

The Problem of Evil

University of Houston, Fall 2023
ILAS 4350-15775, Interdisciplinary Problem Solving
Tuesday 230-4pm in Old Science Building, S 115

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Course Description

This capstone course helps students to achieve a meaningful synthesis of their three distinct minors. It is centered on substantive socio-ethical "problem-solving" methodologies as applied through the particular minors completed by each student. Students will thus work on a research project that comprehensively integrates their chosen minors. This senior seminar is individually customized around each student's specific program of study.

Problem-solving enterprise must be as effective as righteous. So, morality must ground the adopted solutions. For this purpose, in Fall 2023, the course will discuss standard ethical theories regarding the problem of evil (Calder, Chignell), especially the moral and metaphysical kinds of evil. The leading questions are: *What's evil? Where does it come from?* Our overview starts from the classic issue of reconciling God and evil (*The Book of Job*), including the free will defense (Aquinas, Leibniz, Plantinga). Then, we'll examine some metaphysical explanations for the existence of evil, such as good's absence (Aquinas) and evil's necessity (Leibniz), paving the way for its intelligibility (Kant, Card, Wood). Alternative approaches will also be considered, e.g., Nietzsche's conflict of values (Leiter), Bloom's biological dispositions, and the power-(in)justice relationship (Arendt, Zimbardo). Finally, we'll analyze the notion of evil personhood (Sias).

Class Schedule

Aug 22	Class Introduction
Aug 29	The Question of Evil (Calder or Chignell)
Sep 5	Rationality Lost (<i>The Book of Job</i> 1-12, 22-3, 40-2; Hartley 70-87, 540-5)
Sep 12	The Absence of Good (Aquinas, <i>On Evil</i> Q1: 1-2, <i>Summa</i> Q48-9)
Sep 19	The Necessity of Evil (Leibniz §§ 1-4, 7-9, 12-3, 20-8, 30; Jolley 155-72)
Sep 26	God and the Problem of Evil (Plantinga 7-29)
Oct 3	Free Will (Leibniz §§ 34-9, 42-3, 50-2, 120, 160, 162-4, 273, 288)
Oct 10	The Free Will Defense (Plantinga 29-49)
Oct 17	The Intelligibility of Evil (Kant 1785: 7-18; Wood 2014: 144-72)
Oct 24	Radical Evil (Wood 1970: 210-9; Card 2003: 73-95)
Oct 31	A Conflict of Values (Nietzsche 10-34 or Leiter 155-77)
Nov 7	Dispositions (Bloom 16-39)
Nov 14	Authority and Power (Zimbardo 3-22; Arendt vii-xxiii, 280-98)
Nov 28	Evil Personhood (Sias 157-84)
Dec 2	All Papers Due (11:59 pm)
Dec 5	Research Presentation (S243, 9am-7pm)

Bibliography

- Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* (Any Edition).
Aquinas, Thomas (2003), *On Evil*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Arendt, Hanna ([1963], 2006), *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin.
Bloom, Paul (2013), *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil*. New York: Broadway Books.
Calder, Todd (2022), The Concept of Evil. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
Card, Claudia (2003) *The Atrocity Paradigm. A Theory of Evil*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Chignell, Andrew (2021), Kinds and Origins of Evil. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
Hartley, John E. (1988), *The Book of Job*. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Kant, Immanuel ([1785], 1997), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Kant, Immanuel ([1793], 1960), *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Open Court.
Jolley, Nicholas (2005), *Leibniz*. Routledge.
Leiter, Brian (2002), *Nietzsche on Morality*. Routledge.
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm ([1710] 2007), *Theodicy*. BiblioBazar.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1967) *On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
 Paton, Herbert James (1947), *The Categorical Imperative*. London: Hutchinson.
 Plantinga, Alvin (1974), *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Eerdmans.
 Sias, James (2016), *The Meaning of Evil*. Palgrave.
 Wood, Allen W. (1970), *Kant's Moral Religion*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
 Wood, Allen W. (2014), Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil. In Anderson-Gold, Sharon and Muchnik, Pablo (eds) (2014), *Kant's Anatomy of Evil*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 144-72.
 Zimbardo, Philip (2007), *The Lucifer Effect*. New York: Random House.

Time and Place

In Fall 2023, this course is offered as a hybrid class with face-to-face and asynchronous components. The face-to-face part will occur on Tuesday, 230-4 pm in Old Science Building, S 115. The online platform for the asynchronous part of the class is *Canvas*. There, you can also find all the relevant information about the course, including the syllabus, readings, and links for paper submissions.

Requirements and Assessments

Part of the course consists of attending and discussing the class materials. The readings will provide the moral knowledge required for your final research papers, representing the course's real purpose. Below is the breakdown of your final grade.

(a) 20% Attendance, Class Discussion, and Participation - On Tuesdays (230-4pm), students must attend class and discuss the assigned readings. They must also fulfill the requirements of the Research Paper Schedule set forth below.

(b) 20% Weekly Class Reviews - On Thursdays, students must submit a brief paper (around 750 words) about the arguments discussed in class. Links for submissions are available on *Canvas*.

(c) 30% Paper on Ethical Theories - Students must write a paper (3000 words) on the class subjects. See the guidelines below.

(d) 30% Problem-Solving Research Paper - Students must write a research paper (3000 words) addressing an ethical problem to solve. The solution must significantly involve the chosen minors of the *Liberal Studies* degree, especially their methodology. The guidelines follow below.

Paper on Ethical Theories Guidelines

The paper must show the ability to *argue* about the class subjects. Present a question completely by analyzing its arguments and counterarguments.

Structure and write your paper following the steps below. Make sure to implement each of them. If anything needs to be clarified, don't guess, but ask the teacher. As for the format, your papers must have around 3000 words (but no fewer than that), including a bibliography not contained in the counted words. Write single-spaced, 9pt (Montserrat or Garamond font) and submit the work in a pdf file to *Canvas*.

Intro	Introduce the <i>question</i> by identifying the problem you want to discuss. Describe it with simple words and motivate your choice by telling why the chosen issue matters. (ca. 400 words)
Thesis	Make your claim, namely state your <i>thesis</i> that answers to the chosen question. Be simple. You can, for example, defend one of the many arguments the readings present. You don't need to be creative. (ca. 100 words)
Arguments	Defend the <i>supporting reasons</i> for your thesis. Ideally, you should refer to three arguments, one for each minor. Present them analytically, namely isolate the central claims structuring the argument. (ca. 2000 words)
Objections	Consider at least two <i>counterarguments</i> . Present them properly and show their truth. Then, reject them in ca. 250 words.
Conclusion	Derive a <i>consequence</i> from the arguments and counterarguments you have previously discussed. (ca. 250 words)

The bibliography must solely consider the readings. If you want to introduce a reading not covered in the lectures, ask your teacher for permission before proceeding. Quotations are welcome but only within 25% of your paper.

In writing your paper, you can rely on the assistance of the teaching fellow (Dr. Tierney). He organizes weekly office hours (by appointment) to clarify the class subjects. In addition, the UH Writing Center can provide further help with your writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS's students: [UH-Writing-Center](#)

Research Paper Schedule

	Please keep in mind that all these preparatory steps toward your final paper are included in the participation component of your grade.
Sep 7	Thursday - Submit an outline of the research project to discuss with Dr. Tierney the week after (no more than 750 words, printed). The outline should contain (a) a title, (b) a brief description of the problem to solve, (c) a short draft of the solutions according to the research methods of the minors, (d) a list of desired professors to contact as supervisors (one professor for each minor).
Sep 14	Thursday - In-person meeting with Dr. Tierney (2:30 pm, S244) to discuss his feedback about your outline. If you cannot make it, Dr. Tierney will also be available on Tuesday, Sep 19 online at 4:30pm.
Nov 14	Tuesday - Submit (on Canvas by 11:59 pm) an advanced draft of the research project (no less than 2000 words, although not definitive), including (a) title and question, (b) proposed solutions, (c) established contact with the supervisors, (d) bibliography.
Nov 16	Thursday - In-person meeting with Dr. Tierney (2:30 pm, S244) to discuss your research paper's draft. If you cannot make it, Dr. Tierney will also be available on Tuesday, Nov 21, online at 4:30pm. Further, students can request an appointment with Dr. Tierney when they need extra help preparing their research papers. Please don't hesitate to contact him.
Dec 2	Research Paper Deadline (on Canvas by 11:59 pm)
Dec 5	Presentation Day, S244

Research Paper Guidelines

Here are the necessary steps for writing your paper. Make sure to implement each of them. Again, if anything needs clarification, ask the teacher. Expect suggestions and corrections on each step as you submit your outline.

- 1 Format - The research paper must have ca. 3000 words and include a bibliography (not contained in the 3000 words). Write single-spaced, 9pt (Montserrat or Garamond font), and turn in a pdf file.
- 2 Framing your question - Consider an ethical problem encompassing the collection of your minors. Research its current status quo and think of a possible solution.
- 3 Paper Structure - Structure your paper according to the following steps.
Introduction - Introduce your question/problem and why it's important (ca. 300 words). Identify the problem you want to discuss. Describe it with simple words and motivate your choice by telling us why the chosen issue matters.
Thesis - Make your claim (ca. 100 words). This part represents your thesis, namely your answer to the question. You are claiming how you'll solve the problem.
Use Arguments to solve the problem. Apply methodologies and approaches you have learned from your three minors. Use the class bibliography to substantiate the arguments. The argument from each of your three minors (statement and supporting claims) should be around 700 words.
Use Arguments to solve the problem. Apply methodologies, approaches, and all knowledge that you have learned from your three minors to develop a plausible

material solution to the problem. Also, consider the ethical theories and concepts from this class to show that your solution is consistent with or supported by some moral standards. Refer to the class bibliography to disclose the ethical sources. Your argumentation for this component of your paper should be around 700 words.

Rebut Counterarguments. Identify major objections (at least two) and refute them in ca. 250 words.

Conclusion - The conclusion (ca. 250 words) offers your solution to the chosen problem or question, naturally deriving from your arguments.

- 4 Conducting Research - You must conduct research, formulate and defend claims. You must survey established literature before developing an original perspective on a topic and writing a sufficient answer to the question. To produce arguments, you must research how others have handled the problem adequately or inadequately. Your view will be original because of your perspective derived from your three minors.

Further, your research will lead to an established bibliography for your paper. Your instructor must have previously approved these sources.

Seek guidance from professors teaching in your minors' programs or departments.

- 5 Examples of problems for your research paper follow below.

Social Justice Immigration, Police Brutality, Racism, Gender Discrimination.

Evil and Injustice Violence, Climate Change, Economic Inequalities and Poverty, Environmental and Economic Sustainability.

Bioethics Abortion, Euthanasia, Bioengineering.

Writing Support

The UH Writing Center works with undergraduates enrolled in any course who want help writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS's students: [UH-Writing-Center](#).

University Policies

You must comply with the university's policies regarding ethics and academic honesty. See the following links and read their documents thoroughly: [Student-Conduct-Policy](#) and [Academic-Honesty](#). For counseling and psychological services, visit [CAPS](#). Finally, you can request special accommodations here: [Adjustments/Auxiliary-Aids](#). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Houston has issued extraordinary policies listed at the end of the syllabus.