PHIL 211: Why are Bad People Bad? *

Course Logistics

Instructor: Dr. Anton
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Course Description

In this course, we shall consider the timeless quandary, *why are bad people bad?* People who tend to behave in standard socially acceptable ways are shocked by those who do not. Contemporary scholars examine past societies and present struggling areas and find it difficult to imagine how slavery or genocide ever seemed like a good idea. It is difficult for those of us who typically follow a basic moral code to imagine the motives that could drive someone to behave in such ways. On the other hand, it is likely that those who bully, torture, rape, and kill others wonder why everyone doesn't want to behave the same way.

This course is designed to explore these and related issues in detail. Students will consider causes of bad habits, moral ignorance, and vicious motives. We shall discuss the prevalence of certain moral failings. Finally, we shall consider what, if anything, can be done to minimize them in ourselves and society write large.

Course Trigger Warning:

The content of this course is very difficult for many to stomach. We will be reading, viewing, and considering evidence from both real-life and hypothetical cases of truly deplorable behavior. Whenever possible, Dr. Anton shall try to provide in-class trigger-warnings prior to displaying difficult images and films. However, given the subject matter of the course, it is not feasible for Dr. Anton to provide trigger warnings prior to every difficult topic's mention. Students should be mentally prepared each and every class to discuss difficult topics without warning, which include (but are not limited to): murder, torture, sexual assault (including rape), extreme violence, bullying, manipulation, hate, prejudice, and genocide.

Course Delivery Method

This course is entirely online. All work will be assigned, completed, and submitted through the course Blackboard page. Students are required to be familiar with Blackboard. All readings, quizzes, assignment instructions, and lectures will be provided via Blackboard. Students are encouraged to try to access materials in advance and to notify Dr. Anton immediately if they have difficulty accessing the course materials. For technology assistance, call WKU IT services at 270-745-7000.

Course Objectives

PHIL 211 is a Social and Cultural Colonnade Connections Course(3 hours)
Students will investigate ways in which individuals shape, and are shaped by, the societies and cultures within which they live. Courses will consider the ethical questions and shared cultural values that shape societal norms and behaviors, the independent and collective or collaborative artistic expression of those values, and/or the role of social and cultural institutions in developing and sustaining norms, values, and beliefs.

Students will:

1. Analyze the development of self in relation to others and society:

Students will consider various theories of vice that examine how one's background (including one's culture) and situational influences contribute to the development of character. For example, students will discuss possible cultural and societal influences of tragedies such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide as well as the impact of traumatic experiences in childhood on a person's development. Students will consider both how bad individuals come to power as well as how groups interact in the face of evil.

2. Examine diverse values that form civically engaged and informed members of society.

Students will study and evaluate various theories of human nature based on distinct ideas of values. For example, students will compare the views of philosophers such as Mengzi and Xunzi who disagree about the moral quality of human beings at birth and, as a result, advance slightly different social programs based on their anticipated effectiveness in cultivating the best citizens possible. In addition, students will consider different views of responsibility, which consider whether and when it is fair to hold others accountable and how best accountability can shape a society for the better.

3. Evaluate solutions to real-world social and cultural problems.

Students will study and consider various models of rehabilitation of the evil mind. Students will not only consider philosophical approaches to moral and social improvement from thinkers such as Mengzi, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Arendt, but also, they will survey and evaluate historical and contemporary attempts to improve society. For example, students will consider whether legally sanctioned deterrents such as the death penalty successfully discourage capital offenses, whether the right to free speech positively or negatively affects hate groups such as the KKK, and whether various attempts to minimize recidivism such as rehabilitation programs and "three strikes" policies on violent crime could have a positive impact.

In addition, this course aims to teach students how to:

4. Utilize basic formal elements, techniques, concepts, and vocabulary of philosophy, including the concepts and techniques of argumentation, philosophical theories, and core techniques and concepts of the interpretation of philosophical texts.
5. Analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments, (including a demonstrated ability to distinguish between valid and fallacious reasoning and to identify common logical fallacies); identify reliable sources; and distinguish between different types of philosophical evidence.
6. Express themselves logically and objectively in both analytic and argumentative writing.
7. Evaluate themselves as moral beings.
8. Consider their own susceptibility to moral influences as well as potential effects their behavior might have on others.

Texts and Required Technologies
-All texts are provided free of charge via Blackboard or WKU library services.

Course Outline

Each unit is organized as responses to a sub-question of the course's enduring question, *why are bad people bad?* We shall spend 2-3 weeks on each of the following sub-questions of the course's main enduring question, *why are bad people bad?* The potential answers to each sub-question are grouped and titled according to weekly themes:

(1) Are people in general naturally bad?
- Original Sin
- Evil as Privation
- Human Nature

(2) Are *some* people bad by nature?
- Neuropsychology of Bad Agents
- Social Evidence of Human Depravity

(3) Do people become bad as a result of custom, habit, nurture, and experience?
- Nurture and External Pressure
- Custom and Habit

(4) Do people choose to be bad?
- Vice and Weakness of Will
- Temptation and Choosing to Give In
- Autonomous Choices and Bad Influences

(5) Do our attitudes make us bad?
- Envy, Greed, and Pride
- Self-Deception

(6) Why do we hate (each) other(s)?
- Prejudice
- Genocide

Evaluation Distribution:

Quizzes	30%
Short Writings	35%
Final Written Exam	35%

Quizzes

There will be a quiz almost every week delivered via the Blackboard platform. Notes and readings ARE permitted during these quizzes. NO help from the Internet or other people is permitted. Follow the schedule and check under the "Quizzes" tab for more information. In general, quizzes will be due by 11:59pm the Saturday of the week to which they pertain (unless otherwise noted).

Short Writings

Students will be required to write several short pieces throughout the semester. For example, students will write an original discussion post, a response discussion post, a reflection on an assigned independent activity, an abstract of a specific reading, an objection to a specific reading, etc. These assignments will typically be announced a week in advance but may be announced on short notice via e-mail and Blackboard.

Students are expected to check their WKU e-mail daily in the event that Dr. Anton communicates an assignment upon short notice.

The following is the case for ALL written assignments unless otherwise noted:

Grammar, organization, and style count.

Students interested in passing are advised to use spell-check, ensure their sentences are neither run-ons nor fragments, and be certain to organize related sentences in a logical manner concerning a single topic for each paragraph. Unless the assignment is a single paragraph (Dr. Anton will tell you when this is the case), your assignment should have more than one paragraph. This is the *minimum* required to pass these assignments. Students interested in passing well should also refer to Dr. Anton's "Writing" folder under "Helpful Content" in the Blackboard site for this course.

Course material must be used.

Unless Dr. Anton tells you otherwise (and, at the time of this writing, she cannot imagine why she ever would), **use the relevant course material**. For example, if a writing assignment concerns the sub-question for unit 2 in this course, address as much material from unit 2 as possible. No assignment submission that neglects relevant course material will receive full credit (*unless* the assignment specifies it is to be done *prior* to the readings).

Citing is essential.

Whenever writing about course material (or outside material that is not common knowledge, which is most material you are inclined to include), citing is required. Dr. Anton **requires students use *Chicago Manual of Style*** (16th edition or later—the footnote (NOT endnote) version), unless otherwise specified. Citations must be specific. They should include exact page numbers or ranges of pages in almost every case. See the folder labeled "Chicago Humanities Style" on Blackboard. Go through this path to get there:

"Helpful Content"→"Writing Philosophy"→"Citing and Referencing".

These are standard criteria that must be met to pass any writing assignments in this course. Of course, other requirements not mentioned still apply (e.g., completeness, accuracy, evidence-gathering, sense-making, argumentation, compliance with directions, etc.).

Final Written Exam

Students will complete a final written exam, the answers of which must be *at least* **1,500 words in length** (though no maximum is strictly assigned, the instructor suggests students not exceed

2,300 words) answering the following questions that come directly from the Colonnade Connections Course Objectives (see course objectives 1-3 above):

1. *Given what you've taken from this class and its content, how do you think the development of self relates to others and society?*

2. *Given what you've taken from this class and its content, what are some values that form civically engaged and informed members of society? How might these values be diverse?*

3. *What are some solutions to real-world social and cultural problems related to this course and its content? You may endorse solutions mentioned in class or come up with alternatives. Be sure to distinguish between solutions being implemented and solutions you suggest. Also, be sure to evaluate the (likely) effectiveness of those solutions.*

Students will be expected to engage the vast majority of the course material thoroughly and critically while advancing the student's own response to the questions (even if the student's own response is to endorse a particular scholar's answer). Students are *not* required to do outside research; however, any material the student elects to incorporate in the paper must be fully explained and cited.

In light of the **first question**, you might consider how our work throughout the course informs your view of why or how individual human beings develop (including interactions with other individuals and society writ large) based on our attention to instances when the development of the self goes awry.

The course question presumes that there are bad people. Therefore, in light of the **second question**, consider how the course has shaped your views on what kind of values stand for the foundation of a view of human beings where some are considered "bad." What is the relationship to such values and larger groups of people/society? Furthermore, what values might encourage members of society to be informed and engage in their community? Is there any reason to think we ought to make sure our values are diverse? Is there a limit to how diverse our values can be? Why or why not?

The last question allows for a great deal of creativity. Dr. Anton looks forward to what you come up with!

Students will be graded primarily on:
- ☐ How completely and accurately they portray the positions in readings and other materials;
- ☐ How critically they evaluate said positions;
- ☐ How clearly and consistently they present their own view; and
- ☐ How well they argue in defense of their position.

Deal-breakers:

This assignment will have *deal-breakers*, or minimum requirements that, if not met, constitute a failure to complete the assignment. Dr. Anton does not award credit for incomplete work. Therefore, assignments failing to meet the deal-breakers *will not be graded*, they **will be assigned a grade of '0,'** and students *will NOT be able to redo the assignment or anything in replace of the assignment*. No extra credit will be applied to an assignment failing to meet all deal-breakers.

Deal-breakers will include:

- A strict word minimum.
- Following directions (especially for how and when to submit work, including: formatting, using the *Safe Assign* link, citing, and avoiding plagiarism and other kinds of academic dishonesty).
- Incorporating course material
- Chicago Humanities footnote citations
- Explicit attention to the questions noted above for Colonnade *Connections* course assessment purposes.

More detailed instructions will be provided throughout the semester and well in advance to the paper's due date. Students are reminded that grammar, style, organization, and referencing♦ should be done well in order to receive credit for accomplishing the above-mentioned objectives. Students are also informed that Dr. Anton does not believe there is such a thing as a naturally born good writer who can meet her standards of writing in a first draft. This is because Dr. Anton does not believe in naturally good writers; there are only good editors. *Good writers* edit their own work constantly, work on any significant piece of writing over time and in multiple sittings, get help from other writers and readers, and refine, develop, re-organize, repackage, and use multiple strategies to communicate and defend their ideas repeatedly until it is RIGHT. Students are encouraged to review the helpful material on writing philosophy (and philosophy in general) in the "Helpful Content" tab of the Blackboard Course completely and often prior to attempting this paper.

NB: As complete, frequent, and specific citing are essential to passing any paper in Dr. Anton's class, students are strongly encouraged to keep readings throughout the semester, make helpful notes in margins, highlight, etc., and keep track of precisely where something interesting is said in a reading. This requires keeping regular records of what is in readings throughout the course. Nobody wants to be searching for that pithy explanation of a concept located in "some" reading we did in the "first half" of the semester that is most likely on a left-hand side of a page. Please spare yourself this agonizing experience! Also, Dr. Anton *will not* entertain requests of this nature. That is, it is dysfunctional (in the sense that costs you proper functioning points) to ask her, "Remember someone who said something about natural impulses being bad? Where was

♦ Thorough, specific, and accurate citations are expected throughout. Citations should be formatted in accordance with *Chicago Humanities Style* (16th edition or newer, the version with footnotes) unless otherwise specified (e.g., Plato and Aristotle have their own citation methods, which are explained in a folder dedicated to these text found through this pathway: "Helpful Content"→ "Writing Philosophy"→"Citing/Referencing").

that?" It is your responsibility as a student to know who each author is, which beliefs belong to them and are central to their system, and where in the course readings you can find evidence connecting the author to the claim.

*The instructor will **not** read drafts in advance.*

Some of the shorter writing assignments students work on throughout the semester can be used in this assignment, and therefore students are expected to keep the instructor's feedback from earlier assignments in order to revise and improve upon the earlier versions when incorporating them in the final paper. **Students are welcome to discuss ideas for writing this paper with the instructor during virtual office hours, but the student must have specific questions about how to improve specific aspects of the paper.** Again, the instructor will not read (or correct) drafts of work prior to submission for credit.

Students should refer to the *writing resources* provided by the instructor.

In particular, students are encouraged to carefully review the PowerPoint presentation on how to write a philosophy paper and to make use of the paper checklist prior to submitting work for evaluation. Students are encouraged to seek assistance improving their writing via tutors, the writing center, or their peers; however, *plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated*. It is expected that all submitted work is that of the student and that all resources are properly cited. See "Anton's Course Policies" for a discussion of academic dishonesty.

Additional Essential Policies and Information (including appendices)

Academic Dishonesty

Abide by rules of academic honesty at all times. Academic Dishonesty (including plagiarism) is an offense punishable by an 'F' for the entire course. Dr. Anton will report instances of academic dishonesty to the student conduct office. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. It is the student's responsibility to know what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Other Course-Specific Policies:

Please see the document, **"Anton's Course Policies"** for further information (available on Blackboard and by request). This document is an appendix to the syllabus; therefore, it is equally binding. This syllabus (as well as its appendices, reading lists, and assignments and deadlines) is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor at any time.

University Policies:

Persons with Disabilities

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, Room 1074. The SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

Policies Concerning Inclusion

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) and Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040). Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are "Responsible Employees" of the University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

For more information about student rights and responsibilities, go to:

https://www.wku.edu/syllabusinfo/