



Representations of Evil in Western Literature (15p/7.5cr)

Level: Basic

Subject area: Educational Studies/ Philosophical Studies

Course code: PE 170

Course Prerequisites

General eligibility for university studies.

Course Goals

As a result of successfully completing this course, the student should be able to:

Knowledge and Understanding

- account for the differences in how secular, pagan, and Christian worldviews explain the problem of evil
- understand why and how the Christian worldview changed western narratives of evil
- be familiar with some of the key cultural and historical events that influenced the development of western thought about evil
- account for the relevance of a strong understanding of the problem of evil in discussions of contemporary issues.

Skills and Abilities

- present some of the main explanations of evil as represented in western literature
- analyze literary representations of evil from the perspective of secular and Christian worldviews
- describe the historical contexts surrounding significant changes in western understandings of the problem of evil
- present the unique contributions of Christianity in the development of western definitions of evil
- critique and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a literary work's representation of evil in a significant paper
- explain the relevance of cultural narratives of the problem of evil for addressing contemporary issues.

Assessment and Approach

- describe the cultural role and influence of literary fiction
- identify how the problem of evil challenges a Christian worldview
- analyze how the problem of evil is represented in selected literary texts

- evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of literary explanations of the problem of evil
- summarize how changes in western perceptions of evil are reflected in literature
- write a well-structured and well-argued paper analysing the problem of evil in a text.

Course Contents

This course explores representations of the problem of evil in western literature across a wide range of historical periods and literary forms—poetry, short story, novel, and drama.

Particular attention is given to the emergence of a Christian worldview in Europe: the changes it brought to cultural understandings of evil, the challenges to those cultural understandings presented by atheism in the last 300 years, and the dilemma concerning contemporary perceptions of evil we now face.

Course Procedures

The teaching consists of recorded online lessons, seminars, and individual/group assignments.

Examination

Evaluation Procedures:

A = 90-100	Excellent knowledge and a high degree of independent thinking
B = 80-89	Good level of knowledge and some independent thinking
C = 70-79	Basic knowledge and abilities
D = 60-69	Fulfilment of minimum requirements
F = below 60	Fail

Assignments:

The assignments, as listed below, are each assessed on a scale ranging from 59–100 %

Answers to study guide questions	55% (11 x 5%)
Engagement in online seminars	15%
Term paper	30%
TOTAL	100%

Description of assignments:

1. Active attendance of online seminars.
2. Study guide questions.
3. Term paper analysing the representation of evil in a selected work of literature.

Study and Assignment Schedule

Modules 1–11 consist of a) preparation in terms of reading and listening to a pre-recorded online lecture (OL), b) an online meeting where the contents of the module is discussed and students can ask questions, c) submitting answers to a set of study guide questions (SGQs). Module 12 consists of writing a term paper examining the problem of evil as represented in a work of literature selected by the student.

Module 1 The place of the problem of evil in Christian apologetics and the role of fiction in culture: An overview. Read: Countee Cullen, “Yet Do I Marvel”; C. S. Lewis, “Human Wickedness”; (OL) Dorothea Brande, “Introduction”, Stephen Fry on

- God. SGQs.
- Module 2 The problem of evil as portrayed in 425 BC. View: Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* (OL). SGQs.
- Module 3 400 AD–The problem of evil through the lens of a new worldview. Read Prudentius, *Psychomachia* (The Battle of the Soul). SGQs.
- Module 4 1300 AD–The problem of evil and human construction of identity in Dante’s *Inferno*. Read excerpts from Dante’s *Inferno*. SGQs.
- Module 5 1592 AD–The problem of evil and the role of human will in Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*. View: *Dr. Faustus* (OL). SGQs.
- Module 6 1600 AD–A coming crisis of faith and the problem of evil mirrored in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. View: *Hamlet* (OL). SGQs.
- Module 7 1667 AD–The fall of angels and the fall of humanity in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Read excerpts from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. SGQs.
- Module 8 Poetical reflections of a cultural shift in nineteenth century Britain, 1789-1901. Read selected poems (selections to be determined may include William Blake, E Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and others). SGQs.
- Module 9 Twentieth century representations of the problem of evil. Read selected poems (will include Thomas Hardy, T. S. Eliot, William Butler Yeats, Philip Larkin, and others) and James Joyce, “Araby.” SGQs.
- Module 10 Evil resisted in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring*. View *The Fellowship of the Ring* (OL). SGQs.
- Module 11 Redemption in Richard Adams’s *Shardik*. Read selected excerpts from Books I and V. Read Chapters 48-58. SGQs.
- Module 12 Finish *Shardik*, Chapters 48-58. Course afterword (OL lecture). Term paper due.

Course Literature

Required Literature

Adams, Richard. *Shardik*. Available in print, on Kindle, and as an audiobook at Audible
Other texts will be available to download and read in pdf files online or will be viewed on film.

Other articles, texts and videos may be available at the course start.

For more information see also “General Syllabus Policies.”

Syllabus completed 2023-05-10.

Syllabus is valid from 2023-08-28.