PHIL000 – Confronting Evil
Time and Location TBD

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1. COURSE DESCRIPTION
In this course we explore the question of the nature of evil. The focus will be on how we should respond to evil when we confront not only seemingly obvious cases of evil, but also other more insidious forms of evil that are harder to see. Questions we will address include: what is evil, and what distinguishes the merely bad from the evil? Do we, as part of our nature, inherently have a capacity for evil? What implications does a positive answer to this question have for issues concerning moral responsibility and holding people accountable for their actions? Further, in the face of evil, especially great evil such as genocide, how should we respond? Is forgiveness psychologically possible? Is it the right response, morally speaking? Further, how should we respond to more insidious forms of evil that are hard to see, e.g. the causes of police violence and the high incarceration rates of minorities, how some lives appear to be more valued than others, etc.

Prerequisites: None.

2. COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. This course is about evil and what (if anything) we should do when confronted with it. The goal of this class is to introduce students to this question through to key works in the Western philosophical canon from Hobbes to Kant, while also drawing on Chinese Philosophy and recent work in psychology. We will consider the variety of strategies of argument, or persuasion, that the different authors employ, and we will trace the ways they build upon, and argue with, their predecessors and contemporaries. We will place each work in its own historical and cultural context, and try to identify the lasting contributions that it has made to the ongoing discussion.
2. Students should emerge from the course with a solid understanding of the historical development of the concept of evil, and what this concept tells us about issues concerning moral responsibility, blameworthiness, and forgiveness.
3. The student work for the course is designed to develop critical and analytical skills through close reading and analysis of complex texts, and communication skills in both contribution to group discussion and in argumentative and critical writing in essay form.
4. Students will also become familiar with disciplinary and interdisciplinary methods of argument and persuasion as the course materials draw on canonical works in both the Western and Eastern philosophical traditions as well as recent work in psychology.

3. REQUIRED READINGS
TBD.
4. ASSIGNMENTS

10% - Reflection Pieces
Over the course of the semester you must submit at least 5 reflection pieces. These pieces of written work are to be no more than 1 page long and the purpose is to identify and discuss a question raised in the readings. These pieces will be graded as pass/fail and worth 2% each. As long as your reflection piece shows that you have done the reading and thought critically about it you will get the 2%. You may submit more than 5, but only your best 5 will count towards your final grade.

20% and 25% - Papers
You will be required to write two papers. These papers will be your chance to develop your thoughts at greater length. Paper topics will be distributed at least one month before the deadline.

20% and 25% - Midterm and Final
At the end of each week you will receive a list of questions that concern the material that was just discussed. The questions for the final and the midterm will be selected from these lists. The questions on the midterm and the final will be a mix of short-answer (1-2 paragraphs in length) and essay questions (3+ paragraphs in length).

5% bonus – Attendance and Participation
Continued attendance and quality participation can add an additional 5% to your final grade.

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<tr>
<th>Grading Breakdown</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Pieces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
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<td>Paper 2</td>
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<td>Final</td>
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<td>Att. and Part.</td>
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5. LATE WORK
If you have good reason for being unable to submit work by a deadline, you must come discuss this at least one week in advance so that we can agree on some arrangement. If we do not agree to a new deadline, you will lose 3% per day the assignment is late. Late reflections will simply not be graded. Documented extraordinary hardship or emergency situations are of course exceptions to the above policies, and will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
# 6. Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I continued</td>
<td>- Selections from Hobbes, <em>Leviathan</em>&lt;br&gt;- Selections from Mary Midgley, <em>Wickedness</em></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>II. Human Nature and the Capacity for Evil</td>
<td>- Xunzi, “The Nature of Man is Evil”&lt;br&gt;- Selections from Mengzi, <em>Gaozǐ</em> and <em>Book II</em>.&lt;br&gt;- Short videos discussing Milgram’s obedience experiments, and Zimbardo’s Stanford prison experiment.&lt;br&gt;- Lord of the Flies (Movie)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>III continued</td>
<td>- Selections from Kant, <em>Religion and the limits of reason alone</em>&lt;br&gt;- The Act of Killing (Movie)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>IV continued</td>
<td>- Selections from Desmond Tutu, <em>No Future Without Forgiveness</em>&lt;br&gt;- Selections from Simon Wiesenthal, <em>On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness</em>&lt;br&gt;- Selections from Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton, <em>Forgiveness and Mercy</em></td>
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| 8 | IV Continued | The Reader (Movie)  
The Wave (Movie) |
| 9 | V. Implicit Bias, Privilege and Racism | Selections from Banaji and Greenwald, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*  
Peggy McIntosh, ‘White Privilege and Male Privilege’  
Elizabeth Spelman, ‘Managing Ignorance’ |
| 10 | V continued | A Class Divided (Movie)  
The Color of Fear (Movie)  
Short video on the Doll Experiments |
| 11 | VI. Capital Punishment | Ernest van den Haag, ‘On Deterrence and the Death Penalty’  
Jeffrey Reiman, ‘Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty’  
Selections from Tracy Isaacs, *Moral responsibility in collective contexts* |
| 12 | VI continued | Selections from Matthew Kramer, *The Ethics of Capital Punishment: A Philosophical Investigation of Evil and its Consequences*  
Dead Man Walking (Movie)  
The Life of David Gale (Movie) |
| 13 | VII. Mass Incarceration and Police Violence | Selections from Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America’s Police Forces*  
Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property”  
The Interrupters (Movie) |
should respond to the continued reports of police violence.

| 14 | VII continued | - Selections from Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
|    |               | - Martin Luther King, Jr., “Why We Can’t Wait”
|    |               | - Robin D. G. Kelley, “Why We Won’t Wait”

15 Final Week Catch-up and review session

7. **STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

**Academic Conduct**
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards*. [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/](https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* [http://equity.usc.edu/](http://equity.usc.edu/) or to the *Department of Public Safety* [http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us](http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us). This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

**SUPPORT SYSTEMS**
A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* [http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali](http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* [http://emergency.usc.edu/](http://emergency.usc.edu/) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.