

## The Problems of “Evil” in Modernity

Culture & Expression  
Spring 2011: HUHC 012, H6

**Professor:** Dr. John Teehan

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Hours: TR 3:00-4:00 and by appointment

### **Theme:**

Fall C&E spent the term brooding upon the vagaries of Love in the ancient world and in the Middle Ages, and Love turned out to be far more than simply a “many-splendored thing” and instead became a window onto the complexities of the age, the culture and ultimately, personal relations and the human condition. Now a new C&E team turns its attention to the problems of Evil in the modern age.

This semester the course will examine from multiple perspectives how the moral, theological and transhistorical or ontological concept of Evil (upper case E) gets transformed and given complexity in works that reflect, and reflect upon, the changing circumstances of an emerging modernity: from the Elizabethan age of the early 1600s, through the periods in Europe of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanticism, and through the Holocaust in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and information age in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. We will address in the periods social-historical phenomena such as the emergence of a mercantile middle class and new economies of trade and industrial production, based on both colonial exploration and exploitation of resources, as well as new technologies, from the printing press to the steam engine to the computer. These new economies gave rise in turn to new understandings of the individual self, new forms of empowerment and political representation, and to new understandings of ‘evil’ (lower case e). The rapid acceleration of historical changes in so many areas carried implications for an understanding of the positive and negative, or ‘good and evil,’ impact of those changes on society in general and the individual in particular, and more particularly, on different kinds of individuals (defined by class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc). These developments in Western culture also influenced other cultural traditions: a cross-cultural comparison with philosophical and literary traditions in China will provide perspectives on both Eastern and Western traditions. We will see how social practices that reflect systematic and economic rationalism lead to new confrontations with the concept of ‘evil’ as an aspect of humanity that seems to defy rational understanding.

### **The Strategy:**

C&E consists of two related courses in both fall and spring semesters. *HUHC 011* and *012: Social Sciences* have their emphasis on understanding the structures and values of a culture or civilization through the disciplines of History, Sociology, Religion, Anthropology, Psychology, Philosophy, Economics and Geography. *HUHC 013* and *014: Humanities* have their emphasis on artistic expressions of the cultures under examination through the disciplines of literary analysis (e.g. English, Classics, Romance and Comparative Literatures), Linguistics, Music, Drama, Dance, Fine Arts, Architecture and Aesthetics. Faculty on both teams work to develop a reading list and lecture schedule that work in tandem to reinforce the students’ insight into and understanding of the ancient world through to the Middle Ages, and then in the spring, the modern world since the Renaissance. Twice weekly faculty lectures set the context for student-based discussion sections.

**Requirements:**

*Written:* Three short essays (3-5 pp)

Paper #1 10%

Paper #2 15%

Paper #3 20%

Midterm 20%

Final 20%

*Participation:* 15%

Note that this part of your grade is not based solely on attendance—it is not enough simply to come to class! You must actively participate in our conversations. You are responsible for reading the materials closely each session and coming to class prepared to discuss relevant issues (this includes bringing the reading to class—failure to bring the reading will count against this part of your grade). Each student will also be assigned responsibility to initiate discussion on designated Social Science lectures. Your grade will reflect my assessment of your classroom contributions: if you never or rarely contribute to discussion, or if you simply respond to others' thoughts without furthering the class discussion, you can expect this portion of your grade to be low. However, sheer quantity is not always beneficial when it comes to participation: if you contribute in unhelpful ways to discussion (e.g., your comments are disrespectful to others, reveal a lack of preparation for class, or are consistently off topic), you can expect this portion of your grade to be low. If, on the other hand, you bring thoughtful and helpful comments to class that further our understanding of a topic—or raise questions that help us think about a topic in a new and interesting way—you can expect your grade to be high. A word of advice: one of the best ways to excel in this portion of the class is to bring a list of thoughts and questions from readings and lectures with you to discussion. If class participation is not at an appropriate level, I reserve the right to administer quizzes related to the previous night's reading. Quiz grades will be factored into the participation grade. At the mid-point of the semester you will receive a preliminary grade to give you an indication of your performance in this area to that date.

*Attendance:* Regular attendance is a requirement for earning credit for this course and is a prerequisite for earning full grades. Attendance will be taken at Lecture and in Section—you are responsible for making sure I see you at Lecture. Poor attendance (more than 3) will result in the loss of a grade for the course (one grade for 4; two grades for 6); more than 6 will result in a failing grade. (Note: 3 latenesses = 1 absence; if you come in past the mid-point of the lecture you will not be credited with attending that day.)

- N.B.** 1) The due dates for the assignments will be listed on the syllabus. Late papers will be penalized. In some cases they will not be accepted.
- 2) There are no re-writes. However, drafts are strongly recommended.
- 3) Spelling, grammar and style count toward your grade.
- 4) *The learning process requires an attitude of mutual respect from all those involved. Behavior which diminishes the learning/teaching process will not be tolerated* (e.g. private conversations; eating in class; walking in after the lecture has begun; rude comments).
- 5) All cell phones are to be turned off before class. There is absolutely no texting in class. Students found texting will have to surrender their cell phones or leave the classroom (and be charged an absence). Laptops **may not be used** in class. If you have a pressing, legitimate need for a laptop you must speak to me prior to bringing in your laptop.

**Texts:**

These books are available in the Hofstra University Bookstore (HUB). HUB also orders used copies. You can also order them yourself online, but be sure to purchase the correct edition of the listed texts and translations. Other assignments will be posted in E-Reserve (password: **43qv2hp3**) and/or on Blackboard. A list of specific up-to-date reading assignments can be found under Course Documents on the Culture & Expression site on Blackboard. (N.B. This is not the same as the Blackboard site for this course.)

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Simon & Schuster.

(ISBN-10: 074348276X; ISBN-13: 978-0743482769)

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Eds. David Kastan and Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005)

(ISBN-0: 87220-733-1; ISBN-13: 978-0872207332)

Voltaire. *Candide*. Trans. Lowell Bair. Bantam Classics.

(ISBN-10: 0553211668; ISBN-13: 978-0553211665)

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Don Giovanni*. New York: Riverrun Press; London: Calder Publications, 1983, 1995. (ISBN-10:0-7145-3853-1)

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*, Bantam Classics.

(ISBN-10: 0553211161; ISBN-13: 978-0553211160)

Poe, Edgar Allan. *Great Short Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Harper Perennial.

(ISBN-10: 0060727853; ISBN-13: 978-0060727857)

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *The Grand Inquisitor*. Hackett Publishing.

(ISBN-10: 0-872201937; ISBN-13: 978-0-87220-193-4)

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Faust, Part I*. Trans. Peter Salm. New York: Bantam Books, 1985.

(ISBN: 0-553-21348-2)

Jarry, Alfred. *Ubu Roi*. New Directions Publishing Corporation.

(ISBN-10: 0811200728; ISBN-13: 978-0811200721)

Lu Hsun. *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*. WW Norton & Company, 1977, 2003.

(ISBN-10: 0393008487; ISBN-13: 978-0393008487)

Zhang Zianlang. *Half of Man is Woman*. W.W. Norton & Co., 1980.

(ISBN-10: 0393332969; ISBN-13: 978-0393332964)

Anderson, M.T. *Feed*. Candlewick. 2002.

(ISBN-10: 0763622591; ISBN-13: 978-0763622596)

**Academic Honesty Policy:**

Plagiarism is a serious ethical and professional infraction. Hofstra's policy on academic honesty reads: "The academic community assumes that work of any kind [...] is done, entirely, and without assistance, by and only for the individual(s) whose name(s) it bears." Please refer to the "Procedure for Handling Violations of Academic Honesty by Undergraduate Students at Hofstra University" for details about what constitutes plagiarism, and Hofstra's procedures for handling violations; to be found at [http://www.hofstra.edu/PDF/Senate\\_FPS\\_11.pdf](http://www.hofstra.edu/PDF/Senate_FPS_11.pdf) ,

**Disabilities Policy:**

If you have any concerns regarding a physical, psychological and/or learning disability that may have an impact upon your performance in this course, appropriate accommodations can be made on an individualized, as-needed basis after the needs, circumstances and documentation have been evaluated by the appropriate office on campus. The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities is located in 212 Memorial Hall. Telephone: 516-463-7074. Please see the Hofstra Guide to Pride, or see their site: <http://www.hofstra.edu/StudentAffairs/stdis/index.html>. All disability-related information will be kept confidential.

## Lecture and Discussion Schedule

<b>Week 1</b>	R	1/27	<b>Snow Day!</b>
<b>Week 2</b>	T	2/1	<b>Lecture: Prof. Skulsky on <i>King Lear</i> (1608) and Evil</b> Section discussion: King Lear and the Problems of Evil
	R	2/3	<b>Lecture: Prof. Dardis on Renaissance Science</b> Section discussion: Free Will in a Mechanistic World
<b>Week 3</b>	T	2/8	<b>Lecture: Prof. Freitas on Martin Luther and the Reformation</b> Section discussion: “Evil,” Sin, and Free Will
	R	2/10	<b>Lecture: Prof. Skulsky on Milton’s <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1667)</b> Section discussion: <i>Paradise Lost</i> and Free Will
<b>Week 4</b>	T	2/15	<b>Lecture: Prof. Bogard on Max Weber and the Puritans</b> <b>(<i>Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>, 1905)</b> Section discussion: The Redemptive Power of Work (?) <b>First Essay Assigned</b>
	R	2/17	<b>Guest Lecture: Prof. John McDermott, Finitude and Evil</b> Section discussion: the McDermott lecture
<b>Week 5</b>	T	2/22	<b>President’s Day – No Classes</b>
	R	2/24	<b>Lecture: Prof. Donahue on Voltaire’s <i>Candide</i> (1759)</b> Section discussion: Voltaire’s <i>Candide</i>
<b>Week 6</b>	T	3/01	<b>Lecture: Prof. Bogard on the <i>Declaration of Independence</i> (1776)</b> <b>and the <i>Declaration of Sentiments</i> (1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton)</b> Section discussion: the “Declarations”
	R	3/03	<b>Lecture: Prof. Kozol on Mozart’s <i>Don Giovanni</i> (1787)</b> Section discussion: Reason, Passion and “Evil” <b>First Essay Due</b>
<b>Week 7</b>	T	3/8	<b>Lecture: Prof. Dardis on Utilitarianism</b> Section discussion: Reason, Passion and “Good”
	R	3/10	<b>Lecture: Prof. Donahue on Goethe’s <i>Faust</i> (1808)</b> Section discussion: Faust and Forbidden Knowledge
<b>Week 8</b>	T	3/15	<b>Lecture: Prof. Green on Nationalism</b> Section discussion: Culture, Identity and “Evil”
	R	3/17	<b>Lecture: Prof. Brand on Edgar Allan Poe (selected stories)</b> Section discussion: Culture and Individuals
<b>Week 9</b>	T	3/22	<b>Lecture: Prof. Frisina on Nietzsche</b> Section discussion: The Genealogy of “Evil”
	R	3/24	<b>Lecture: Prof. Teehan on Dostoyevsky’s <i>Grand Inquisitor</i></b> Section discussion: The “Problem of Evil” and the Reality of Suffering

<b>Week 10</b>	T 3/29	<b>Lecture: Prof. Kozol on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's</b> <i>Yellow Wallpaper</i> (1892)
	R 3/31	Section Discussion: Evil and Suffering cont./Review for Mid-term <b>Lecture: Prof. Brand on Walt Whitman</b> <b>Mid-Term</b>
<b>Week 11</b>	T 4/05	<b>Lecture: Prof. Teehan on Darwin's</b> <i>The Descent of Man</i> (1871) Section discussion: "Nature red in tooth and claw" <b>Second Essay Assigned</b>
	R 4/07	<b>Lecture: Prof. Zhou on Lu Hsun</b> <i>Selected Stories</i> Section discussion: The Evolution of "Evil"
<b>Week 12</b>	T 4/12	<b>Lecture: Prof. Frisina on Chinese World View and "Evil"</b> Section discussion: Confucianism
	R 4/14	<b>Lecture: Prof. De Seife on Alfred Jarry</b> <i>Ubu Roi</i> (1896) Section discussion: Confucianism continued
<b>Week 13</b>	<b>Spring Recess—no classes</b>	
<b>Week 14</b>	T 4/26	<b>Guest Lecture: Richard Bernstein on Hannah Arendt</b> Section discussion: Can "Evil" be Banal? <b>Second Essay Due</b>
	R 4/28	<b>Lecture: Prof. De Seife on Resnais's</b> <i>Night and Fog</i> (1955) Section discussion: Political "Evil" <b>Third Essay Assigned: "What is Evil?"</b>
<b>Week 15</b>	T 5/03	<b>Lecture: Prof. Zhou on Zhang</b> <i>Half Man is a Woman</i> (1985) Section discussion: Political "Evil" continued
	R 5/05	<b>Lecture: Prof. Green on Greed</b> Section discussion: Greed is—Good or a Deadly Sin?
<b>Week 16</b>	T 5/10	<b>Lecture: Prof. Freitas on M. T. Anderson</b> <i>Feed</i> (2004) Section discussion: <i>Feed</i>
	R 5/12	<b>Last Day of Classes: Group Q &amp; A (???)</b> Section Discussion: Review for Final <b>Third Essay Due</b>
	T 5/17	<b>Final Exam, Monroe Lecture Hall, 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm</b>

**□HCLAS General Education Learning Goals and Objectives  
(for Liberal Arts Distribution credit)  
Applicable to HUHC Culture & Expression**

Goal 1. Students will demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively.

*Learning Objectives:*

- 1.a Clearly and accurately summarize and evaluate the facts, presumptions, viewpoints, values, and arguments presented in a text or creative work.
- 1.b Gather and assess relevant information, and apply appropriate cognitive methods in solving problems or answering questions raised in a text or creative work.
- 1.c Construct well-reasoned solutions or conclusions; test and defend conclusions against relevant criteria and standards.
- 1.d Critically analyze one's own thinking by identifying one's presumptions, values, and viewpoints as well as problems, inconsistencies, and unanswered questions.
- 1.e Conceive and defend alternative hypotheses and viewpoints; offer and explain reasons for provisionally rejecting or accepting them.

Goal 2. Students will apply analytical reasoning across academic disciplines.

*Learning Objectives:*

- 2a. Read with comprehension, and critically interpret written work in discipline-specific contexts.
- 2b. Critically interpret and analyze aesthetic qualities of works in literature and the fine or performing arts.
- 2c. Apply quantitative, inductive, and deductive reasoning.
- 2d. Apply abstract thinking and conceptual modeling.
- 2e. Apply the methods of social science to ethically investigate and analyze human social behavior.
- 2f. Describe, comprehend, and analyze the role of philosophical ideas, historical movements, or ethical debates in the development of civilizations.

Goal 3. Students will demonstrate proficiency in written communication.

*Learning Objectives:*

- 3a. Compose grammatical sentences.
- 3b. Use various sentence forms to effectively modulate style and tone.
- 3c. Compose a sequence of paragraphs that develop a point.
- 3d. Summarize, quote, and respond to reliable texts to support and develop claims; apply relevant standards for citation.
- 3e. Write an effective argumentative essay.
- 3f. Respond to writing assignments using appropriate style, structure, and voice.
- 3g. Apply editing, proofreading, and revising strategies.

Goal 4. Students will demonstrate proficiency in oral communication.

*Learning Objectives:*

- 4a. Demonstrate skill in oral communication for purposes such as informing, persuading, and/or defending.
- 4b. Compose and deliver effective, audience-appropriate oral presentations that develop and support a point; or participate in formal debates; or lead or participate in collaborative discussion of a question or a text.
- 4c. When appropriate, use visual, auditory, and/or technological aids.

Goal 5. Students will develop an awareness of and sensitivity to global issues.

*Learning Objectives:*

- 5a. Provide and understand information on simple concrete subjects in a language other than English in both oral and written form.
- 5b. Demonstrate knowledge of the intellectual, social, political, economic, or cultural practices of at least one of the peoples in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, or of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia.

Goal 6. Students will demonstrate information literacy.

*Learning Objectives:*

- 6a. Conduct research using the variety of information sources available to them.
- 6b. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate the relevance and utility of different sources.
- 6c. Integrate sources effectively and ethically through proper citation.

Goal 7. Students will demonstrate technological competency.

*Learning Objective:*

- 7a. Demonstrate the ability to use general or discipline-specific technologies to identify, retrieve, analyze, and communicate ideas and information.