

## Ethics after the Holocaust

Instructor: Yaniv Feller

Meeting Times: Tuesdays, 11:45-13:40; Thursdays, 12:50-13:40

Location: Jewish Studies Seminar Room

Office Hours: Thursdays 14:00 or by appointment: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>

**Course Description:** The Holocaust is an epoch-making event that challenges many of our basic ideas about the modern world, human nature, and God. In this course, we examine some of the difficult questions raised in its aftermath. When is evil radical and when is it banal? Are comparisons to the Holocaust helpful or insensitive? Was God in the death camps? Is it possible to forgive such atrocities, and if so, who has the right of forgiveness? In our search for answers, we will read canonical thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. We will put these philosophical and theological discussions in conversation with various media such as art, film, and even Instagram stories.

**Course Outcomes:** This course will help you:

- Learn the major philosophical and theological challenges posed by the Holocaust.
- Recognize how the memory of an historical event shapes our present society.
- Develop the ability to closely and critically read philosophical texts, noting their merits and problems
- Hone your expression skills on philosophically difficult and emotionally-laden subjects.

**Required Texts:**

- Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (ISBN 978-0143039884)
- All other texts are available via Canvas

Recommended Texts: There are plenty of available resources online, not all, unfortunately, are of sufficient quality.

For explanation or reviewing of terms, I suggest you use the Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/holocaust-encyclopedia> or Yad Vashem's website: <https://www.yadvashem.org/>

Two helpful introductions to the history of the Holocaust: Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); and Norman Goda, *The Holocaust: Europe, The World, and the Jews* (Routledge, 2012).

## **Methods of Evaluation:**

**Active Participation (10%):** This is a discussion-based seminar. You are expected to come to class having done the readings and thought of at least one question and/or significant quote from the readings. If you cannot make it to class because of a valid reason (religious observance, family emergency, illness etc.), please let me know as soon as possible. Other than that, you are allowed to miss one class “no questions asked.”

**Five Response Papers (15%):** 2-3 pages, double spaced. You are required to submit five papers, one for each unit (Modernity, Evil, Theodicy, Resentment, Afterimages). The purpose of these reflections is to engage the text in writing *in preparation* for class. Each of these papers should include a very brief summary of the reading and its main argument, including what you consider its most important message or insight. After summarizing what you deem an important part of the argument, you need to engage it by raising a question provoked by the text. These reflection papers can later be used to develop your other papers, including the final paper. Obviously, you cannot cover all the reading so identifying a key issue is central. Depth is more important than breadth!

Deadline: the **day of the relevant class at 8am**. I intend to read these before class. Please note that as there are many options for these, no excuses will be accepted for late submission of reflection papers.

**Thinking with Arendt (25%):** 5-6 pages, double-spaced. In this paper, you explain the merits and limits of one of the central arguments by Arendt. The basis of discussion must be Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, but the assignment requires you to think through the consequences of the argument made, e.g. was Eichmann’s evil really banal and does it matter? Does thoughtlessness justify capital punishment?

Deadline: October 25

**God and Forgiveness (25%):** 5-6 pages, double-spaced. In this paper, you will be asked to critically explain and critique the argument of at least one thinker studied in the sections on Theodicy and Resentment, although a comparison between two positions is also possible. How does the book of Job help us understand contemporary theodicies? Why do people suffer unjustly?

Deadline: November 22

**Afterimages (25%):** 5-6 pages. How do we think or represent the Holocaust? What is the relation between philosophical arguments about it and artistic works? For this assignment also creative projects would be considered, but you need to talk to me in advance.

Deadline: Based on Registrar’s office deadline

**Bonus Events (1% each, up to three times):** Throughout the semester, a Google document will be updated with events of interest happening around campus. To get the bonus you have to attend the event and submit a one or two pages response summarizing the key argument/plot,

raise an observation, for example by connecting it to the class materials, and a question you were left with after the event.

## **Course Policies**

**Classroom Etiquette:** This class does not espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel students to believe concepts concerning race, gender, national origin as listed in Florida House Bill 7. We, as students and faculty, have a shared responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Unauthorized recording of the class is prohibited. It goes against these values and the fostering of a community of learners.

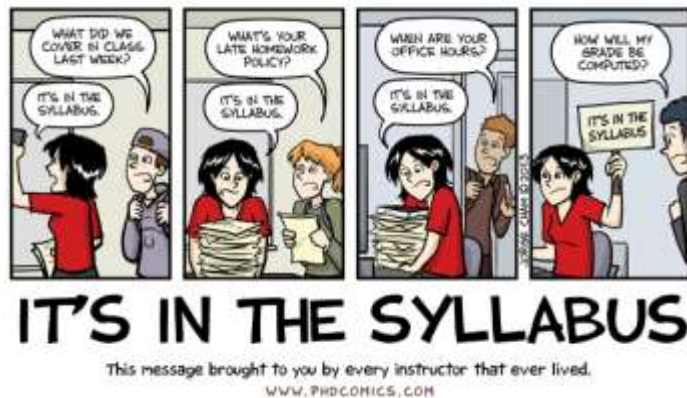
The horrors of the Holocaust are hard to grasp and process. Throughout the class we will deal with sensitive materials that may provoke emotional responses. The focus of our class is on fostering critical learning and emphatic listening. We are here together to learn more, so any question that comes 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, or practices (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.

**Academic Integrity:** 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 (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conducthonor-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. When in doubt, come talk to me beforehand in order not to make mistakes.

**Accessibility and Accommodations:** Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. 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. Do not hesitate to talk to me in person and I will do my best to assist.

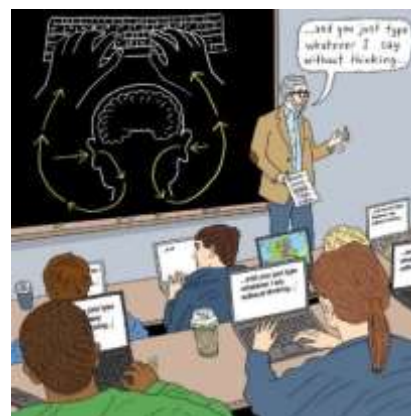
**Counseling and Wellness Center:** Taking care of your mental and physical wellbeing is very important. The University of Florida has great resources and people to help you with any struggles you might have in this regard. Please see <https://counseling.ufl.edu/> or come talk to me if you have any questions about who to contact in this regard.

**Office Hours and E-Mail:** Please feel free to come by my office and talk to me. Meeting in person is preferable to email. If you cannot make it to the office hours, you can schedule a meeting using this link: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min> .



In the case of email, please use your university email account (other accounts may land in the spam folder) and include a topic-line, your name, and the question(s) you have. I try to respond quickly, but note that emails will receive a reply within two working days. This means that if you send me an email on the weekend, or if you send a request for extension in the last minute, they might be answered only later, and the penalty incurred will be implemented.

**Electronic Free Zone:** Electronic devices are great, but they are also a distraction. There is now evidence that students who use electronic devices in class, as well as people who sit next to them, tend on average to receive lower grades. I therefore ask you not to use laptops, phones or other disturbing electronic devices during class. Please bring the readings in a printed form for every class. If there are any accommodation concerns, do contact me and we will find a solution.



## Schedule

### Introduction

Thursday, August 25 Syllabus; \*Recommended: Animated map: “World War II and the Holocaust” (Here: [USHMM](http://USHMM))

### I. Modernity

Tuesday, August 30: Zygmunt Bauman, “Sociology after the Holocaust,” in *Modernity after the Holocaust*, 1-30

Thursday, September 1: David Nirenberg, “Thinking about Judaism, or the Judaism of Thought” *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, 1-12.

## II. Evil

Tuesday, September 6: Kant, *Groundwork*, 31-40; Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 55-65

Thursday, September 8: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 437-459

Tuesday, September 13: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chp. 1-3

Thursday, September 15: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 4-6

Tuesday, September 20: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 7-8

Thursday, September 22: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 14-15

Tuesday, September 27: **Rosh Hashanah (NO CLASS)**

Thursday, September 29: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Epilogue, Postscript

Tuesday, October 4: Arendt-Scholem correspondence (selections),

## III. Theodicy

Thursday, October 6: Leo Baeck, “Jewish Existence” (1935)

Tuesday, October 11: The Book of Job (selections); Martin Buber, “The Question,” *The Prophetic Faith*, 183-197

Thursday, October 13: Joel and Ethan Coen, *A Serious Man* (movie)

Tuesday, October 18: Hans Jonas, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz”; Eli Wiesel, “God’s Suffering: A Commentary”

Thursday, October 20: Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” *Entre Nous*, 91-101;

Tuesday, October 25: **NO CLASS**

Deadline Arendt Assignment

## IV. Resentment

Thursday, October 27: **NO CLASS**

Tuesday, November 1: Emmanuel Levinas, “Toward the Other,” *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 12-29; \*Recommended background: introduction to *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 3-11

Tuesday, November 1: **MAKE-UP CLASS**, 7pm at the Hippodrome: Attend screening and discussion of *Albert Speer Goes to Hollywood* (2020) 7:00 PM

Thursday, November 3: 1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, par. 45; *Beyond Good and Evil*, par. 260; 2. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, par. 4, 6-13.

Tuesday, November 8: Jean Améry, “Resentments,” *At the Mind’s Limits*, 62-81

## **V. Afterimages**

Thursday, November 10: Michael Steinberg, “Grounds Zero,” *Judaism Musical and Unmusical*

Tuesday, November 15: Michael Rothberg, “‘Touch an Event to Begin’: Americanizing the Holocaust,” *Traumatic Realism*, 221-247 (Until USHMM); Film: Steven Spielberg, *Schindler’s List*

Thursday, November 17: Laura Levitt, “Looking Out from under a Long Shadow,” *American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust*

Tuesday, November 22: **NO CLASS**

### God and Forgiveness Deadline

Thursday, November 24: **Thanksgiving**

Tuesday, November 29: 1. Eva’s Story on Instagram; 2. Lital Henig and Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, “Witnessing Eva Stories: Media Witnessing and Self-inscription in Social Media Memory,” *New Media & Society* 24.1 (2022): 202-226.

Thursday, December 1: *Son of Saul* (movie in-class viewing)

Tuesday, December 6: Discussion of *Son of Saul* and concluding discussion

### Afterimages Assignment based on Registrar’s Schedule