

PHL408H1S

The Holocaust in Contemporary Philosophy

Monday 10:00am – 12:00pm

Sidney Smith Hall 2120

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Sol Goldberg

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Office hours: T 1:00–2:00 (SS 5016H)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will investigate the place of the Holocaust in contemporary philosophy. Some philosophers have claimed that it is an unprecedented event with enormous ramifications for philosophy, while many others have not found in it any special philosophical significance, at the most invoking it for vivid examples of moral dilemmas and at the least simply ignoring it. Does the Holocaust have profound philosophical implications? If so, then does a failure to consider these implications reveal a fundamental shortcoming of contemporary philosophy? This course will consider these questions before looking at some special problems which the Holocaust has raised for applied philosophy, e.g., multi-generational guilt, Holocaust denial, the uniqueness of historical events, and how far moral standards categories can be distorted under extreme social conditions.

EVALUATION

1. **Participation:** (15%)
2. **Assignments:** (25% x 2 = 50%)
 - Development of a weekly discussion topic (students choose which topics they want to explore further)
 - Hardcopy to be submitted NO LATER THAN one week after the topic is discussed in class
 - 450–600 words
 - At least one of the assignment should provide the basis of the final essay
3. **Final essay:** (35%)
 - Due the last day of the course
 - 2000–2500 words

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Students with diverse needs are welcome in this course. Please contact the Accessibility Centre for needs assessment, referrals and arrangements. The instructors will be glad to provide whatever assistance is necessary. <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>

PLAGIARISM

From the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: It shall be an offence for a student knowingly: To represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e. to commit plagiarism. Wherever in the Code an offence is described as depending on "knowing", the offence shall likewise be deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known.

STUDENT CONDUCT

Please switch off cell-phones before class; do not talk to your classmates; use laptops only for taking notes. Distraction of other students is unacceptable.

COURSE MATERIAL

All of the texts for the course will be available on Blackboard.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

01/09 Introduction: the Holocaust, metaphilosophy, & applied philosophy

01/16 Is the Holocaust a philosophical problem?

- E. Fackenheim, "Auschwitz as Challenge to Philosophy and Theology" & "Preface to the Second Edition [of *To Mend the World*]"
- M. Freeman, "The Holocaust and Philosophy"
- J. Halberstam, "Philosophy and the Holocaust"
- D. Levin, "What Measure Now? A Survivor's Reflections on the Holocaust"
- J. Roth, "The Philosopher's Project" (from: *Ethics during and after the Holocaust*)

01/23 The Holocaust, unique events, and the problems of philosophy

- E. Fackenheim, "The Holocaust and Philosophy"
- W. Kansteiner, "From Exception to Exemplum"
- B. Lang, "Uniqueness and Explanation"
- A. Magalit and G. Motzkin, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust"
- A. Milchman and A. Rosenberg, "Two Kinds of Uniqueness: The Universal Aspects of the Holocaust"

01/30 Hannah Arendt: thoughtlessness, responsibility, and moral philosophy

- H. Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations"
- H. Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship"
- H. Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy"

02/06 Explaining the perpetrators: why they did it and why they did not do it

- H. Arendt, "Social Science Techniques and the Study of the Concentration Camps"
- E. Fackenheim, "Holocaust and *Weltanschauung*: Philosophical Reflections on Why They Did It"
- H. Pauer-Studer and D. Velleman, "Distortions of Normativity"
- P. Roth, "Hearts of Darkness: 'Perpetrator History' and Why There is No Why"
- G. Scarre, "Understanding the Moral Phenomenology of the Third Reich"
- H. Welzer, "Mass Murder and Moral Code: Some Thoughts on an Easily Misunderstood Subject"
- N. Zangwill, "Perpetrator Motivation: Some Reflections on the Browning-Goldhagen Debate"

02/13 The Holocaust and the language of moral philosophy: evil or just mass wrongdoing

- P. Formosa, "Moral Responsibility for Banal Evil"
- E. Garrard, "Evil as an Explanatory Concept"
- E. Garrard, "The Nature of Evil"
- D. Lackey, "Extraordinary Evil or Common Malevolence: Evaluating the Jewish Holocaust"
- B. Lang, "The Evil in Genocide"
- B. Wilikins, "The Roots of Evil"

02/27 Extending the blame? Collective and trans-generational guilt

- L. Alweiss, "Collective Guilt and Responsibility"
- D. Schroeder & B. Brecher "Transgenerational Obligations, 21st Century Germany and the Holocaust"
- E. Stump, "Personal Relations and Moral Residue"
- B. Wringer, "Collective Action and the Peculiar Evil of Genocide"

03/05 Understanding the rescuers: rational action and human solidarity

- N. Geras, "Richard Rorty and the Righteous Among the Nations"
- M. W. Jackson, "Oskar Schindler and Moral Theory"
- Monroe, Barton & Klingemann, "Altruism and the Theory of Rational Action: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe"
- R. Rorty, "Solidarity"

03/12 Interpreting the victims: the imperative of resistance and its limits

- E. Fackenheim, "The Spectrum of Resistance during the Holocaust: An Essay in Description and Definition" & "Resistance as an Ontological Category: An Essay in Critical Analysis" (from: *To Mend the World*)
- M. Morgan, "Jewish Ethics after the Holocaust"

03/19 History and testimony: factually true or truthful to the memory?

- R. Braun, "The Holocaust and Problems of Historical Representation"
- M. Dintenfass, "Ethics, the History of the Holocaust, and Historiographical Theory after the Linguist Turn"
- J. Keilbach, "Photographs, Symbolic Images, and the Holocaust – On the (Im)Possibility of Depicting Historical Truth"
- B. Lang, "Is It Possible to Misrepresent the Holocaust?"
- H. White, "Figural Realism in Witness Literature"
- H. White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation"

03/26 The possibility of forgiveness

- J. Derrida, "On Forgiveness"
- E. Garrard, "Forgiveness and the Holocaust"
- B. Lang, "The Holocaust and Two Views of Forgiveness"
- G. Scarre, "Excusing the Inexcusable: Moral Responsibility and Ideologically Motivated Wrongdoing"
- L. Thomas, "Forgiving the Unforgivable?"

04/02 Holocaust denial: moral and legal responses

- R. Cohen-Almagor, "Holocaust Denial is a Form of Hate Speech"
- J. Knechtel, "Holocaust Denial and the Concept of Dignity in the European Union"
- B. Lang, "Six Questions on (or about) Holocaust Denial"
- K. Lasson, "Defending Truth: Legal and Psychological Aspects of Holocaust Denial"
- A. Mathis, "General Semantics and Holocaust Denial"
- C. McKinnon, "Holocaust Denial"