

## Philosophy 190: Evil and Evil People

Winter 2011—TR 11:30-12:50

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Brown Hall 350

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x 4302

Office Hours: M 6-7:00 and TR 1:15-2:15

### Course Description:

This course is dedicated to trying to answer the enduring question: “Are there evil people?” and getting the answer right requires thinking rather hard about just what evil people are like. And much depends on that answer. Given some answers to the question, evil people abound or at least rather many more of us are capable of doing terrible, horrible things than we would be willing to admit; given other answers to the question, evil people just aren’t to be found. More importantly, if we are interested in doing something about the prevalence of evil in the world, we had better get clearer about just what it is that we are talking about.

This course is supported by a generous grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities via the “Enduring Questions” grant program. One requirement of the course is that it be “pre-disciplinary”—that is, even though the course is being taught and housed in the philosophy department, the course requires no prior philosophical training and is accessible to all students, regardless of major or program of study. The course is a balance of work in philosophy, literature, and psychology as reflected in the assigned readings.

### Texts:

Four texts have been ordered for the course:

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann and the Holocaust* (ISBN# 0-14-303760-9)

Colin McGinn, *Evil, Ethics, Fiction* (ISBN# 0-19-823877-0)

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and the Piazza Tales* (1-593-08253-3)

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (ISBN# 0-375-75151-3)

The instructor will also frequently place required readings (marked with a \*) on the course Vspace site, and students will be expected to have read prior to class. The instructor will also make lecture handouts available prior to class that students may print and use.

### Grades and Course Requirements:

A student's grade will be composed from points earned on four different sorts of assignments: a term paper, "squibs," in-class quizzes, and the completion of a "journal" recording the completion of weekly assignments. No official record of attendance or participation is kept, but good attendance and participation are noticed. The following represents how various assignments will be weighted.

Term Paper:	45 % of overall grade
Squibs:	30% of overall grade
Cumulative % of points earned on quizzes:	15% of overall grade
Journal Assignments:	10% of overall grade
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Final Grade:	100%

The term paper will be formally assigned later in the semester. The instructor will supply topics and instructions as appropriate.

Squibs are short papers, roughly between 250-500 words, or 1-2 pages, on a topic or question assigned by the instructor. Squibs will be assigned weekly and will be due at the beginning of class. Squibs will be posted and made available on the course Blackboard site. As a result, **late squibs will not be accepted**. Students who will not be able to attend class must e-mail their squibs as an attachment before class to receive credit.

Quizzes will be administered in class, and make-up quizzes will not be permitted, *unless* i) a student has cleared their absence prior to class or ii) following some extraordinary circumstances, the student informs the instructor as soon as is possible.

Journal assignments will be a series of short written exercises that students will be tasked with on a more-or-less weekly basis and collected at the end of the semester. The instructor will keep a running list of such assignments and students will keep a running "journal" in which they record their answers. From time to time, students will be asked to contribute to an on-line discussion forum given these assignments as prompts.

Unless stated otherwise, grading will be on a standard curve such as the one below, although the instructor reserves the right to adjust the curve:

- 92-100: A
- 90-91: A-
- 87-89: B+
- 83-86: B
- 80-82: B-
- 77-79: C+
- 70-76: C
- 60-69: D
- 0-59: F

**Policies of the Instructor and the University:**

**Academic integrity:**

The instructor abides by all policies of SVSU regarding, for example, cheating and plagiarism, disabled students, disruptive students, and so forth. Students should make themselves aware of these policies as stated in the student handbook; ignorance of said policies is not an excuse. The fullest penalty for violations will be pursued, including, but not limited to, a failing grade for the course.

It is expected that a student's work will be entirely her own. All instances of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the University and the penalty shall be assigned in accord with SVSU policy, but will at least include a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. Do your own work. Be sure that any work that is not exclusively yours is appropriately documented and cited. Consult the instructor for help, if necessary.

### **Handicapped and Disabled Students:**

Students with disabilities that may restrict their full participation in the course activities are encouraged to meet with the instructor or contact the SVSU Office of Disability Services, Curtiss 112, for assistance or call 989.964.7000. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations must make their request by contacting the Office of Disability Services. All accommodations must be approved by the Office of Disability Services.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### **Week 1 (1/13): The Milgram Experiments**

- **Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority" (\*)**

#### **Week 2 (1/18 and 1/20): Kant and Aristotle**

- **Immanuel Kant, selections from *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (\*)**
- **Aristotle, selections from *The Nicomachean Ethics* (\*)**
- **John Doris and Stephen Stich, "As a Matter of Fact: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics" (\*)**

#### **Week 3 (1/25 and 1/27): Medieval Conceptions—Aquinas and Augustine**

- **St. Thomas Aquinas, selections from *Summa Theologica* (\*)**
- **St. Augustine, selections from *The Confessions* and *City of God* (\*)**
- **Friedrich Nietzsche, selections from *The Genealogy of Morals* (\*)**

#### **Week 4 (2/1 and 2/3): Evil as Consistency**

- **Eve Garrard, "Evil as an Explanatory Concept" (\*)**
- **Dan Haybron, "Consistency of Character and the Character of Evil" (\*)**
- **Hillel Steiner, "Calibrating Evil" (\*)**

**Week 5 (2/8 and 2/10): Two Character Studies**

- *The Sopranos*—“College”
- *In the Company of Men*

**Week 6 (2/15 and 2/17): Evil as Extremity**

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, selections from *The Brothers Karamazov* (\*)
- Marcus G. Singer, “The Concept of Evil” (\*)

**Week 7 (2/22 and 2/24): The Virtuous Sailor and “Jemmy Legs”**

- Herman Melville, *Billy Budd: Sailor*
- Colin McGinn, *Evil, Ethics, and Fiction*—chapter 4

**Week 8 (3/1 and 3/3): Moral Saints**

- Herman Melville, *Billy Budd: Sailor*—cont’d
- Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints” (\*)

**Week 9 (3/8 and 3/10): SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

**Week 10 (3/15 and 3/17): Monsters and Fallen Angels**

- Stanley Benn, “Wickedness” (\*)
- John Milton, selections from *Paradise Lost* (\*)

**Week 11 (3/22 and 3/24): Evil and Psychopathy**

- Robert D. Hare, selections from *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us* (\*)
- *American Psycho*

**Week 12 (3/29 and 3/31): Dorian’s Soul**

- Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*
- Colin McGinn, *Evil, Ethics, and Fiction*—chapter 5

**Week 13 (4/5 and 4/7): The Picture of Dorian Grey, cont’d**

- Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*, cont’d
- Colin McGinn, *Evil, Ethics, and Fiction*—chapter 6

**Week 14 (4/12 and 4/14): Reflections on the Holocaust**

- **Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann and the Holocaust***
- **Daniel Goldhagen, selections from *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (\*)**
- **James Waller, selections from *Becoming Evil* (\*)**

**Week 15 (4/19 and 4/21): What is to be Done?—Journal Assignments due**

- **Roy Perrett, “Evil and Human Nature” (\*)**
- **Philip Zimbardo, selections from *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (\*)**

**Final Paper due: Thursday, 4/28 (10:30)**