

Evil (Prospective Course)

Course Description

What is evil? Where does it come from? What can we do about it? Such questions have long occupied thinkers of all sorts, and this class is devoted to looking at a variety of perspectives on evil. We shall engage with some of these perspectives by reading religious texts from several traditions, literature, philosophy, and psychology. Ultimately, since evil is a fundamental aspect of the human condition, our aim is to investigate what it means to be human in light of it.

Required Texts

MFE: Rorty, Amélie (ed.). *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives*.

Schedule of Readings [each "*" corresponds to 1-3 class sessions]

The Divine and Evil

- * "The Book of Genesis / The Book of Exodus" (MFE 8-12), "Tower of Babylon"
- * Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*

Civil Evils

- * Thucydides, "The Corcyraean Revolution" (MFE 13-15) and "The Melian Dialogue"

Ancient Greek Moral Psychology on Evil Action

- * Plato, *Protagoras* 352a- 358d; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 1-10

Religious Conceptions of Guilt and Divine Benevolence

- * St. Augustine, Excerpts from *The Confessions* and *City of God* (MFE 43-53); Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, "There is no evil in Allah's perfect world" (MFE 54-55)

Medieval Moral Psychology

- * Aquinas, "On Evil" (MFE 84-92)

The Devil

- * "The Rebellion of Iblis" in the *Quran* (7.1-54); Milton, "The Voice of Satan" (MFE 123-125)
- * Anselm, "On the Fall of the Devil"

Vices in Literature

- * Dante, "The suffering of the damned"; Chaucer, "The seven deadly sins" (MFE 93-105)

Enlightenment on Evil

- * Leibniz, "The justice of God and the problem of evil" (MFE 161-164); Voltaire, "Conscience and original sin" (MFE 168-171)
- * Rousseau, "Social corruption" (MFE 172-178); Kant, "The rational will overcomes base inclinations" (MFE 179-187)

The Banality of Evil

- * Arendt, "The banality of evil: failing to think" (MFE 265-268)

Recent Psychology on Evil

- * The Milgram Experiment ("[Rethinking One of Psychology's Most Infamous Experiments](#)"); and "[The Stanford Prison Experiment Story](#)"