PHIL 490 Senior Capstone Seminar: The Problems of Evil

Professor: Jennifer A. Frey
Classroom: Wardlow College 109
Schedule: MW 3:55-5:10
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Office Hours: MW 12-1, or by appointment
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Course Description:

This is the capstone seminar for philosophy majors. This semester we will be investigating the philosophical puzzles that arise as we think about evil. There are many such puzzles. First, there is the question of the metaphysical nature of evil. Is evil a positive force or substance, or is it merely a privation or lack? Second, where does evil come from; what is its origin or source? Third, why is there any evil at all; or, why isn’t the world perfectly good? Fourth, is the reality of evil compatible with belief in an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent creator God? Fifth, how and when can we say with justification that human actions and motivations are ‘evil’? Sixth, why are human beings so prone to temptation and evil? Sixth, what is moral psychology of evil?

To some extent, these questions overlap and are inter-related. Moreover, philosophers, poets, and religious thinkers have provided very different answers to these questions over time and across cultural contexts. Our course will proceed chronologically rather than thematically, in order to give students a sense of how Western thought about evil has evolved over the course of its intellectual history.

This is a “great books” seminar, since it surveys texts that make up the traditional Western canon as it has been handed down to us. There are many reasons for this, but high on the list is my belief that philosophical thinking becomes parochial, pedestrian, and boring when it conducts itself a-historically and in isolation from its cultural context. Moreover, I think philosophy is at its best when understood as a humanistic enterprise, actively engaged with the rest of the Humanities. This course will make use of a variety of humanistic resources: psychological, historical, religious, and aesthetic (i.e., literature, art, and film). We will approach these different sources as philosophers, but with an understanding of both the strengths and limitations of that perspective.

Learning Outcomes:
The aim of this course is to develop your skills as a philosopher. Trained philosophers, more than anyone else, have been habituated to think and write both analytically and creatively about the big questions that concern human existence. Our big question in this course is the nature of evil and the puzzles this concept generates. As philosophers in training, we will approach this topic with a certain analytical and hermeneutic toolkit at our disposal. The goal of this class is to sharpen those tools, which, at this point as senior philosophy majors, you no doubt already possess to some degree.

Upon the completion of this course, you should be able to perform the following tasks well:

• Understand the difference between philosophical, literary, and sacred texts.
• Develop strategies for reading difficult philosophical, literary, and sacred texts.
• Recall and identify key arguments in philosophical texts.
• Understand a problem by relating different texts to one another analytically and creatively
• Develop your own interpretation of different philosophical, literary, and sacred texts, based on close readings, class discussion, and independent research
• Lead a class discussion on a difficult text in a class presentation
• Develop an original and workable thesis for a major research paper
• Write a well organized and well defended critical research essay
• Participate in class discussions in an informed and organized manner

Required Texts:

You must purchase the following seven texts for this course. All texts, with the exception of Augustine, are available at the campus bookstore.


**Optional/Background Texts:**

All of these texts are available on course reserve in the Thomas Cooper Library.

Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (eds) *The Problem of Evil*
Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil.*
Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*
Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil.*
Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*
Terry Eagleton, *On Evil*
Hans Joas, *Mortality and Morality*
Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil:*
Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan*
Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer*
Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*
Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*
Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*
Peter Van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*

**Course Schedule:**

**ANCIENT/CLASSICAL SOURCES**

M 8/25: Course Introduction/ Hebrew Bible, Genesis (BB)

M 9/1: **Labor Day**, NO CLASS [NB: Prof. Frey in Oslo, Norway all week]

W 9/3: Selections from Plato and Aristotle (BB) [*Guest lecturer:* Prof. Christopher Frey, ancient scholar]

M 9/8: St. Augustine, *Free Choice of the Will*, Book I-II

W 9/10: St. Augustine, *Free Choice of the Will*, Book III

Optional/Background/Recommended Reading: Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil*; Philo of Alexandria, *De Mundi Opificio*

**MEDIEVAL SOURCES**


W 9/17: Aquinas, *On Evil* (QQ. IV-VII) **question due**


**EARLY MODERN SOURCES**


W 10/1: Milton, *Paradise Lost*. Books IV-V, VII, IX **question due**


M 10/13: Kant, *Religion*, Part II. **Question due**

W 10/15: Kant, *Religion*, Part III.

Optional/Background Reading: Goethe, *Faust*; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*;

*19TH/20TH CENTURY EUROPEAN SOURCES*


F 10/24: **Take Home Midterm Due**


W 10/29: Nietschze, *Beyond Good and Evil*, parts VI-VI. **Question due**

M 11/3: Nietschze, *Beyond Good and Evil*, parts VII-IX.


*20TH CENTURY ANGLO-AMERICAN ANALYTIC*

W 11/19: J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence” (BB)

M 11/24: Marilyn McCord Adams, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God” (BB) **question due**


M 8/1: Troy Jollimore and Sharon Barrios, “Beauty, Evil, and the English Patient” (BB)

**W 8/3: IN CLASS FINAL PAPER DRAFT WORKSHOP**

**M 8/8: Final papers due** by 11:30PM (upload to BB)

**Course Requirements:**

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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
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<td>Term Paper</td>
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<td>Paper Outline</td>
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<td>Class Questions</td>
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1. Each student must make one oral class presentation of about 25-30 minutes. The presentation will introduce us to the reading of the day, identify the main claims of the reading assignment, relate the text to others we have read, and raise important questions to orient and focus the class discussion. It is up to you whether or not you incorporate secondary literature into your presentation.

You must provide me with the presentation manuscript **at least 2 days** before the presentation in class (email attachment is sufficient; frey.jenn@gmail.com).

- You must have a one page **handout** as part of your presentation. Please be sure to get me the handout at least **1 day** in advance so that I can provide sufficient copies for all participants.

2. You will have a take home midterm examination. The midterm will consist in short essay questions designed to show that you have comprehended the readings thus far. This exam will be open note and open book. Your answers must be typed (12 pt., Times New Roman, double spaced) and uploaded to BB. It should take no longer than 2 hours to complete. **I will not accept late exams without a written doctor’s excuse.**

3. One term paper, 15-20 pages in length (12 pt., Times New Roman, double spaced, page numbered). I will not give paper prompts; you must come up with your own original idea for a research paper, and I must approve your thesis well in advance. The paper is due December 8th, which is the date of your final exam. There will be no final
exam for this class. More explicit instructions will be given via an assignment later in the term. **I will not accept late term papers without a written doctor’s excuse.**

4. Outline of paper, due 11/5. This outline must include your thesis statement, as well as an outline of how you will defend its main points.

5. From time to time I will solicit one question regarding the required readings. I must receive your question by email the night before that class. These questions (2-5 lines) must be contextualized, i.e., it must show that you understand what you are talking about. A good example is: Milton’s Satan claims, “Evil be thou my good.” How can evil be a good that is pursued by rational creature? What does this apparent possibility say about Milton’s concept of evil? Could Satan (or anyone) really live up to such a principle of action?

6. Class participation/attendance. Please note that class participation is a full **10% of your final grade.** Please do not underestimate the importance of this in determining your final grade. Participation should be an easy A. However, in order to earn an A in class participation, you must not only come to class prepared (i.e., you have read and taken notes on the text), but you must also **actively participate in the class discussion in a productive and informed way.** Class participation includes: helping to explain, analyze, and critically evaluate the author’s position, asking questions about the material under discussion, helping to clarify another’s point, responding to the professor’s questions, and so on. It is expected that you will form opinions in this class and that you will be willing to share them with your professor and peers. A reasonable goal would be to make at least one contribution to class discussion each class meeting. The more you are silent, the lower your class participation grade will be. If you are uncomfortable talking in class then it is your responsibility to find a way to come talk to me about this so that we can come up with a creative and fair solution.

**Grading Rubric:**

- A = 100-93% = excellent, exceptional, exemplary work
- B+ = 92-86% = very good, commendable, solid
- B = 85-80% = good, shows promise
- C+ = 79-76% = adequate, acceptable, ok
- C = 75-70% = passable, but weak
- D+ = 69-66% = very poor, unsatisfactory
- D = 65-60% = marginal, seriously flawed
- Below D = 59% and below = failure

**Classroom Policies:**

*Attendance*
Although you are not graded for attendance, students are obligated to attend class regularly. This class adopts the university-wide attendance policy, which is as follows: absence from more than 10% of the scheduled class sessions, whether excused or unexcused, is excessive and there will be a grade penalty for each further absence. Every absence over four will drop one’s total grade in the course by half a letter grade (or five percentage points). For instance, a student with six absences can receive no better than a 90% in the class.

To record your attendance, you will need to sign your name on an attendance sheet that will be passed around during class. If the sheet does not make it to you, it is your responsibility to sign the sheet before you leave. If you forget to sign the sheet, you will be marked absent.

*Technology*

You are not allowed to use laptops, phones, or other electronic devices during class meetings unless given special permission by the professor. Please make sure that your phones are put into silent mode before you enter class. Students who violate this policy repeatedly may be expelled from the classroom.

*Academic Honesty*

Assignments and examination work are expected to be the sole effort of the student submitting the work. Students are expected to follow the University of South Carolina Honor Code (www.housing.sc.edu/academicintegrity/honorcode.html) and should expect that every instance of a suspected violation will be reported. Students found responsible for violations of the Code will be subject to academic penalties under the Code in addition to whatever disciplinary sanctions are applied. Cheating on a test or copying someone else’s work will result in an F for that assignment or exam, and possibly a grade of F in the course, and, in accordance with University policy, be referred to the University Committee for Academic Responsibility and may result in expulsion from the University.

*Blackboard*

I will rely on Blackboard for assignments and grades, as well as to communicate with you outside of class. It is your responsibility to make sure that the email address you use and check is the email address used by Blackboard; if you are not receiving Blackboard communications from me it is your responsibility to notify both me immediately and to fix the problem immediately. I expect you all to be proficient in Blackboard, and if you are having problems with it, it is your sole responsibility to make sure that solutions are found. Instructions, tips, and support are available at uts.sc.edu or servicedesk@sc.edu

*Disability Services*
If you have a disability that impedes your opportunities for success in this class it is your responsibility to let and the folks at disability services know immediately so that we can accommodate your needs. They can be reached at sasds@mailbox.sc.edu For more information, go online: http://www.sa.sc.edu/sds/