

Course Outline

Department of Philosophy, History & Politics
Faculty of Arts

Phil 491-3
Special Topics in Philosophy: Ethics and the Holocaust (3,0,0)
Fall, 2006

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If you phone me and I am unavailable please leave a detailed message on my Voice Mail and a number where I can reach you. You are highly encouraged to send me e-mail messages with the an appropriate subject heading.

Course Description:

During World War II, over 6 million Jews and 5 million other so-called 'undesirables' or 'useless eaters' were exterminated by the Nazis. The Holocaust, a term which means 'burnt sacrifice' or 'destruction by fire' is unfortunately an all too familiar one. And even though in 1905 we were warned by philosopher George Santayana that 'Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it' genocide still is a spectre that raises its demonic face to the world and grins.

What was involved? How did it happen? Why did it occur? Who is to blame? These are the questions that humanity continues to ask. Obviously, it was an act of indefensible evil. And it is this evil that we will be analysing and evaluating in this course.

Course Objectives:

The aim of this course is to help students gain appreciation of the events and the context of the holocaust. You will gain a deep understanding of the complex moral issues involved in assessing the blameworthiness of all those involved. You will have an understanding of the times leading up to and including World War II. By peering into the dark abyss of human behaviour and belief students will be moved to define their moral lives by learning from the experiences of others.

Required Texts:

Night: This work by Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel gives the student a first hand account of the experiences of a Holocaust Survivor.

History of the Holocaust: This short book by Yehuda Bauer and Nili Keren will provide the student with important background information on Judaism, Jewish life in Pre-Europe, and the rise of the Nazism.

A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination is edited by Michael Morgan, a Professor of Philosophy at Indiana University. It features writings by theologians, cultural critics, philosophers, political theorists, and Holocaust survivors. It surveys the major themes raised by the Holocaust and examines the most provocative and influential responses to these topics and to the Holocaust itself. Organized in a roughly chronological pattern, the volume opens with early responses from the postwar period. Subsequent sections cover the emergence of central theological statements in the late 1960s and 1970s, the development of post-Holocaust thinking in the 1970s and 1980s, and burgeoning reflections on

the significance of the death camps. Connections between the Holocaust and important events and episodes in Western culture in the 1980s and 1990s are also discussed.

As the nature of this course is such that it involves the discussion of contentious issues and beliefs, it is extremely important that you approach the theories, beliefs, and comments raised in the class with an open mind. You must be respectful of other people and their views and approach the course with a dispassionate attitude. If you are unable to subject your own beliefs to rational criticism and discussion, or if you find it difficult to address philosophical problems from an unbiased perspective, you may not find this course to your liking.

Assignments etc.

1) Ongoing Review Quiz

As the student reads **The History of the Holocaust and Night**, the student will be required to answer a series of multiple choice questions. 10%

2) Short Essay - Film Analysis.

Choose one of the following films and evaluate the moral blameworthiness of one of the major characters. (750-1000 words) The Experiment, The Nasty Girl, Europa, Europa, Schlinder's List, The Killing Fields, Hotel Rwanda, Shake Hands with the Devil. Worth 20%

3) Term Essay – Survivor Testimony

Students will write a 3000 word term paper. The student will conduct an 'ethical exploration' and develop further the issues, ideas, or themes that they find philosophically interesting from the class lectures and readings by viewing and reporting on a Survivor Testimony. The structure of your paper should be as follows.

View being presented by the survivor

An analysis of this view

Relating this view to issues within the course

Conclusion.

Please visit www.jeffmclaughlin.ca for further information on planning and writing a philosophy essay. Also see below for what I look for in your papers.

All papers must be typewritten, double spaced, include a title page listing the topic, name and student number, word count, and secured with a staple in the upper left corner (Please: no folders or reports covers of any kind). All materials MUST be referenced using MLA.

Worth 30% Late assignments = 10% deduction per day. Due Date (mid-november) TBA

4) Mid term Exam

Short answer questions

Worth 20% Date: TBA

5) Final Exam - Take home essay - handed out at the end of the course.

Worth 20% Date: TBA

Changes to Course:

In the event that any part of the course requires to be altered, a consensus of students surveyed at the time may constitute a reason for making the change. Consensus = df. 80% of those students in attendance when the survey is taken.

Auditing:

The auditing of this course is not permitted.

Plagiarism and Cheating:

Cheating is defined as any dishonest or deceptive conduct or attempted conduct by which individuals or groups of individuals use or attempt to use unauthorized aids, assistance, materials and methods to represent their academic work, training and standards as other than they are.

Plagiarism is defined as an act in which an individual submits the work of another person as his or her own.

A student caught in either of these activities will be penalized with at least a zero grade on the particular assignment. Serious cases will result in automatic failure of the course. See the section on academic honesty in the Calendar.

Lectures:

History of the Holocaust and The Rise of the Third Reich
The Wannsee Conference
Life and Death in the Camps
Moral Responsibility
Moral Character
Excuses
Self-Deception
Political Culture, Socialization, and Responsibility
The Principal Perpetrator: Adolf Hitler
Perpetrators: The Men in Police Battalions
Victims
Helpers, Rescuers and Bystanders

NOTE: This course is designated as a 'writing intensive course'.

In general, this is what I look for in your long papers and exams. Be sure you have covered each of the following in your works. Please ensure you have read the 'How To' series on my home page.

General:

- Course concepts, presentation of others views, clear and accurate.
- Writing: The paper is well written with correct spelling, punctuation, and diction, and expressed in the students own words.
- Organization: The paper is well organized and the organization is made clear to the reader.
- The paper clearly presents the issue it will discuss and selects intelligently aspects of that issue for discussion.
- Clarity: The arguments are presented clearly and understandably.

Positive Argument:

- The paper takes a definite position on the issue.
- The paper gives appropriate reasons for the position it takes.
- The reasons cogently support the conclusion.

Consideration of objections:

- The paper considers reasonable objections to its positive argument including any that were discussed in class or found in assigned reading.
- The paper gives appropriate reasons for rejecting these objections.
- The reasons for rejecting the objections cogently support doing so.

Consideration of Opposing Views:

- The paper considered the most plausible argument or arguments for opposing views.
- The paper gives appropriate reasons for rejecting these opposing view.
- The reasons for rejecting the opposing views cogently support doing so.