



Psychology of Good & Evil

Course Syllabus PSY/HMS 397.63 Summer 2009

Instructor: Dr. Brooke Bennett-Day
Class meets: Taylor 110, T 5:30-9:00pm; hybrid course
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Office hours: By appointment

Textbooks:

Zimbardo, P. (2008). *The Lucifer effect: Understanding how good people turn bad.*
Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology.*

The class website is located at <https://wesportal.wesleyancollege.edu/ics/>

You will need your login name and password to access the website.

Announcements and schedule changes will be posted there. Given the shortened nature of the course you should plan to check the website at least every other day.

Course Description and Objectives

The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil. ~ Hannah Arendt

Little progress can be made by merely attempting to repress what is evil; our great hope lies in developing what is good. ~ Calvin Coolidge

This course will explore both the darker and more hopeful sides of human behavior by examining the influence of both situational and personal factors. The darker side of behavior will focus whether there are indeed “bad apples” or if “bad barrels” might play a role in some of our darker and more tragic political and social outcomes. In addition to examining systematic influences on bad behaviors, the course will also involve an application of those same principles to creating systems that encourage the better side of human nature.

Beyond just examining and restructuring detrimental systems, researchers in the new field of positive psychology emphasize that we should focus more attention on what “goes right” in individual decisions and behaviors. The second half of this course will follow their lead, including psychological research on topics such as happiness, forgiveness, mindfulness, flow, and gratitude.

Classroom Expectations

Given that this is a hybrid course and we only have six face-to-face meetings, it is imperative that you attend each of those scheduled meetings. If you have to miss all or part of a class meeting you must let me know as soon as possible. Absences that I do not consider to be excused will result in a penalty of 5% off your final course grade. Excused absences will require additional work in order to make up for the missed hours.

Academic Honor Code

"The Honor Code is the foundation upon which life in the Wesleyan College community is built. It is based upon the idea that individual freedom is a right founded upon responsibility. A student is expected to tell the truth, respect others and their property, and maintain academic integrity and honesty in all areas of college life."

Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated within this course. Instances of either will result in a zero for that exam or assignment, with possible further repercussions as per college guidelines. Be aware that your summaries of research findings should be in your own words, just like everything else.

Students with Disabilities

Wesleyan College is committed to equal education and full participation for all students. Any student who requires reasonable academic accommodations or the use of auxiliary aids in class must first identify herself to the Director of Student Disability Services in the Academic Center. Documentation is required which will be evaluated and appropriate accommodations recommended. The student will then be expected to collaborate with each of her professors. Please contact Christy Henry in the Academic Center at 757-5219.

Grading

Your grade for the course will be based on discussion board interactions, weekly thought papers, two exams, a final reflection paper, and participation. I realize this may sound like a lot for a 6-week course, but take into consideration that we are only meeting half the time of a standard course.

Discussion board interactions. A discussion board posting will be required at five points over the semester (7 pts each). Your initial posting must be made by midnight on Friday night; you will also be responsible for commenting on two of your fellow students' posts by Monday night at midnight.

Weekly thought papers. These are five short papers that will be sent to me electronically throughout the semester (15 pts each). They differ from the interactions in that they are expected to be formal papers, to be more lengthy (2-3 double-spaced pages), and do not require comments. My recommendation is that you type out your response in a word processing program and save it before trying to send it. Each weekly thought paper is due by midnight on Monday night. In

addition to sending it electronically, you will save a copy of each paper in a portfolio to be turned in at the end of the semester.

Exams. There will be two equally weighted exams (50 points each), consisting of multiple choice and short answer questions. The multiple-choice portion of the exam will be given via a timed online quiz. The short answer portion of the exam will be completed out of class separately.

Reflection paper. This short (4-5 pages) paper will be turned in along with your final portfolio. The purpose is for you to reflect on the integration of the “good” and the “evil” and to combine that with your own place in the world. This page count includes a reference page, double-spacing, and standard margins. This paper will be turned in with the copy of your final portfolio.

Participation. A portion of your grade is made up of participation points. The assumption is that a student who shares her ideas in class, completes the readings, and takes care of her out-of-class activities will receive all 40 points. Due to the relationship between being in class and actively participating, absences will result in a deduction of 15 participation points per absence (5% of final grade). More than two absences will result in the student being asked to drop the course.

The whole semester breaks down like this:

35 pts Discussion board interactions
75 pts Weekly thought papers
100 pts Exams
50 pts Reflection paper
40 pts Participation

So, with a grand total of 300 possible points, the grading scale is as follows:

A = 269-300 points (90-100%)
B = 239-268 points (80-89%)
C = 209-238 points (70-79%)
D = 179-208 points (60-69%)
F = below 178 (below 60%)

	Class topic	Assigned reading
May 12	Introducing the Lucifer Effect Exploring the Stanford Prison Experiment	Ch 1 (TLE)
May 19	Ethics, extensions, & social dynamics	Ch 10-13 (TLE)
May 26	Systems, situations, & heroism	Ch 15-16 (TLE)
Jun 2	Positive psychology & “feeling good”	Ch 1-5 (PPP)
Jun 9	Values & Strengths	Ch 6-7 (PPP)
Jun 16	Relationships & Systems revisited	Ch 10-11 (PPP)

Note. The instructor reserves the right to make changes at any time and for any reason to the syllabus. Changes will be announced both in class and on WesPortal.

The following are your out-of-class activities for the course. Each time you complete an activity you are to date and initial the appropriate space. Include these record-keeping sheets in your portfolio. Time allotted to each activity is only an estimate (your mileage may vary). Aside from the discussion board interactions, it is often possible to complete activities ahead of time. Consider this if you know that one of the upcoming weeks might be particularly hectic for you.

Assignments for the week of 5/12-5/18

All activities must be completed by midnight on 5/18.

Date & initial when completed	Time	Activity
	.25 hr	Check out our author, Phil Zimbardo, on his Colbert Report appearance. http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/149094/february-11-2008/philip-zimbardo
	1 hr	Post your portion of the early chapter summaries on the appropriate section of WesPortal. Make sure to read over other chapter summaries as needed; create a 1-page timeline of the study for your notes.
	1.5 hr	Check out the Stanford Prison Experiment website, paying special consideration to the discussion questions found there. (http://www.prisonexp.org/). Pick one of these questions and post that question and your response on the discussion board by <i>Friday night at midnight</i> . Post a reply to the responses of two other students by the standard Monday night deadline. **Weekly discussion board interaction**
	.25 hr	Read: http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/jews-and-germans-lesson-gets-out-of-hand/2007/04/11/1175971162172.html
	1.5 hr	BBC did a replication of the SPE in the early 2000s. Discuss the similarities and differences between this and the original SPE. Based on Zimbardo's description of this study in Chapter 11, he does not give it much credence. Address why that might be the case. http://bbcprisonstudy.org/bbc-prison-study.php **Weekly thought paper**

Assignments for the week of 5/19-5/25

All activities must be completed by midnight on 5/25.

Date & initial when completed	Time	Activity
	.25 hr	Check out our author, Phil Zimbardo, on his Daily Show appearance. http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=84518&title=philip-zimbardo
	1.5 hr	Browse the website that goes along with Zimbardo's book. Specifically read through his suggestions, "Dr. Z's 20 tips on resisting unwanted influences on you". As we go into the positive psychology section of the course, consider what parts of these require a person to have a decent amount of self-esteem, to be self-assured, and to be cognizant of one's own place in the world. ****Weekly thought paper****
	1.5 hr	Zimbardo ends his book with a discussion on heroism. One of his larger points is that heroism (like evil) should be thought of as much more banal than it often is. Think about heroes that you have encountered (personally or within your neighborhood), and why you consider their actions to be heroic. Post your response to this topic on the discussion board by <i>Friday night at midnight</i> . Post a reply to the responses of two other students by the standard Monday night deadline. **Weekly discussion board interaction**
	.75 hr	The Lucifer Effect often deals with incredibly large systems (governments, branches of the military, etc.) but it is useful to consider that smaller groups can create systems as well. Find a news article that deals with a description of a "bad apple" that might have been, at least in part, the result of a "bad barrel". Remember – recognizing systematic influence does not <i>excuse</i> the behavior of an individual. Print this out to bring to class.

Assignments for the week of 5/26-6/1

All activities must be completed by midnight on 6/1.

Date & initial when completed	Time	Activity
	1.5 hrs	Remember that your midterm is due by 5/28 at 6pm.
	.75 hr	Find a short (< 3 min) video online that makes you happy. Post a link to the video on the discussion board by <i>Friday night at midnight</i> . Post a reply to the videos of two other students by the standard Monday night deadline. **Weekly discussion board interaction**
	.25 hrs	Check out the program for the upcoming International Positive Psychology Association meeting: http://www.ippanetwork.org/WCPP/IPPA_World_Congress_registration_brochure.pdf
	3.25 hrs	Watch <i>Chocolat</i> & complete the exercise on Savoring on pages 69-72 in PPP. Share your thoughts on how the film and your savored experience reflect the theme of the chapter. ****Weekly thought paper****
	.50 hrs	Make a list of a dozen common events that “push your buttons” and generally get you down. Write each one on a 3x5 index card to bring to class.

Assignments for the week of 6/2-6/8

All activities must be completed by midnight on 6/8.

Date & initial when completed	Time	Activity
	1.5 hr	Complete the “three good things” exercise on pages 38-39 of PPP for at least 5 days. Briefly describe your process in completing this exercise. Do you feel that this is a helpful exercise? If so, how might it be extended to others in a useful way? If not, why not? ****Weekly thought paper****
	.50 hrs	Go to http://www.viastrengths.org website and take the VIA Inventory of Strengths to receive feedback on your signature strengths of character.
	.50 hrs	Keep an ongoing list (written or mental) of the choices that you make during the week. This will be discussed in class in the framework of PPP pages 190-191.
	1 hr	The clip below is from one of the TED (technology, entertainment, & design) conferences; it’s a talk by Dirty Jobs host Mike Rowe on the value of hard work. It does have some interesting dialogue on animal castration, so choose your listening-spot accordingly! Listen to the talk and post your thoughts about what he’s saying at the appropriate place on the discussion board by <i>Friday night at midnight</i> . Post a reply to the responses of two other students by the standard Monday night deadline. http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/mike_rowe_celebrates_dirty_jobs.html **Weekly discussion board interaction**

Assignments for the week of 6/9-6/15

All activities must be completed by midnight on 6/15.

Date & initial when completed	Time	Activity
	1 hr	Check out the Appreciative Inquiry Commons website, housed at Case Western University: http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/ . Find one of the research papers posted there, read it, and be prepared to share about it in class.
	1 hr	Complete the writing your own legacy exercise (PPP pages 22-23). Post yours by <i>Friday night at midnight</i> . Post a reply to two other students by the standard Monday night deadline. **Weekly discussion board interaction**
	2 hrs	Interview three individuals regarding their perception of one of the enabled institutions referred to in the chapter. Ask them what it means to have a good family, a good school, a good workplace, a good society, or a good religion. Compose a summary of who you chose to interview (you don't have to include names, descriptive data is fine) and their responses. Reflect on those responses, perhaps comparing across individuals if you asked them about the same institution. ****Weekly thought paper****
	1.5 hrs	Remember that your final exam and portfolio are due by 6/18 at 6pm. Make sure that your portfolio includes copies of all of your weekly thought papers, your activity completion sheets and your comprehensive reflection paper.