

PHIL 211: Why are Bad People Bad? *

Course Logistics

Instructor: Dr. Anton, audrey.anton@wku.edu

Office: (zoom: <https://wku.zoom.us/j/99569513382>) (physical) Cherry Hall 310

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom.

Voice Mail: (270) 745-5757 (goes directly to e-mail, so e-mail is just as good)

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 writ large.

Texts and Required Technologies

-All texts are provided free of charge via Blackboard or WKU library services. Students will be required to submit work in MS Word (*not* pages, rtf., pdf, etc.). For purposes of zoom office hours, students must have access to a smartphone, tablet, or computer with both video and mic capabilities.

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 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.

Evaluation Distribution:

Quizzes (11)	50%
Personal Social Experiment Paper	20%
Final Exam	30%

Quizzes

There will be multiple quizzes every week delivered via the Blackboard platform. These are listed on the course assignment sheet as well as in each week's module schedule. Students will need to locate and take the appropriate quiz by its deadline in the tab called "Tests and Quizzes," which is beneath the heading "Submit Work Here" on the left-hand side of the Blackboard

course menu. Students may only take each quiz one time.

- Quizzes are always due by 11:59 p.m. (Central Standard Time)
- Notes and readings ARE permitted during these quizzes. NO help from the Internet or other people is permitted.
- BOTH information in the readings AND information in the videos and lectures will appear on quizzes. It is difficult to pass a quiz if one *just* reads, or *just* watches the lectures. Students are reminded that assigned readings *and* assigned media are required material for the course.
- For advice on how to perform well on Dr. Anton's Quizzes, see "Helpful Content" under the "Course Content" heading on the left-hand side of the Blackboard course menu.
- *It is the student's responsibility to remember to take the quizzes by their due date!*

Note: the answers and feedback to questions will be available immediately after the due date has passed for each quiz. **Students are advised to review this feedback and keep track of what they have learned and what might require further study. Quiz feedback will not be available indefinitely, so students should plan to review their work regularly and shortly after it is due.**

Paper

This session students are required to conduct a personal social experiment and write a paper outlining their findings in light of the course material. Explicit instructions are available on Blackboard.

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

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.

The following is the case for ALL writing assignments for Dr. Anton, 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 Exam

The final exam for this course will cover all content studied. Questions from earlier quizzes may be repeated on this exam, so students are advised to keep track of anything they get wrong on quizzes, any questions that they found particularly difficult, and any "lucky guesses" they had that might require further inquiry into the course material to make sure they understand why they got the question right.

The final exam will be available all day on the final Saturday of the session. Students must take the exam sometime on that day. The exam is timed and must be taken in a single seating (i.e., while students can *begin* the exam any time Saturday, once begun, the exam must be completed during the allotted time and without exiting the exam).

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/>

* The development of this course was sponsored by an Enduring Questions Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.