID number in your request.

Writing

This course will include written assignments. Faculty policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented. Students are also encouraged to use Writing Support Services and other Student Success Centre Services, located on the 3rd floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library. Writing Support Services assist with a variety of assignments, from essays to lab reports. Students can book 30-minute one-on-one appointments online, sign up for 15- minute drop-in appointments, and register for a variety of writing workshops. For more information on this and other Student Success Centre services, please visit www.ucalgary.ca/ssc.

Protection of Privacy

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act. The Department of Philosophy ensures the student's right to privacy by requiring all graded assignments be returned to the student directly from the instructor or teaching assistant.

Internet and Electronic Communication Devices

The instructor reserves the right to establish course policies regarding the use of devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartbooks. If allowed, these devices must be used exclusively for instructional purposes and must not cause disruption to the instructor or to fellow students. Cell phones and paging devices should be set to silent mode during lectures. Audio or video recording of lectures is not permitted without the written permission of the instructor. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy

Emergency Evacuation:

In case of an emergency evacuation during class, students must gather at the designated assembly point nearest to the classroom. The list of assembly points is found at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints> . Please check this website and note the nearest assembly point for this course.

Other Helpful Contacts

- Safewalk and Campus Security: 403-220-5333.
- Faculty of Arts Student Representatives: 403-220-6552, arts1@su.ucalgary.ca , arts2@su.ucalgary.ca, arts3@su.ucalgary.ca, arts4@su.ucalgary.ca .
- Student Ombudsman: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>