

# Understanding Human Evil

Fall 2007

“Indifference, to me, is the epitome of evil.”

*Wiesel*

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Office Hours: Monday: 2:00-3:50; Tuesday: 4:00-5:00; Thursday: 4:00-5:00

Class Time/Location: MWF 11:30-12:20/Main Building 124

## Course Description

This course will focus on the problem of collective human evil: atrocities willfully committed or condoned by large groups or societies. We begin with an examination of some philosophical definitions of evil. Then we consider psychological analyses of social obedience and how they may explain why ordinary humans commit extraordinary evil. Historical and literary accounts of genocide in Rwanda, Nazi Germany, and the Americas are covered as well as a serious discussion on how the current treatment of nonhuman animals compares to the violence humans have wrought against other humans. Finally, so we do not leave the course depressed about humanity, we will explore the different ways in which we can create and foster a caring social world.

## Required texts/readings

- *Obedience to Authority*, Stanley Milgram (2004)
- *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*, Philip Gourevitch (1998)
- *Night*, Elie Wiesel (2006)
- *The Dreaded Comparison*, Marjorie Spiegel (1996)
- *Toward a Caring Society*, Pearl M. Oliner and Samuel P. Oliner (1995)
- Readings on Wofford's library e-reserve (E-Reserve)

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students are expected to:

- intelligently explain and critically examine the problem of large-scale human evil;
- develop their reading comprehension and writing skills;
- improve their presentation skills;
- integrate key concepts with factual evidence.

## Methods of Evaluation

●**Reading Presentations:** every student will give TWO presentations on assigned readings. Presentations should not exceed 15 minutes. In your presentation, you must: (1) summarize the main points; (2) specify one point that made you think and explain your thoughts on it; and (3) provide two discussion questions for the class. All presentations need to be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font with standard margins, and 1-2 pages. No exceptions. You may not read your presentations. They will be graded on clarity, style, organization, creativity, and the quality of the discussion questions. Please provide copies of your presentation for your classmates.

●**Papers:** students are required to write five papers for this class. Each paper should be between 4-5 pages. The first two papers are explanatory in that they will identify and explain the main points of the books. The third and fourth papers require students to describe salient features of the books and integrate them with key philosophical concepts about human evil. The final paper will evaluate students' ability to apply what they have learned about building caring institutions to their personal experiences. Outlines are required for some papers and I will allow revisions on two of them.

## Distribution of Graded Work

- Presentations: 20%
- Paper 1 = 10% (explanatory)
- Paper 2 = 10% (explanatory)
- Paper 3 = 20% (explanatory and analysis/opportunities for revision)
- Paper 4 = 20% (explanatory and analysis/opportunities for revision)
- Paper 5 = 20% (analysis and narrative)

**Grading Scale\*** (percentage): A =100-94; A- = 93-90; B+ = 89-87; B =86-84; B- =83-80; C+ = 79-77; C =76-74; C- =73-70; D =69-60; F =below 60

\*Grades in this course are based on academic achievement and competence.

## Late Work/Extra Credit

All work is due at the beginning of class. For every hour an assignment is late, one letter grade will be deducted. If you know in advance that you will not be attending class when a paper is due, you must see me as soon as possible so that we can make necessary arrangements. If I don't hear from you by the next class period you will have forfeited the paper grade. Extra credit work will not be given.

## Attendance

Attendance is required in this class. You are allowed four absences with no grade reduction, thereafter one point off your final grade for every absence. I will record attendance at every class meeting. You are required to arrive at class on time and remain for the entire period in order to be counted as present.

## Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty will be handed in accordance to Wofford's honor code, which can be found at [http://www.wofford.edu/studentlife/honor\\_code.pdf](http://www.wofford.edu/studentlife/honor_code.pdf)

**Disability**

If you have a disability that requires my attention please let me know as soon as possible so that I may accommodate you.

Reading and class schedule\***Week 1 – Sept. 3-7**

M – Introduction

W – James Waller, “A Place Called Mauthausen” and “The Nature of Extraordinary Human Evil” (E-Reserve)

F- Claudia Card, “The Atrocity Paradigm” (E-Reserve)

**Week 2 – Sept. 10-14**

M- “The Atrocity Paradigm”

W- Stanley Milgram, Obedience to Authority—chapters 1 and 2

F- Chapters 3 and 4

**Week 3 – Sept. 17-21**

M – Chapters 5 and 6

W – Chapters 9 and 10

F – Chapters 12, 13 and 15

**Week 4 – Sept. 24-28**

M – Video: Milgram’s experiment (45 min)

W– **Paper 1 due**

F- Philip Gourevitch, We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families—chapters 1, 2, and 3

**Week 5 – Oct. 1-5**

M– Chapters 4 and 5

W – Chapters 6 and 7

F – Class canceled; read chapters 8 and 9

**Week 6 – Oct. 8-12**

M – Chapters 10 and 11

W – Video: Ghosts of Rwanda (120 min)

F- **Paper 2 due**

**Week 7 – Oct. 15-19**

M- Elie Wiesel, Night—pp. 3-28

W- Video: Memory of the Camps (60 min), Night pp. 29-46

F- Night pp. 47-65

**Week 8– Oct. 22-26**

M- Night pp. 66-115 (Midterm grades)

W- Ervin Staub, “The origins of genocide and mass killing: core concepts” (E-Reserve)

**F-Fall Break****Week 9 – Oct. 29-Nov. 2**

M- Catch-up day

W- **Paper 3 due**

F- Ward Churchill, “‘Nits Make Lice,’ The Extermination of North American Indians, 1607-1996” ---pp. 129-140 (E-Reserve)

**Week 10 – Nov. 5-9**

M- Churchill, pp. 143-157

W- Churchill, pp. 178-188

F- Waller, “Social Construction of Cruelty” (E-Reserve)

**Week 11 – Nov. 12-16**

M- Waller

W- Marjorie Spiegel, The Dreaded Comparison, pp. 15-45

F- Spiegel, pp. 45-72

**Week 12 – Nov. 19-23**

M- Spiegel, pp. 73-107

W-No class

F- No class

**Week 13 – Nov. 26-30**

M- Charles Patterson, “Without the Homage of a Tear” (E-Reserve)

W-**Paper 4 due**

F-Pearl and Samuel Oliner, Toward a Caring Society---chapters 1 and 3

**Week 14 – Dec. 3-7**

M- Chapters 4 and 5

W- Chapters 6 and 8

F- Chapters 9 and 10

**Final Exam: Paper 5 due**

\*Subject to change