

IDS 2935: Why Is There in Evil in the World?

Quest 1: The Examined Life

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- MW 7
- Online <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/98187134534>

Tutorial Section Meetings (please go to the one in which you are enrolled)

- F5
- F6
- F7

Instructor

- Yaniv Feller
- Anderson Hall, #122 (meetings will take place online)
- Office Hours: M 11:00-12:00 (in-person) and by appointment (Zoom or in-person) using the following link: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>
- Email: yfeller@ufl.edu

Teaching Assistant

- Tony Farace
- Email: afarace@ufl.edu
- Office hours after tutorials or on Zoom by appointment

Course Description

The problem of evil has been a focus of intense reflection by philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and novelists. Students will address this key theme in the human condition in this Quest 1 course. Questions that will be asked include: What is evil? How have monotheistic traditions attempted to grapple with God's goodness and the problem of evil? Can natural disasters be considered evil? What turns ordinary people into perpetrators? The class will enable students to analyze this question in a written form and orally by drawing on a variety of methodologies from different fields in the humanities including philosophy, religion, history, and art (H). Students will not only read and analyze classical texts such as the biblical book of Job, as

well modern interpretation of classical themes in TV shows such as *Good Omens*. Outside the classroom, students will also experience artefacts in museums and the library's special collections. Among the skills acquired in the process are close reading, critical thinking, and effective communication of ideas (H). These will be developed through class discussions, in-class exercises, personal reflection pieces, artistic projects, as well as a final analytical paper. The case studies examined, historical and contemporary alike, including Egypt in antiquity, Italy of the Middle Ages, and twentieth century Germany and France (N).

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities
- International
- Writing Requirement (WR) 2000 words

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

Required Readings and Works

- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. Reissue edition. New York: Vintage, 1989. ISBN: 978-0-679-72516-9 (there are other editions available of *No Exit*, but this is the recommended one).
- All other readings and works are available in Canvas.

Recommended Writing Resource: Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style* (4th edition), ISBN: 979-8-848-36592-4.

Course Policies

Zoom Etiquette: Class and tutorials will take place over Zoom. The behavior expected from you is just like a regular class. You need to have your **camera on**, **microphone off** unless you want to speak, be in a **quiet place** with **stable internet connection**, and be **fully engaged**, not doing anything else. Failure to comply will result in penalties to the attendance category.

Academic Honesty: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor->

[code/](#)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of "E" for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows: "A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): (a) quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution, and (b) submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student." Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing UF's standard online evaluations (summary results will be available to students here) as well as a course-specific evaluation that focuses on course content and the experience of the Quest curriculum. Class time will be allocated for the completion of both evaluations.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Writing Studio: The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 302 Tigert Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

***This syllabus is subject to change, and the professor will alert students to changes.*

II. Graded Work

Attendance Policy: Attendance is a prerequisite to succeed in this class. Attendance will be taken at every class meeting. Students will be allowed two unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence after those will incur a 25-point (out of 1,000) deduction from the final grade in the class. Students must have an excused absence to make up for in-class examinations. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Participation (10%): Further information is provided in the participation rubric below.

Unit Reflection Paper (7x3=21%): You are required to submit seven out of eight response paper, but no more than one per unit. Units are marked in Roman numerals (I, V etc.). Deadline is BEFORE class that day at 9am. For example: for August 28 you will submit on Nietzsche. This would allow me to read it before and prepare the class based on your interests and what you got from the text. These very short papers are a chance for you to reflect on the readings and how they engage your own life experience. Each reflection paper should have the following components: 1. A one sentence **quote** from the reading(s). Be sure to provide the page number, not based on the pdf but on the actual pages of the book/article where available.

2. A 3-5 lines **explanation** on why you chose this quote. They can be analytical (this is the main argument, it reminds you another reading etc.) or personal (this quote relates to me because...).

3. One analytical question about the content or argument of the text.

As there is a lot of flexibility, anything submitted after 9am will not count, and no excuses for late submission would be granted.

Creative Commentary Exercise (20%): This 600-900 words assignment requires you to choose a biblical text that we discussed in class (Job, Genesis 1-3). You will **introduce** the text in one paragraph, then **show** how it raises the problem of evil. You will be **analyzing** the text in such a way that explains possible solutions that emerge inherently from the text (at least two), before **critically assessing** them, explaining why they work or where they fall short. This counts toward the Writing Requirement.

Deadline: September 30, noon

Reimagining Hell (20%): In this 600-900 words assignment you get to think about hell as a place and idea. You will imagine the set for a remake of Sartre's No Exit in 2024. Begin by **describing the** problem the text raises as you understand it, then **explain** how your dramaturgic choices (set, dress of the characters, who will play them) and **express** the issue in a way that relates it to at least one of the readings we made for class. This counts toward the Writing Requirement. Deadline: November 11, noon.

Thinking With Arendt (29%): In 900-1200 words, **describe** a central element of Arendt's argument about evil. **Explain** the merits and shortcoming of the argument based on your understanding of the argument. Then, **critically assess** the consequences of the argument made, e.g. was Eichmann's evil really banal and does it matter? Does thoughtlessness justify capital punishment? This counts toward the Writing Requirement. Deadline: Thursday, December 12, 17:00. Note that late submission would result not only in a penalty but also potentially in an INCOMPLETE grade.

Feedback would be available upon demand within a week from the deadline.

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
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A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubric(s)

Writing Assessment Rubric and Statements

	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off-topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.

MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper’s argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader’s understanding or severely undermine the writer’s credibility.
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- The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.
- The instructor will evaluate and provide feedback before the end of the course on all of the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.
- WR course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

Participation Rubric¹

	Excellent 9-10	Good 8	Average 7	Insufficient 6	Unsatisfactory 0-5
Knowledgeable: Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.	Consistently makes excellent contributions to the overwhelming majority of class discussions in a way that shows excellent preparation of the relevant class materials.	Contributes to most class discussions in a way that shows good preparation of the relevant class materials.	Regularly contributes to class discussions and is able to explain their position based on the reading.	Sometimes contributes to the discussion in ways that do not necessarily show good preparation of class materials.	Never or rarely contributes to class discussions, and the contribution do not prove evidence of reading.
Thoughtful: Evaluates carefully issues raised in assigned work.	Consistently makes excellent contributions to the overwhelming majority of class discussions by raising important questions, relating to other comments, or making	Contributes to most class discussions by raising important questions, relating to other comments, or making connections across readings	Regularly contributes to most class discussions by raising important questions, relating to other comments, or making connections across readings.	Sometimes contributes to the discussion in ways that show the ability to carefully evaluate issues raised.	Never or rarely contributes to class discussions, and the contributions do not amount to careful evaluation of the material.

¹ Coming to class, having done the readings and ready to discuss them, is essential for your success in this course, and for the enjoyment of all of us. If you cannot make it to class because of a valid reason (religious observance, illness etc.) please let me know as soon as possible. Other than that, see the “attendance policy” above.

	connections across readings.				
Considerate: Takes the perspective of others into account and listens attentively. ²	Always respectful to others, and takes their comments seriously.	Respectful to others and attempts to engage their comments.	Respectful, and sometimes relates to others' comments	Rarely takes into account how others might perceive one's comments.	Does not take into account other people's feelings and perspectives.

III. Annotated Schedule

I. Conceptual Distinctions

Mon., Aug. 26: Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

Wed., Aug. 28: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 27-46

Mon., Sep. 2 LABOR DAY NO CLASS

II. Theodicy and Monotheism

Wed., Sep. 4: 1. Genesis 1-3; James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible?*, 3-17

Mon., Sep. 9: The Book of Job

Wed., Sep. 11: Ethan and Joel Cohen, [A Serious Man](#) (watch at home)

Wed., Sep. 18: Martin Buber, "Religion and Reality," 8-19

Mon., Sep. 16: Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz"

III. Gender and Dualism

Mon., Sep. 23: Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith."

² Religion is a sensitive topic for many people. You may come from a faith tradition, or you may not. We are here together to learn more, so any question that comes from an honest desire to learn is a good question. Our goal is to explore and learn, but not to judge either each other's traditions, or ignorance about them. You do not ever need to volunteer anything about your own beliefs, traditions, practices or opinions (or lack thereof) but if you do, make sure that you speak in the first person, thereby making clear that you are representing yourself and not an entire tradition in the discussion.

Wed., Sep. 25: Elaine Pagels, “God the Father/God the Mother,” *The Gnostic Gospels*, 48-69.

IV. Satan

Mon., Sep. 30: Elaine Pagels, “The Social History of Satan,” 35-62 Creative Commentary Deadline

Wed., Oct. 2 JEWISH NEW YEAR – NO CLASS

Mon., Oct. 7: Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 11-31

Wed., Oct. 9: Jeffrey Russell, *Mephistopheles*, 173-190 (start with “Even more than positivism”)

V. Hell

Mon., Oct. 14: Dante, *Divine Comedy*, Inferno I-V (Mandelbaum translation)

Wed., Oct. 16: Dante, *Divine Comedy*, Inferno XXIX, XXXIII-XXXIV (Pinsky translation)

Mon., Oct. 21 ATTEND ONLINE DARA HORN

Wed., Oct. 23: Sartre, *No Exit*

VI. If There Is No God

Mon., Oct. 28: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, sec. 108, 125, 343; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 3-15

Wed., Oct. 30: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor,” 209-224

Mon., Nov. 4: Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 91-101

VII. Radical Evil

Wed., Nov. 6: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*, 31-40

Mon., Nov. 11: Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 55-65 Deadline: Reimagining Hell

Wed., Nov. 13: Hannah Arendt, “Total Domination,” *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 437-459

VIII. Banal Evil

Mon., Nov. 18: Arendt, “The Wannsee Conference or Pontius Pilate”

Wed., Nov. 20: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, selection judgment appeal (230ff.) and *Epilogue* (275-290)

Mon., Nov. 25 NO CLASS

Wed., Nov. 27 THANKSGIVING

Mon., Dec. 2: Arendt-Scholem correspondence

Wed., Dec. 4: Zygmunt Bauman, "The Ethics of Obedience"

Thursday, December 12, 17:00: Deadline Arendt Assignment