

## RESPONDING TO EVIL

The concept of evil is highly charged, but also obscure. What is it to see someone as evil? Is evil a psychological state, like anger or malice, or a kind of fundamental badness? Is real evil possible? Does the concept of evil play a valuable role, or would we be better off without it? Our answers to these questions are often pulled in different directions. On the one hand, seeing someone as evil can be a poorly motivated way of misunderstanding and dehumanizing her. On the other hand, we struggle to understand atrocities and other harms which seem beyond our grasp as anything other than evil. This course will look closely at some philosophical, literary, and political writings on the nature, possibility, and limits of evil; the extent to which a person or action can legitimately be considered evil; and the ethics of our responses to atrocity and oppression.

**Instructor:** Eugene Chislenko, [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu)

Office hours: Anderson Hall 750, W 11:30-1:30 (walk-in); dinner first W of month

**Course requirements:** (1) Active participation, including one 10-minute presentation (25%)  
(2) Two 3-page papers (25% total)  
(3) 2-page proposal for final paper (required but not graded)  
(4) 8-10 page final paper (50%)

**Required books:** Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*;  
Naomi Klein, *No is Not Enough*;  
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*;  
all other readings are posted on Canvas.

Please always bring the week's reading(s) with you to class.

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND READINGS

### 1. W 1/16: **Introduction**

#### I. What is Evil?

### 2. W 1/23: **Diabolical Evil, I**

Reading: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books I-II

### 3. W 1/30: **Diabolical Evil, II**

Reading: Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IX; Phillip Cole, *The Myth of Evil*, Chapter 2

4. W 2/6: **Choosing Oneself Over Morality**

Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:26-44;

Allen Wood, “Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil”

Optional: Dinner at Crisp Kitchen after class.

5. W 2/13: **Intolerable Harms**

Reading: Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, Chapter 1

6. W 2/20: **‘Evil’ as a Narrative Concept**

Reading: Phillip Cole, *The Myth of Evil*, Chapter 1 and Conclusion

7. W 2/27: **Students’ Choice**

Reading: TBA

[No class W 3/6. Happy spring break!]

## II. Responses to Evil

8. W 3/13: **Demystification**

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp.274-9; reactions by Allison, Cole, and Fine

9. W 3/20: **Prioritization**

Reading: Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, Chapters 5 (“Prioritizing Evils Over Unjust Inequalities”) and 6 (“Rape in War”)

10. W 3/27: **Resistance**

Reading: Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, Chapter 10 (“Gray Zones: Diabolical Evil Revisited”); Carol Hay, “The Obligation to Resist Oppression”

11. W 4/3: **Love**

Reading: Mahatma Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, §§1-2, 7, 12-15, 25-26, 68, 73, 76, 88, 100; selections by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Optional: Dinner at Crisp Kitchen after class.

## III. Evil Today

12. W 4/10: **Is Trump Evil?**

Reading: Naomi Klein, *No is Not Enough*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-82)

13. W 4/17: **What Next?**

Reading: Klein, *No is Not Enough*, Chapters 10-14, Conclusion, and Postscript (pp. 189-271)

**Paper proposals due Monday, April 22 by noon.**

14. W 4/24: **Discussion of Paper Proposals**

No new reading.

**Final paper due Friday, May 3 by noon.**

## COURSE POLICIES

**Office Hours:** I encourage you to come to office hours often; talking one-on-one or in small groups is one of the best ways to get a handle on the material and methods of the course. You'll probably get more out of it if you come with specific questions, but coming to talk about the issues in a more general way is fine too. It's also fine to come as a small group. If you want to meet but have a schedule conflict, let me know and we can find a different time.

**Participation:** You will get much more from the course if you participate actively in class! Active participation means showing up prepared, but also more than that. It means taking responsibility for the class going well for everyone, including you. That can mean: pointing to an interesting passage; asking a clarificatory question; emphasizing the importance of someone else's comment; raising a problem; directing discussion in a productive direction; and making procedural suggestions that help the class go well. It also includes one presentation to the class in weeks 3-6 or 8-13. Your presentation will come after an introductory overview by me, which you will have access to in advance and should build on through further examples, passages, questions, objections, defense—whatever you think will start a productive discussion. Each presentation must engage substantially with some part of the reading for that week. Your presentation should take less than 10 minutes and include a visual component such as a handout, PowerPoint, or video, which you must *email me* by noon on the Monday before you present.

**Short papers:** In weeks 3-13, you will write two substantial 3-page papers, *defending a thought* about a reading from the preceding three class meetings. These are due by Monday at noon, as a Word or PDF file (I slightly prefer Word, but either is fine) emailed to [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu). The last day to submit a short paper is Monday, April 22. Late short papers will not be accepted. The choice of week and topic is up to you. Each paper should make sure to quote and interpret a text; defend (rather than merely stating) a view; and take class discussion into account, by responding to ways in which people in class did and/or might disagree with you. Your paper should review and go beyond what we've covered. Parts of papers might be integrated into later class discussion.

**Plagiarism:** *All* written work for this course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else's work as your own is considered plagiarism. Please read Temple University's Policy on Academic Honesty: [http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities\\_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm](http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm)

**Disabilities:** Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact me privately to discuss your situation by the end of the second week of classes, or as soon as you can. If you haven't already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in 100 Ritter Annex or 215-

204-1280 to learn more about the resources available to you. I will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

**Statement on Academic Freedom:** Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. Temple University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: [http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy\\_no=03.70.02](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02)

## FINAL PAPER AND PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT

Write a 8-10 page term paper on a topic of your own choosing, from within the topics covered in this class. Defend your view through discussion of relevant parts of the readings for the course, as well as your own thoughts and examples. Explain all key terms so that someone *who has not taken the course* can understand your paper. Consider explicitly the best reasons *why someone might disagree with you*, and how you might convince that person. Your paper should show an understanding of course readings and class discussion, and of which parts of the readings are relevant for your topic. But the assignment is to work out and defend your own view. Summary of what we have covered so far should take up less than half your paper. When choosing a topic, think about what you're most interested in, and also what you have something to say about that goes beyond what we have covered in class.

**Logistics:** Your paper is due **Friday, May 3, by noon**. Please email your paper as a Word file or PDF (I slightly prefer Word, but either is fine) to [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu), with your name and a title at the top of the first page. Use 12-point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. *Late papers* will be marked down one third of a grade (from A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for each day or fraction of a day they are late, including Saturday and Sunday. I'm open to *extensions* in extenuating circumstances, but only if you ask at least at least two weeks before the deadline.

**Proposals:** This assignment includes a *required proposal* of at most two pages, due Monday, April 22 *at the latest*, by noon as a Word file or PDF to [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu). Your proposal must include: (1) a direct statement of the view you will defend in the paper; (2) a brief explanation of what the view is saying, including what you mean by any key terms; (3) a brief list of the texts you will focus on, including specific titles and page numbers; and (4) a summary of the planned line of thought of the paper, including your central reasons for holding your view to begin with, the main objections or problems you anticipate, and how you plan to address them. Of these, (4) should take up more than half of your proposal. These proposals will not be graded, but they are required, and will be discussed in our last class meeting. Your final *paper* will be marked down one third of a grade for each day the proposal is late. Incomplete proposals will not be accepted; I strongly recommend submitting your proposal early, so you can revise it in time if it is incomplete. Feel free to come to class and/or office hours with any questions!