

RS 121: Evil / Fall 2018

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo
Department of Religious Studies
MW 11:30-12:50 p.m., SJ2 2007

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Email: dseljak@uwaterloo.ca (put course number RS 121 in subject line)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9:30-11:00 am or by appointment. I have an open door policy, so do not hesitate to ask if we might have a conversation.

Laptop rules and etiquette: The use of laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices is strongly discouraged. Phone use (including texting) is not permitted. Please respect the right of other students to learn without distractions.

Why do I have this policy? Because [research](#) shows that laptop and device use in class harms the effectiveness of teaching and learning, both for the user and the people around them.

By the way, students who believe *most strongly* that they can multitask while learning perform attain the *lowest scores* on tests of learning and retention.

This course is about the death and suffering of millions, even tens of millions, of people. It is about slavery, colonialism and imperialism, war and genocide, intentional mass starvation, the threat of nuclear weapons, and ecological destruction. While modern society has brought many advances, it has also given us the power to kill on an unprecedented scale. Much of the evil of the 20th and 21st centuries would be impossible without modern technology, bureaucracy, ideology, and the political, economic, and social structures of a modern society. We will examine how religious communities respond to these new forms of evil.

We will look at a number of religious thinkers who attempt to understand modern societies and the unique forms of evil they produce. These thinkers turn to ancient writings, ideas, values, and practices to address the problem of evil in the modern world. They come up with some startling suggestions. For example, many of them find that their own traditions often contribute to the problem. They also find sources of wisdom and goodness in these traditions in order to offer solutions to the evil they see around them. Finally, they allow us to analyze the nature of the evil in the world and in each one of us. As this is a first-year course in Religious Studies, we will also learn how Religious Studies scholars look at religion and the specific traditions we will be examining.

Required Readings and Viewings

Elie Wiesel, *Night*. (ISBN 9780374500016)

Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*. (ISBN 9780770435660)

Articles on e-Reserves

Assigned web pages

Assigned video presentations

The assigned reading list may appear intimidating. Do not be concerned about the number of readings from religious scriptures. Each passage is only a few paragraphs long. Other documents, such as the Ten Commitments, Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, and the Doctrine of Discovery are also quite short, usually only a few pages long. The book *Night* can be read in a few hours. *Amazing Grace* is a bit longer, but not much, and it is very engaging.

Grades, Tests and Assignments

Two Assignments (15% each for 30% total). 750 words max. each.

Assignment One: Due October 3

Assignment Two: Due November 14

Late penalty for assignments: One mark out of 15 per 24-hour period, including weekends, beginning at 11:59:59 pm on the due date.

Always contact your instructor before the deadline if you are going to be late. With email and voicemail, there is no excuse for not contacting your professor.

Required for your assignment:

- 1. Back up your work frequently.** Computer problems are NOT acceptable excuses for late assignments. If you have your work backed up and your printer fails, you can at least hand it in electronically.
- 2. Keep an electronic or paper copy** of all your work for at least 12 months after the course ends. This is a good idea for all your courses but it is a requirement for RS 121.

Failure to follow these instructions could lead to late penalties or a mark of zero on the assignment.

Five of Six Tests (10% each for 50% total). Midterm tests are all short multiple choice tests.

Test One: September 26. Covers material from September 11 to 25

Test Two: October 15. Covers material from September 26 to October 14

Test Three: October 29. Covers material from October 15 to 28

Test Four: November 7. Covers material from October 29 to November 6

Test Five: November 21. Covers material from November 7 to November 20

Test Six: December 3. Covers material from November 21 to December 2

Your Top Five. I will count your five best scores. You must write all six tests, and the lowest score will be automatically dropped.

Class Participation (20%)

Class participation in discussion will be important. The first rule of class participation is showing up to class. Hence regular attendance is expected. **Students are allowed two unexcused absences, after which they will lose two grades per absence.** The second rule is keeping up with the assigned readings and viewings. The third rule of class participation is participating, that is, having something to say. Finally, participation requires that we respect one another, allowing each person to speak and having their contribution respected.

Extra class participation marks can be gained by attending on-campus speaker events. See below.

Policy regarding Illness, Missing Tests, and Failure to Meet Requirements

With regards to tests and assignments, I follow the same policy as that found in the UW Examination Regulations:

- A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the "University of Waterloo Verification of Illness" form or it will not be accepted.
- If you fall sick on the day of the test, contact your instructor at the first possible opportunity.
- If a student has a test deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test on the first Friday following the test date.

- The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations or hand in assignments.
- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative test or examination time or to modify an assignment deadline.
- If you need an accommodation for other reasons (for example, a family crisis or you are representing St. Jerome's or the University of Waterloo at a sports event or academic competition), please see me.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Federated University and Affiliated Colleges are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Academic Integrity Office (UW): A resource for students and instructors.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71 (Student Discipline).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Students who decide to file a grievance should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances). For more information, students should contact the Associate Dean of St. Jerome's University.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline or University of Waterloo Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) if a ground for an appeal can be established. In such a case, read St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals.

Note for Students with Disabilities: The AccessAbility Services (AS) Office, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

The Writing and Communication Centre: The Writing and Communication Centre works across all faculties to help students clarify their ideas, develop their voices, and write in the style appropriate to their disciplines. WCC staff offer one-on-one support in planning assignments and presentations, using and documenting research, organizing and structuring papers, and revising for clarity and coherence. You can make multiple appointments throughout the term, or drop in at the Dana Porter Library for quick questions or feedback. To book a 50-minute appointment and to see drop-in hours, visit www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre.

Speakers on Campus.

You can earn extra class participation grades by attending approved lecture events on campus. For example, Dr. Alicia Batten will be speaking about André Trocmé, a Protestant pastor in France who helped to hide Jewish refugees from the Nazis during World War II. See details [here](#). I will email announcements for approved speaker events.

Class and Reading Schedule

Dates—with exception of assignment due dates and test dates—are subject to change.

Sept. 10	Evil in the Modern Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Evil in the Modern Age” module on Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).
Sept. 12	Evil in the Modern Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read “Evil in the Modern Age” module on Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).
Sept. 17	The Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Pew Research Centre, “<u>Jews.</u>” • Watch “<u>The Path to Nazi Genocide.</u>”
Sept. 19	Judaism and the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Elie Wiesel, <i>Night</i>. • Selected readings in English from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Genesis <u>12</u>, <u>15</u>, <u>17</u>
Sept. 24	Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ten Commandments: <u>Exodus 20:1–17</u> • Read Michael Lerner: “<u>God: A Jewish Renewal (Kabbalistic-Mystical-Neo-Hasidic) Approach to God.</u>” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stop at this sentence: “So who is God? In my Jewish Renewal account, God is the Force of Healing and Transformation that calls the world to love and mutual caring.” • Read Michael Lerner, <u>The Ten Commitments</u>
Sept. 26	Roman Catholicism, Innovation, and Modern Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test One • Pope Paul VI, <u>Nostra Aetate</u> • <u>Genesis 1-3</u> • <u>Luke 6, 15</u> • <u>Matthew 5, 25</u>
Oct. 1	Roman Catholicism, Innovation, and Modern Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gregory Baum, “John Paul II and Structural Sin,” from <i>Essays in Critical Theology</i>.
Oct. 3	Imperialism and Colonialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment One due • Read Robert Miller, Doctrine of Discovery. http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org/index.htm, click on “2014 Conference,” click on “The Doctrine of Discovery: The International Law of Colonialism, Robert Miller’s Ten Elements that Constitute the Doctrine – pdf.” • Gustavo Guitierrez, “Idolatry and Death,” from <i>The God of Life</i>.
Oct. 8-10	Thanksgiving and Study Break	
Oct. 12 Friday, Oct. 12 follows a Wednesday schedule to make up for Study Day on Oct. 10.	Colonization and Indigenous peoples in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “The Legacy,” in <u>What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation</u>, pp. 103-111. • Cindy Blackstock, “<u>Summit Keynote</u>,” Truth and Reconciliation Response Projects, University of Waterloo. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lecture begins at 30:00 mark and goes to the end. • “<u>Response of the Churches to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.</u>”

Oct. 15	Gandhi, Colonialism, and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Two • Mahatma Gandhi selections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Brute Force” ○ “How Can India Become Free?” ○ “Italy and India” ○ “Passive Resistance” ○ “What is True Civilization?”
Oct. 17	Gandhi, Colonialism, and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mahatma Gandhi selections
Oct. 22	Ideology, Modernity and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the “Ideology and Evil in Modern Society,” module on Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).
Oct. 24	Ideology, Modernity and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the “Ideology and Evil in Modern Society,” module on Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).
Oct. 29	Economic Liberalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Three • Read Linda McQuaig, “Nudists and Capitalists,” from <i>All You Can Eat: Greed, lust, and the new capitalism</i>. • Watch The Corporation, video presentation.
Oct. 31	Economic Liberalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Linda McQuaig, “Nudists and Capitalists,” from <i>All You Can Eat: Greed, lust, and the new capitalism</i>. • Watch The Corporation, video presentation.
Nov. 5	MLK and Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Other America” in <i>The Radical King</i>.
Nov. 7	Pope Francis on the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Four • Read #52-75 and #202-216 of Apostolic Exhortation <u>Evangelii Gaudium</u> of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops.
Nov. 12	Pope Francis on the ecological crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read #10-26 and #65-75 of <u>Laudate Si’!</u>. (<i>On Care for our Common Home</i>).
Nov. 14	Introduction to Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment Two due. • Readings from the <i>Dhammapada</i>: • http://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_buddha.htm • http://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_mind.htm
Nov. 19	Buddhism and the Ecological Crisis: Thich Nhat Hanh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plum Village, “<u>Five Mindfulness Trainings.</u>” • Plum Village, “<u>The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings.</u>”
Nov. 21	Buddhist eco-feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Five • Stephanie Kaza, “Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism, and the Environmental Crisis,” from <i>Ecofeminism and the Sacred</i>.
Nov. 26	Buddhist eco-feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephanie Kaza, “Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism, and the Environmental Crisis,” from <i>Ecofeminism and the Sacred</i>.
Nov. 28	Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reading
Dec. 3	Final class test.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Six

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/07/27/class-cellphone-and-laptop-use-lowers-exam-scores-new-study-shows>

The Myth of Multitasking

New study shows that splitting attention between lecture and cellphone or laptop use hinders long-term retention, and those in class suffer from others' use of devices.

By [Emma Whitford](#)

July 27, 2018

Yes, cellphones and laptops do affect students' grades, and no, students can't multitask as well as they say they can.

Arnold Glass, a psychology professor at [Rutgers University at New Brunswick](#), and Mengxue Kang, a graduate student, [recently published a study](#) in *Educational Psychology* that they say reveals a causal link between cellphone and laptop use during class and poorer exam scores.

Glass has been teaching for over 40 years and has been proactive about bringing new technology into the classroom. He's noticed changes in his students' behavior as they've become more used to the technology, and some of those changes are for the worse.

"For about five or six years, [student] performance was getting better and better," he said. "But because I was attuned to this, and because I was collecting an enormous amount of data, I was immediately aware when things started changing. Students started ignoring me -- they used to not ignore me."

Previous studies on the impact of personal devices on student performance have measured individual student scores against those of their peers, but, using what Glass calls a "platinum standard" method, Glass and Kang designed their experiment to test students' performance against themselves. One hundred and eighteen students, split between two virtually identical sections of an upper-level psychology course, were told they could use their electronic devices in class during half of the lecture periods and asked to keep them put away during the other half. To enforce the rule, a proctor attended class on device-free days.

Glass and Kang measured student performance with daily quizzes, three unit exams and a cumulative exam over the course of the semester. Exam scores were poorer for all students on the material covered on device-approved days, regardless of their individual decisions to use their device or not. [Previous lab studies](#) have noted the effects of classroom distractions, but Glass and Kang's work confirmed those effects in an actual classroom.

"Students themselves shrug it off and say, 'Oh no, I can divide attention, this isn't bothering me,'" Glass said. "These are large enough effects that students' grades were clearly affected by [laptop and cellphone use]. Students really are hurting themselves by ignoring me -- this isn't just my ego."

Students' insistence on their ability to multitask isn't a matter of stubbornness; divided attention had no impact on day-to-day performance and students could accurately recall what happened in class that day even if they were using a cellphone or laptop. But the use of a device had a significant impact on long-term retention, a consequence Glass sees as more "insidious" because it happens over time.

"This is one of the occasional cases in human cognition where our intuitions mislead us, because even though they can divide their attention well enough to remember in the moment ... what happens is that a week later, they've pretty much forgotten what happened in class," Glass said. "What's the point of going to class in the first place if a week later you don't remember it?"

In light of his findings, Glass bans laptops and cellphones during lectures, and he's made a habit of calling out his students when he sees them using one.

"I also tell [my students] I'll do something which most faculty will not do anymore: I'll call them out when I notice them ignoring me, and I'll call them out not because I'm tremendously offended by this, but because I know it negatively affects them."

He encourages other faculty to do the same but said that class evaluations discourage them from making their students uncomfortable.

"They wouldn't want to see their evaluations go down, and they're right, their evaluations will go down if they call students out," Glass said. "They want to maintain an atmosphere where the class views them as their friend and entertainer, so I don't really expect instructors to follow my advice."