

## RS 121: Evil / Winter 2023

St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo  
Department of Religious Studies  
**MW 10:00-11:20 AM, SJ2 2002**

**Land acknowledgment.** St. Jerome's University and the University of Waterloo are situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Haudenosaunee people of Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. This territory is the traditional lands of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples.

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

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1:00-2:30 pm [Online](#); informally after class; or by appointment (in-person or online).

### CORRESPONDENCE

The best way to reach me is email. Please put the course identifier (RS 121) in the subject line. If you need to reach me by phone, please call my work cell (226-747-5812) during the hours of 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday to Friday only. **Do not use this number on the weekend.** Please text before calling.

### DEVICE RULES AND ETIQUETTE

**Phone use (including texting) is not permitted.** A first offense will result in a discussion. Each subsequent offense will mean a deduction of 2 marks on your class participation grade.

The use of laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices is strongly discouraged. If you are using your device for anything other than note-taking, please sit in the back row, so that your device use does not distract other students. **Please respect the right of other students to learn without distractions.**

I have this policy because [research](#) shows that laptop and device use in class interferes with learning both for the user and the people around them. By the way, students who believe *most strongly* that they can multitask while learning 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 dominate, exploit, and kill on an unprecedented scale. Much of the evil of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 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. Specifically, we will look at 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 conclusions. 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. 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.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Students in this course will

1. Understand what makes modernity unique in human development as well as how this creates novel forms of harm;
2. Acquire basic, accurate information regarding the world's major religious traditions and how these traditions change in the encounter with modern forms of evil;
3. Analyze the issues, questions, and ideas that arise within religious traditions and communities in the context of modernity and its challenges;
4. Develop a *critical approach* to the study of society, modernity, and religion so that students will be able to *ask critical questions* of religious and social phenomena as well as scholarly explanations of those phenomena.

## **REQUIRED READINGS AND VIEWINGS**

Elie Wiesel, *Night*.

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step*

Articles on e-Reserves

Assigned web pages and electronic articles [see e-Reserves for this course]

Assigned video presentations

**The assigned reading list may appear intimidating.** Do not be concerned about the number of readings; most are quite short. For example, readings from religious scriptures are only a few paragraphs long. Other documents, such as the Doctrine of Discovery, are also quite short, usually only a few pages long. The book *Night* can be read in a few hours.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

**Five of Six Tests (15% each for 75% total).**

Midterm tests are all short multiple-choice tests.

Test One: January 25. Covers material from January 9 to January 23 plus Module 1 on Learn site.

Test Two: February 8. Covers material from January 25 to February 6

Test Three: March 1. Covers material from February 6 to February 27

Test Four: March 15. Covers material from February 27 to March 13

Test Five: March 27. Covers material from March 13 to March 25

Test Six: April 5. Covers material from March 27 to April 3 plus Module 12 on Learn site.

**Your Top Five.** I will count your five best test scores. The lowest score will be automatically dropped.

**Written Assignment (15%).** 750 words max. each. **Due March 22**

- This assignment includes written document and research notes.
- A great resource is the University of Waterloo's [assignment planner](#).

### **Class Attendance and Participation (10%)**

Class participation in discussion is important. The first rule of class participation is showing up to class. Hence regular attendance and participation in class discussion is expected.

## **POLICY ON LATE WORK, MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, AND MAKE-UP TESTS**

### **Missed Test**

- For students who miss a test in line with the policies of this course outline, a make-up test session will be arranged.
- Otherwise, a missed test will receive a mark of zero.

### **Late penalty for assignment**

- One mark out of 15 per 24-hour period, including weekends, beginning at 10:00 am 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** to avoid losing work due to technology issue: Failure to follow these instructions could lead to late penalties or a mark of zero on the assignment.
  - **Back up your work frequently.** Computer problems are NOT acceptable excuses for late assignments. If you have your work backed up and/or your printer fails, you can at least hand it in electronically.
  - **Keep an electronic or paper copy** of all your work (including research notes) 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.

### **Class participation grade**

- **Students are allowed two unexcused absences**, after which they will lose **one mark out of 10 per absence up** to a total of 10 marks.
- **If you do find yourself unable to attend class due to illness**, you will need to contact me and, where appropriate, use the University of Waterloo [Self-declared Absence](#) site or the [University of Waterloo Verification of Illness](#) form. Please note that, once you declare an absence using this site or get a medical note, **you must also contact your professor** to arrange for any accommodations (retaking a Quiz, submitting an assignment late, avoiding an unexcused absence penalty, etc.).
- **If you miss more than two classes**, you can earn extra class participation grades by attending approved lecture events on campus. These events will reflect the course theme of evil and/or religion in the modern world. I will email announcements for approved speaker events, but students may propose lectures as well.
- Besides attendance, you will be graded on participation in classroom discussions based on your knowledge of the assigned readings and lecture material as well as the originality and importance of the contribution you make to the class.

## UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO REGULATIONS

With regards to class attendance and participation as well as assignments (in-class and handed-in), we will follow these [UW 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 a due date, contact your instructor at the first possible opportunity.
- If a student has an assignment deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, the instructor will establish a new due date, which will include the same academic penalties for lateness as the original assignment.
- 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 (e.g., at a sports event or academic competition), please see me.

## OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) for more information.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. [Read the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome’s Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. Check the University of Waterloo’s [Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information. 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 instructor, 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 offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the St. Jerome's University Policy on [Student Appeals](#).

**Note for students with disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, 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 AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

**The Writing and Communication Centre:** The Writing and Communication Centre (WCC) 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](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre).

### **Mental Health Support**

- The Faculty of Arts provides details on available mental health support on its [website](#).
- [Campus Wellness](#) - Counselling and Health Services
- Sean Hayes, Director of Campus Ministry ([sean.hayes@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:sean.hayes@uwaterloo.ca)) is available as a resource.

### **Student Affairs**

- [The St. Jerome's Student Affairs team](#) works to create healthy and accessible learning environments, to encourage students to take ownership and accountability in advocating for their own unique student experience, and to foster opportunities for growth and leadership development. For additional UW resources, visit the [Student Success Office - Learning Resources](#)

## CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

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

<b>Jan. 9</b>	Evil in the Modern Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read “Evil in the Modern Age,” Module 1 on Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).</li> </ul>
<b>Jan. 11</b>	Evil in the Modern Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See Jan. 9 reading.</li> <li>Pew Research Center, <a href="#">Future of World Religions</a></li> </ul>
<b>Jan. 16</b>	The Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read Pew Research Centre, “<a href="#">Jews.</a>”</li> <li>Watch “<a href="#">The Path to Nazi Genocide.</a>”</li> </ul>
<b>Jan. 18</b>	Judaism and the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read Elie Wiesel, <i>Night</i>.</li> <li>Selected readings in English from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genesis <a href="#">12</a>, <a href="#">15</a>, <a href="#">17</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Jan. 23</b>	Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Ten Commandments: <a href="#">Exodus 20:1–17</a></li> <li>Read Michael Lerner, <a href="#">The Ten Commitments</a></li> </ul>
<b>Jan. 25</b>	Roman Catholicism, Innovation, and Modern Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Test One</b></li> <li>Read Pew Research Centre, “<a href="#">Christians.</a>”</li> <li>Pope Paul VI, <a href="#">Nostra Aetate</a></li> <li><a href="#">Genesis 1-3</a></li> <li><a href="#">Luke 6, 15</a></li> <li><a href="#">Matthew 5, 25</a></li> </ul>
<b>Jan. 30</b>	Roman Catholicism, Innovation, and Modern Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gregory Baum, “Critical Theology,” pp. 168-181.</li> </ul>
<b>Feb. 1</b>	Imperialism and Colonialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robert J. Miller, <a href="#">The Doctrine of Discovery</a></li> <li><a href="#">21 Things You May Not Have Known about the Indian Act</a></li> </ul>
<b>Feb 6</b>	Colonization and Indigenous peoples in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>J.R. Miller, “The State, the Church, and Indian Residential Schools in Canada,” in <i>Religion and Public Life in Canada</i>, ed. Marguerite Van Die, pp. 109-129.</li> </ul>
<b>Feb 8</b>	Colonization and Indigenous peoples in Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Test Two</b></li> <li>Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “The Legacy,” in <a href="#">What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation</a>, pp. 103-111.</li> <li><a href="#">Response of the Churches to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada</a></li> <li><a href="#">Apology by Roman Catholic Bishops to Indigenous People</a></li> <li><a href="#">Pope Francis apology over residential schools</a></li> </ul>

<b>Feb. 13</b>	Gandhi, Colonialism, and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read Pew Research Centre, "<a href="#">Hindus</a>"</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Dark Side of British History</a> (warning: distressing details!)</li> <li>• BBC News, <a href="#">Churchill's legacy still painful for Indians</a></li> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi selections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "Brute Force"</li> <li>○ "How Can India Become Free?"</li> <li>○ "Italy and India"</li> <li>○ "Passive Resistance"</li> <li>○ "What is True Civilization?"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Feb. 15</b>	Gandhi, Colonialism, and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See Feb. 13 readings</li> </ul>
<b>Feb. 20-24</b>	Reading Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Family Day and Study Break</b></li> </ul>
<b>Feb. 27</b>	<b>Online class.</b> Ideology, Modernity and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read "Economic Liberalism," Module 7 on Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).</li> <li>• In Module 7.3 Watch "The Corporation."</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 1</b>	<b>In-person class.</b> Ideology, Modernity and Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Test Three</b></li> <li>• See Feb. 27 readings.</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 6</b>	Economic Liberalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read Linda McQuaig, "Nudists and Capitalists," from <i>All You Can Eat: Greed, lust, and the new capitalism</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 8</b>	Economic Liberalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class video presentation, "The New Corporation."</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 13</b>	Pope Francis on the economic and ecological crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read #52-60 and #202-216 of <i>Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium</i> of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops.</li> <li>• Read #10-26 and #65-75 of <a href="#">Laudate Si'</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 15</b>	Introduction to Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Test Four</b></li> <li>• Read Pew Research Centre, "<a href="#">Buddhists</a>."</li> <li>• Readings from the <i>Dhammapada</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_buddha.htm">http://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_buddha.htm</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_mind.htm">http://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_mind.htm</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.kwanumzen.org/wp-content/uploads/Heart-Sutra-in-English-text1.pdf">http://www.kwanumzen.org/wp-content/uploads/Heart-Sutra-in-English-text1.pdf</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 20</b>	Buddhism and the Ecological Crisis: Thich Nhat Hanh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plum Village, "<a href="#">Five Mindfulness Trainings</a>."</li> <li>• Plum Village, "<a href="#">The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings</a>."</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 22</b>	Buddhist eco-feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Assignment due</b></li> <li>• bell hooks, "Feminist Politics: Where we stand."</li> <li>• Stephanie Kaza, "Acting with Compassion: Buddhism, Feminism, and the Environmental Crisis," from <i>Ecofeminism and the Sacred</i>.</li> </ul>

<b>Mar. 27</b>	Buddhist eco-feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Test Five</b></li> <li>• Stephanie Kaza, “Acting with Compassion.”</li> </ul>
<b>Mar. 29</b>	Vandana Shiva and eco-feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Vandana Shiva on why the food we eat matters</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Solutions to the food and ecological crisis facing us today</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Vandana Shiva videos</a></li> </ul>
<b>April 3</b>	Religious responses to evil in the modern world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read “Conclusion: Religious Responses to Evil in the Modern World”, Module 12 on the Learn website (found under CONTENTS tab).</li> </ul>
<b>April 5</b>	Final class test.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Test Six</b></li> </ul>

### IN CASE OF CAMPUS SHUT DOWN

Since Canada is still experiencing the effects of the COVID pandemic along with an increase in other respiratory infections, St. Jerome’s University and the University of Waterloo may move to remote teaching. Fortunately, an online version of RS 121 is offered through the Centre for Extended Learning. So, instead of lectures, I will assign students appropriate modules from the CEL version of this course. We will also schedule “synchronous” remote learning. You would be required to “attend” class virtually on those dates from 10-11:20; attendance and class participation requirements will remain the same. We will follow as much as possible the reading and course schedule above.

All assignments and evaluation values would remain the same. The assignment will be submitted via the Learn web site. Quizzes will be done remotely through the Learn web site.

Whatever the circumstances, all need to stay up-to-date regarding Health and Safety protocols and to ensure that we’re complying with requirements: [On-campus Health and Safety Requirements](#). We will need to stay home if we are ill, suspect we are ill and/or if we have been advised to self-isolate or quarantine. Here is information about Covid-19 [Assessment and Vaccination](#) on campus.

As mentioned above, **if you do find yourself unable to attend class due to an extenuating circumstance**, you will need to contact me and, where appropriate, use the University of Waterloo [Self-declared Absence](#) site or the [University of Waterloo Verification of Illness](#) form. Please note that, once you declare an absence using this site or get a medical note, **you must also contact your professor** to arrange for any accommodations (retaking a Quiz, submitting an assignment late, avoiding an unexcused absence penalty, etc.).

I too may be impacted by illness, suspected illness, self-isolation/quarantine or family care duties. Depending on the situation, we will catch-up on missed lecture material in a later in-person class, switch to online modules, meet synchronously on-line, or use recorded narrated slide presentations.

In other words, we will muddle through somehow by being flexible and compassionate towards one another.



<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."