

HONOR 2810-001 Spring 2023
Honors Core Thematic Intellectual Traditions
“Evil”
KV 1125

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Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto
(I am a human, I regard nothing human as alien)
-TERENCE

Rien ne ressemble à la vertu comme un grand crime
(Nothing resembles virtue so much as a great crime)
-LOUIS ANTOINE DE SAINT-JUST

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This Intellectual Traditions course will explore the theme of Evil through several historical, philosophical and literary perspectives. We will pursue questions about what is deemed "evil," who defines it, what causes it, where it leads, how it affects individual and collective experience, and whether it remains a useful concept.

Each week readings will focus on dimensions of lived human experience falling within a nexus of diabolical, criminal, tragic, monstrous, deceptive, cruel, and so-called "inhuman" acts and events. Such encounters with "evil" stretch our more benign associations of the adjective *humane*; they also pose critical problems for any attempt to remove or remediate the "worst" among the human community.

Descriptions of human tragedy remain steeped in notions of personal and collective responsibility, attaching painful effects to malevolent or negligent causes. While modern societies tend to move beyond archaic concepts like inherited guilt, dispensing with religious-tinged words like *sin* and *vice*, the notion of *evil* remains a potent recourse for the modern imagination confronted by human suffering. We will compare different attempts to explain evil, from theodicy to anthropodicy, while posing questions about the potential value (and harm) of such explanations.

REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS:

- PDF readings (on Canvas)
- *Maldoror*, COMTE DE LAUTRÉAMONT
- *A Tempest*, AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:

Attendance & Participation (15%)
Weekly Responses (25%)
Brief Presentation (10%)
Reflective Essay (25%)
Final Exam (25%)

The Weekly Responses will respond to the assigned readings for each week. Each student will give a Brief Presentation (5-10 minutes) discussing one of the assigned readings. A Reflective Essay will discuss one or more of the assigned readings as it can be applied to either a literary work or to a film (see film suggestions below). The Final Exam will contain short and long answer questions that focus on concepts and issues discussed during the course of the semester.

CONTENT ACCOMMODATIONS:

As its title suggests, this course pays witness to experiences of human suffering as well as cases and visions of moral depravity. We will look at and discuss sensitive and sometimes upsetting material. As a concept, and perhaps by definition, "evil" turns our gaze toward the limits of the imagination. I will do my best to frame our discussions and to make room for students' expressed needs and preferences regarding issues that some may (and probably will) find triggering and/or emotionally difficult. Content accommodations will be considered on an individual basis discussed beforehand with the instructor, and some requests may require documentation. Students should reach out as soon as possible to request topic- or issue-related content accommodations of any kind.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The University's plagiarism policy is strictly enforced. According to the Student Code, plagiarism is defined as "the unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person's work in, or as the basis for one's own work offered for academic consideration or credit..." Examples of plagiarism include "representing as one's own, without attribution, any other person's words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression." Disciplinary action for plagiarizing papers or exams ranges from a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, to suspension or expulsion from the University.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS (TEXTS TO BE DISCUSSED ON THE DAYS LISTED)

Week 1 – EVIL ORIGINS

1/9 INTRODUCTION
1/11 JOHN MILTON, from *Paradise Lost*; FREDERICK THOMAS ELWORTHY, from *The Evil Eye*
1/13 MILTON & ELWORTHY, cont'd

Week 2 – POSSESSION

- 1/16 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no class)
1/18 from "The Trial of Husain Suliman Karrar"; FREDERICK DOUGLASS, from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
1/20 MICHEL DE CERTEAU, from *The Possession at Loudun*

Week 3 – SORCERY

- 1/23 JULES MICHELET, from *Satanism and Witchcraft*
1/25 LÉOCADIE EKOUE, "Aze and the Incommensurable"; ELIAS KIFON BONGMBA, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Wimbun Tfu"
1/27 MICHELET, BONGMBA, EKOUE, cont'd

Week 4 – DEFILEMENT

- 1/30 SAINT AUGUSTINE, from *Confessions*
2/1 MARY DOUGLAS, from *Purity & Danger*
2/3 AUGUSTINE & DOUGLAS, cont'd

Week 5 – EVIL NATURE

- 2/6 MARQUIS DE SADE, from *Juliette*; "Dialogue between a Priest & a Dying Man"
2/8 SIMONE WEIL, from *Gravity & Grace*
2/10 SADE & WEIL, cont'd

Week 6 – COMTE DE LAUTRÉAMONT (ISIDORE DUCASSE)

- 2/13 *Maldoror*, 1st-2nd canto
2/15 *Maldoror*, 3rd-4th canto
2/17 *Maldoror*, 5th-6th canto

Week 7 – EVIL KNOWLEDGE

- 2/20 Presidents Day (no class)
2/22 SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ, from "Redondillas"; "A Response of the Poet..."
2/24 JOSEPH DE MAISTRE, from *St. Petersburg Dialogues*

Week 8 – CRIME

- 2/27 JEAN GENET, from *The Thief's Journal*; "The Criminal Child"
3/1 MICHEL FOUCAULT, from *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother...*

3/3 GENET & FOUCAULT, cont'd

Spring Break 3/5-3/12

Week 9 – AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

- 3/13 *A Tempest*, "Introduction," Acts I-II
3/15 *A Tempest*, Act III
3/17 *A Tempest* (cont'd); "Poetry & Knowledge"

Week 10 – POWER

- 3/20 BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, from *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*
3/22 M. NOURBESE PHILIP, from *Zong!*
3/24 DE LAS CASAS & PHILIP, cont'd

Week 11– CRUELTY

- 3/27 VALENTINE PENROSE, from *The Bloody Countess*
3/29 CLARICE LISPECTOR, from *Crônicas*; "A Chicken," "The Egg & The Chicken"
3/31 PENROSE, LISPECTOR, cont'd

Week 12 – BANALITY

- 4/3 CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, from *Flowers of Evil*
4/5 HANNAH ARENDT, from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
4/7 BAUDELAIRE & ARENDT, cont'd

Week 13 – TERROR

- 4/10 JEAN BAUDRILLARD, from *The Transparency of Evil*
4/12 GAYATRI SPIVAK, "Terror: A speech after 9-11"
4/14 BAUDRILLARD & SPIVAK, cont'd

Week 14 – CONTAINMENT (THREAT)

- 4/17 GEORGES BATAILLE, from *Literature & Evil*; "Evil in Platonism & Sadism"
4/19 GANANATH OBEYESEKERE, "Radical Evil & the Notion of Conscience"
4/21 BATAILLE & OBEYESEKERE, cont'd

Week 15 – FINAL EXAM

FILM OPTIONS FOR REFLECTIVE ESSAY TOPICS (not required):

Häxan (1929), Benjamin Christensen
The Night of the Hunter (1955), Charles Laughton
Diabolique (1955), Henri-Georges Clouzot
The Bad Seed (1956), Mervyn LeRoy
The Seventh Seal (1957), Ingmar Bergman
Mother Joan of the Angels (1961), Jerzy Kawalerowicz
Landru (1963), Claude Chabrol
Mademoiselle (1966), Tony Richardson
An Angel for Satan (1966), Camillo Mastrocinque
Marat/Sade (1967), Peter Brook
Theorem (1968), Pier Paolo Pasolini
The Cremator (1969), Juraj Herz
Arsenic & Old Lace (1969), Robert Scheerer
The Conformist (1970), Bernardo Bertolucci
Don't Deliver Us From Evil (1971), Joël Séria
The Devils (1971), Ken Russell
Daughters of Darkness (1971), Harry Kümel
Diabeł (1972), Andrzej Żuławski
The Night Porter (1974), Liliana Cavani
Lacombe, Lucien (1974), Louis Malle
The Story of Sin (1975), Walerian Borowczyk
O Território (1981), Raúl Ruiz
Possession (1981), Andrzej Żuławski
Blue Velvet (1986), David Lynch
Adoration (1987), Olivier Smolders
Hellraiser (1987), Clive Barker
Damnation (1988), Béla Tarr
Cold Light of Day (1989), Fhiona-Louise
Society (1989), Brian Yuzna
The Good Son (1993), Joseph Ruben
Heavenly Creatures (1994), Peter Jackson
Se7en (1995), David Fincher
Office Killer (1997), Cindy Sherman
The Skeleton Key (2005), Iain Softley
Bluebeard (2009), Catherine Breillat
Antichrist (2009), Lars von Trier
The Act of Killing (2012), Joshua Oppenheimer
The Purge (2013), James DeMonaco
The Cursed Ones (2015), Nana Obiri Yeboah
The Witch (2016), Robert Eggers
I Am Not a Witch (2017), Rungano Nyoni
Crazy, Not Insane (2020), Alex Gibney
Benedetta (2021), Paul Verhoeven
Titane (2021), Julia Ducournau