

PHILOSOPHERS THINK ABOUT GOOD AND EVIL

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Fall Semester

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Office Hours: by appointment

Short description:

The words “good” and “evil” seem to be old-fashioned. However, we do use them more frequently than we think. We use them when we talk about the people who surround us and their actions, when we are amazed by the enormous progress of science and medicine, when we are horrified by the atrocities of civil and other wars, when we read about totalitarian regimes which suppress freedom of speech and of press, and when we hear about internet bullying and the mental suffering it causes children.

Good and evil have been a topic of philosophical reflection since its very beginning. This course intends to make students familiar with the history of thought about good and evil. The course will focus on philosophers from antiquity (Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus), from the Middle Ages (Augustine, Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas) and from the modern period (Leibniz, Kant). Attention will also be paid to recent discussions of evil in the wake of the holocaust (H. Arendt “The banality of Evil”).

Among the questions which will be dealt with: the opposition between good and evil, the difference between bad and evil, the distinction between metaphysical, natural and moral evil, the “existence” of evil in a world created by a good God, religious versus secular views of evil, the sources of evil, human free will and responsibility, doing evil with words.

Assessment:

Minor assignments: weekly assignments 10%

Mid Term: assignment 15%

Final requirement: in-class exam 65%

Participation and attendance: 10% of the grade.

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else’s work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an

exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.