

Evil

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The Course*Description*

What is the nature of evil, suffering, and injustice? Is physical, spiritual, and existential suffering inescapable in human life? How can an omnipotent, benevolent God be just, given the terrible things – epidemics, earthquakes, tsunamis – that human beings have suffered? How could God allow the Shoah or any genocidal war to occur? What are the predominant forms of evil in our society? This course will discuss such fundamental theological, philosophical, and political questions by studying how they have been addressed in several recent important books and works of art.

Required course texts and editions

Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Penguin)
Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (Touchstone)
Spalding Gray, *Swimming to Cambodia* (Husion House)

These course texts are available at what used to be the bookstore but is now called "The Campus Store." All course materials will be placed on reserve at the library, for the time being still known as "The Library," or will be made available through other means as necessary. I'm aware that the course texts are available on Kindle and other platforms. These editions might be fine for browsing purposes. My advice, however, is to resist the temptation to read everything on screen. Paperbacks are just better than screens because you can read without all those distractions and mark the books up in an active, more fully engaged way. In any case, the paperback pagination will be required for class assignments.

Course requirements and evaluation (summary; details to follow)

First response paper (2 pg.)	10%
Second response paper (2 pg.)	10%
Essay (8 pg.)	35%
Final exam (2 hr)	35%
Tutorial participation	10%

Note: This syllabus is subject to change with due notice given to in-course students.

Lecture schedule

1. Sept. 7 Introduction: Evil or evils?
2. Sept. 11 Theodicy: Leibniz vs. Voltaire
3. Sept. 14 Theodicy: J.K. Rowling vs. the intellectuals (Flew and Mackie)
4. Sept. 18 *The Book of Job*
5. Sept. 21 Camus, *Plague*, introduction
6. Sept. 25 Camus, *Plague*, continued
7. Sept. 28 Camus, *Plague*, continued
* First response paper due
8. Oct. 2 Camus, *Plague*, continued
9. Oct. 5 Camus, *Plague*, conclusion
- = Reading week; no classes
10. Oct. 16 The Milgram experiment
11. Oct. 19 In-class documentary screening (TBA)
12. Oct. 23 Levi, *Auschwitz*, introduction
* Second response paper due
13. Oct. 26 Levi, *Auschwitz*, continued
14. Oct. 30 Levi, *Auschwitz*, continued
15. Nov. 2 Levi, *Auschwitz*, continued
16. Nov. 6 Levi, *Auschwitz*, conclusion
17. Nov. 9 Hell on television: in-class screening (TBA)
18. Nov. 13 Viktor Ullmann, *The Emperor of Atlantis*
19. Nov. 16 Gray, *Cambodia*, introduction
20. Nov. 20 No class; prof at a conference

- 21. Nov. 23 Gray, *Cambodia*, continued
- 22. Nov. 27 Gray, *Cambodia*, continued
- 23. Nov. 30 Gray, *Cambodia*, conclusion
 - * Essay due
- 24. Dec. 4 Review and discussion

Tutorial scheduling

There will be no tutorials on September 6th and December 6th, the first and last Wednesdays of the term. The entire class will meet on September 13th for introductions and a discussion of organizational matters. For the remaining 10 tutorial meetings of the term, the class will be divided in half and the two groups will meet on alternate weeks. Details will be discussed during the Sept. 13th tutorial.

The Assignments

1. *First response paper* (10%)

Students will write a short response to anything read or discussed in the first three classes (Sept. 11 – 18, inclusive). The paper will be 2, but no more than 3 typed pages, standard essay format (double-spaced, normal margins, 12-point font). It is due before class on Sept 28.

2. *Second response paper* (10%)

Students will write a short response to the documentary shown in class on Oct. 19. The paper will be 2, but no more than 3 typed pages, standard essay format (double-spaced, normal margins, 12-point font). It is due before class on Oct. 23.

3. *The essay* (35%)

General warnings

Use only the course text (in the required edition) to write your essay. In other words, do **not** consult any secondary sources, encyclopedias (should you happen to find one), or the internet. I repeat: **do not use the internet**. Any evidence of internet use in your essay will be penalized. As well, your essay must be proof-read the old-fashioned way for spelling and grammatical errors and clarity of style: relying on spelling and grammar functions of your software will not be enough.

Everything else: topic, meeting, outline, final form

The general topic is Camus's presentation of the nature of evil in *The Plague*. Each student is required to select his or her own specific topic, to formulate an argument, and to demonstrate it with appropriate textual exegesis, presenting everything as elegantly as possible. The finished essay will be approximately 8 pages (**not** counting title page and any apparatus) – in other words, no less than 7 and no more than 9 pages – standard essay format (double-spacing, normal margins, 12-point font). It is due before class on Nov. 30, or sooner.

As part of the process of working up the essay, each student is required to meet once with the teaching assistant. Meetings will be scheduled during the weeks from mid-October to mid-November; scheduling details will be discussed in class. In preparation for the meeting with the TA, each student is required to prepare an outline, specifying the proposed topic and the way in which it will be addressed. The outline should be approximately two typed pages; and it must be written, i.e., in prose, **not** point form. It should be submitted to the TA at least 2 days before the student's scheduled meeting. The outline and the meeting are not graded; however, if a student fails to arrange or attend a meeting, the student's finished essay will be worth 30% (instead of 35%) of the course grade. It will be assumed – of course – that the results of a student's discussion with the TA will be incorporated into the finished version of the essay.

4. *Final exam (35%)*

The date, time, and location of the two hour final exam will be set by the Registrar's Office. It will cover Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia*; and attendance and participation throughout the course will be assumed. The exam will consist of essay questions requiring textual interpretation and analysis. In other words, there will be **no** multiple-choice questions on the exam. The form and content of the exam will be discussed during the last week of classes, with student suggestions welcome.

5. *Tutorial participation (10%)*

This should be self-explanatory. Further specifics can be discussed in tutorial.

The Word

Spelling counts

Written work will be marked on grammar, clarity of writing, organization and presentation as well as on the quality of its content and analysis. Students who wish to improve their writing skills might visit McMaster's various support services. There are no shortcuts, however. The best way to learn to write well is to write a great deal, and more importantly, to read a great deal – "indiscriminately and all the time with [your] eyes hanging out" (Dylan Thomas).

Words and power

In everything they write, students should follow five fundamental rules recommended by George Orwell in "Politics and the English Language" (1946):

1. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
2. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
3. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
4. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
5. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

41 other rules for writing good stuff

1. Always check your spelling.
2. Proof-read to see if you any words out.
3. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
4. Verb tense, today and always, was important.
5. Prepositions are terms one should not end sentences with.
6. Steer clear of incorrect forms of verbs that have snuck in the language.
7. The right way to use "is" is, is that it shouldn't be used this way.
8. Muster the courage to boldly refuse to incorrectly split an infinitive.
9. Don't use contractions in formal writing.
10. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
11. Verb's and simple plural's don't require them.
12. Don't use no double negatives.
13. The adverb usually follows the verb.
14. Statements, like, aren't similes or guesses?
15. Write all adverbial forms correct.
16. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten words or more, to their antecedents.
17. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
18. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
19. No sentence fragments.
20. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
21. If you write well and I write well, how is it that you and me don't? If this is a lesson to you, and to me as well, then why isn't it a lesson to you and I?
22. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!
23. "It is best not to use too many 'quotation 'marks,'" he said.
24. Avoid commas, that are not necessary, and un-necessary hyphens, too.
25. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
26. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
27. Don't string too many prepositional phrases together unless you are one of those walking through the valley of the shadow of death.
28. If you reread your work, you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition and redundancy can be avoided by rereading and editing.

29. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
30. A writer must not shift your point of view in mid-sentence.
31. It's really unfair, but things such as human beings, which are animate, get to begin their subordinate clauses differently than other things such as rocks, who are not.
32. Eschew dialect, irregardless.
33. Also, avoid awkward and affected alliteration.
34. Of course, it is incumbent upon everyone to avoid archaisms.
35. Always pick on the correct idiom.
36. Take the bull by the hand and say no to mixed metaphors.
37. Avoid trendy elocutions that sound flaky.
38. From the dawn of time, we have been commanded not to utter sweeping generalizations.
39. Resist hyperbole, even if you have to remind yourself a thousand times.
40. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.
41. First, lists are not arguments; and thirdly, they are often numbered inconsistently.
42. Great green dragons might exist, but green great dragons certainly don't because the mysterious rule about adjectival order in English is opinion-size-age-shape-colour-origin-material-purpose before the noun. If you don't believe me, check out my lovely little old rectangular green French silver whittling knife.

The Law

Department specific

Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments. Students must submit their assignments in class or to the TAs or the professor during their office hours.

University Mandated Statements

1. Statement on Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity> The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: (1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained; (2) Improper collaboration in group work; (3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

2. Note on Changes in the Course

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her or his McMaster email and the course websites (if any) weekly during the term and to note any changes.

3. Social Sciences Faculty E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

4. The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) and its Proper Use

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>) is a self-reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report MEDICAL absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work (that is less than 25% of the course grade). Please note: This tool cannot be used during any final examination period. You may submit a maximum of ONE Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent for more than 3 days, exceed one request per term, are absent for a reason other than medical, or have missed work worth 25% or more of the final grade, you MUST visit your Faculty Office. You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence. Also please note: If you find it necessary to submit the MSAF during this course you must arrange for an extension for any work missed. I do not redistribute grades for missed assignments.