

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

Quest 1: The Examined Life

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- MW 9
- LIT 0113

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

- F3 TUR 2346
- F6 MAT 0114
- F8 TUR 2333

Instructor

- Yaniv Feller
- Anderson Hall, #122
- Office Hours: M 14:30-15:30 and by appointment using the following link:
<https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>
- Email: yfeller@ufl.edu

Teaching Assistant

- Carol Rodriguez
- Email: rodriguez.ca@ufl.edu

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 as 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.

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 (14%): Each student will submit one reflection paper per unit by 9am the morning of class three sentences regarding that day's reading that references specific parts of the reading (include page numbers). In weeks in which there is only one class, you should submit before that class unless told otherwise. 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); 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.

Biblical Interpretation (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: February 21, 23:55.

Adopting Sartre (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:

Villain Analysis Presentation (6%): In this short presentation (3-5 minutes + 3-5 minutes discussion), you will present your idea for the final paper (see below) and get helpful feedback from your classmates that will help you prepare. Questions to ask, are why is this interesting to you? How does this analysis contribute to our understanding of evil? You will be required to present using a Power Point presentation. Deadline: From April 16 until the end of class (some tutorial sections options will be available).

Final Analytical Paper (30%): A 1200-1500 words analytical paper in which you develop. First, you will decide whether you want to create a villain or choose one from a TV show, movie, podcast or other media that you think has a villain and represents evil as discussed in class. If unsure, come talk to me! You will then briefly **reflect** on the medial object (Example questions: what is it? what is the context?) before **critically analyzing** it by relating it to at least one of the readings we made for class (Example questions: how is the villain depicted? Why? How does that relate to the readings we have done? What kind of evil is being expressed?). This counts toward the Writing Requirement. Deadline: May 1, noon. 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%
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.

- 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 connections across readings.	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.
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.

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.

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.

III. Annotated Schedule

I. Conceptual Distinctions

Mon., Jan. 8: Syllabus

Wed., Jan. 10: Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

Mon., Jan. 15: **NO CLASS MLK Day**

Wed., Jan. 17 **4:30pm** Martin Kavka (FSU) and Yaniv Feller (UF) in conversation about *The Jewish Imperial Imagination* (Price Judaica Library) – if submitting a response it is to be submitted after event by Friday, Jan. 19

Mon., Jan. 22: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 27-46

II. Theodicy and Monotheism

Wed., Jan. 24: The Book of Job (selections)

Mon., Jan. 29: Neil Gaiman, *Good Omens* S2E2 (NO RESPONSE, we watch in class).

Wed., Jan. 31: Ethan and Joel Cohen, *A Serious Man* (watch at home)

III. Is Creation Good?

Mon., Feb. 5: 1. Genesis 1-3; 2. Elaine Pagels, “One God, One Bishop,” 28-47

Wed., Feb. 7: Hans Jonas, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz”

IV. Satan

Mon., Feb. 12: Kelly, “Lucifer and the New Biography of Satan,” 191-214

Wed., Feb. 14: Elaine Pagels, “The Social History of Satan,” 35-62

Mon., Feb. 19: Guest Lecture: Professor Ali Mian, Satan in the Muslim tradition

Wed., Feb. 21: Guest Lecture: Religion Librarian Daly Megan (no response) Deadline Biblical Interpretation Assignment

V. Hell

Mon., Feb. 26: *The Book of Revelation*

Wed., Feb. 28: Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*

VI. If There Is No God...

Mon., Mar. 4: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, sec. 108, 125, 343; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 3-15

Wed., Mar. 6: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor,” 209-224

March 9-16: **Spring break, Yay!!!**

Mon., Mar. 18: Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering,” 91-101

VII. Radical and Banal Evil

Wed., Mar. 20: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*, 31-40; *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 55-65 Adopting Sartre Assignment

Mon., Mar. 25: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 437-459

Wed., Mar. 27: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 112-150
Mon., Apr. 1: Arendt-Scholem correspondence
Wed., Apr. 3: Zygmunt Bauman, "The Ethics of Obedience"
Mon., Apr. 8: Visit to Price Judaica Library (F3, half of F6)
Wed., Apr. 10: Visit to Price Judaica Library (second half of F6, F8)

Class Presentations

Mon., Apr. 15: class presentations
Wed., Apr. 17: class presentations
Mon., Apr. 22: **NO CLASS (PASSOVER)**
Wed., Apr. 24: class presentations (virtual)