

A Liberal Religious Investigation of Evil



“Doestoevski underlined the idea that evil is not just one more mystery. It is so central to our lives that if reason stumbles there, it must give way to faith. If you cannot understand why children are tortured, nothing else you understand really matters.” - Susan Neiman, Theology from a Fractured Vista

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Class Expectations

Participants in this class should expect to:

- Be challenged by difficult material.
- Cultivate a reflective attitude to ambiguity and/or unknowing, while searching for clarity.
- Craft and re-work a personal definition of evil.
- Examine evil from a variety of angles that all contribute to a liberal religious investigation.
- Participate at a high level to digest this complex material - attending as many sessions as possible, completing as many assignments as possible, and participating in small group and whole class discussions and experiences.

Class Materials

1. This Study Guide
2. Lance Morrow's *Evil, an Investigation*
3. The Class Reader

Class Purpose

Near the end of his life the reluctant leader, Moses, gave his people one last sermon. He looked at the ragged souls gathered before him and remembered their tendencies toward violence and anger, toward fear and frustration. He also remembered how easily they had abandoned their highest aims for the transient promise of comfort. Aware of these human struggles, and knowing that he would not always be present to serve as their leader, he shared this admonition:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. (Deuteronomy 30-19, NRSV)

Perhaps the greatest human battle is to, daily, choose life over death. No matter your belief in, or definition of, evil, the experience of having to metaphorically choose that which sustains, that which 'saves,' is universal.

All of us are imperfect. All of us make morally and spiritually pertinent choices - abortion, fighting in a war, divorce, protecting a loved one by harming another, using precious

environmental resources, participating in systemic oppressions, and so on. All of us metaphorically choose life (that which sustains, that which saves) or death (that which tears, that which destroys) daily when we make these moral choices, and these are made in minute or profound, tactical or philosophical ways. Not all of our choices seem to fit within the good vs. evil matrix, but awareness of that matrix calls us to a deeper moral vigilance.

This course is about evil in the abstract, but it is more intimately about the choice between *life* and *death*, as it asks each participant to understand the forces that compel us to choose one over the other.

The word “evil” has been out of fashion in liberal religious circles since the Post Modern era. Post Modernism brought with it an overthrow of most absolute dualisms including good and evil. Liberal Religion followed the Post Modern trend in ethics to stand most aggressively with the conclusions of moral relativism and the rights of the individual. Moral relativism holds that morality is relative to the norms of one's culture, or perhaps even to the structure of one individual conscience. Moral relativism and individualism deny the idea that any action or choice can be universally defined as wrong or evil (a word that conveys a universal conclusion). If a moral conclusion is restrained by (that is, only relevant within) the moral norms of the society in which it is practiced, or the moral norms of the individual ‘mind’ that has perpetuated the action, it will always be a transient or impermanent conclusion, never absolute or universal - never expressible with a word as big as “evil.”

By siding with moral relativism and individualism, Liberal Religion abdicated its responsibility to humanity and has been struggling, since the Post Modern era, to regain the ground on which to take objective moral and religious stands. (Objective moral and religious stands are drawn from observable or measurable facts, while subjective stands are drawn from personal opinions and interpretations.)

This curriculum is a means by which liberally religious people can explore the idea of evil in our Post Modern context. This curriculum hopes to show that it is possible to sense, experience, and define evil, and from there, to make right and wrong choices. This curriculum takes into account the wisdom of relativism without allowing that wisdom to deny the validity of a *felt* moral sense, or the possibility of building a moral understanding that transcends specific social contexts. This curriculum is one beginning toward a deeper and wider discussion that may have the power to transform the Liberal Religious experience. Liberal Religion has a long way to go before it is prepared to stand as solidly and resolutely as Moses did, and assert that our choices matter - yes, for our individual selves and societies, but also for the larger life: the Universe, the Spirit of Life, God. Still,

all is not lost. This curriculum begins with the premise that what has made Liberal Religion relevant in our Post Modern world can serve Liberal Religion in *this* project. Liberal religion has what it needs to investigate, define, and advocate against evil; now all it needs is you, and your willingness to engage.

Some Definitions of Evil

Views on the nature of evil tend to fall into one of four camps:

1. Moral Absolutism asserts that good and evil are fixed concepts established by a deity or deities, nature, morality, inherent sense, or some other absolute, unshakable source.
2. Amoralism claims that good and evil are meaningless, and that there is no moral aspect or reality to nature.
3. Moral Relativism holds that the standards of good and evil are products of local culture, custom, or prejudice. Moral Relativism can become Moral Individualism when the individual conscience is seen as the final arbiter - that moral decisions are relative to each individual conscience.
4. Moral Universalism is the attempt to find a compromise between Moral Absolutism and Moral Relativism. It claims that morality is only flexible (relative) to a degree, and that what is truly good or evil can be discerned by studying human behavior, happiness, suffering, and more.

****As you read through these definitions try to discern into which of these camps each of these definitions fall. Some may fall into more than one.**

Plato (428-427 BC) - "Evils... can never pass away; for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good. Having no place among the Gods in heaven, of necessity they hover around the earthly nature and this mortal sphere. Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like Him is to become holy and just and wise."

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 BC) - "For when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil--not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked." Evil, then, is the *act* itself of choosing the lesser good. To Augustine the source of evil is in the free will of persons: "And I strained

to perceive what I now heard, that free-will was the cause of our doing ill.” Evil was a “perversion of the will, turned aside from...God” to lesser things.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) - “. . . [As] the term good signifies ‘perfect being’, so the term *evil* signifies nothing else than ‘privation of perfect being.’ In its proper acceptance, privation is predicated on that which is fitted by its nature to be possessed, and to be possessed at a certain time and in a certain manner. Evidently, therefore, a thing is called evil if it lacks a perfection it ought to have. Thus if a man lacks the sense of sight, this is an evil for him. But the same lack is not an evil for a stone, for the stone is not equipped by nature to have the faculty of sight.”

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) - Said that the difference between good and evil is merely one of personal inclinations: “So everyone, by the highest right of Nature, judges what is good and what is evil, considers his own advantage according to his own temperament... “ and “In the state of nature, wrong-doing is impossible; or, if anyone does wrong, it is to himself, not to another. For no one by the law of nature is bound to please another, unless he chooses, nor to hold anything to be good or evil, but what he himself, according to his own temperament, pronounces to be so; and, to speak generally, nothing is forbidden by the law of nature, except what is beyond everyone's power.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) - “I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser, who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? my friend suggested, — ‘But these impulses may be from below, not from above.’ I replied, ‘They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil.’ No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it.”

Fredrick Nietzsche (1844-1900) - “That which an age feels to be evil is usually an untimely echo of what was formerly considered good - the atavism of an old ideal.”

Henry Nelson Wieman (1884-1975) - Creative Good is that which “operates in human life with such character and power that it will transform man as he cannot transform himself, saving him from evil and leading him to the best that human life can ever reach.” Creative good cannot be destroyed, but it can be obstructed. One form of evil is that which obstructs creative good. The other form of evil is that which destroys created good. “Of these two forms of evil, the most deadly by far is the obstructive.”

Thich Nacht Hahn - “Evil exists. God exists also. Evil and God are two sides of ourselves. God is that great understanding, that great love within us. That is what we call

Buddha also, the enlightened mind that is able to see through all ignorance. What is evil? It is when the face of God, the face of the Buddha within us has become hidden.”

Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev. Victoria Safford - “Evil is the capacity, within us and among us, to break sacred bonds with our own souls, with one another, and with the holy. Further, it is the willingness to excuse or justify this damage, to deny it, or to call it virtue. The soil in which it flourishes is a rich compost of ignorance, arrogance, fear, and delusion—mostly self-delusion—all mingled with the sparkling dust of our original, human being.”

Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev. Abhi Janamanchi - “I see evil as the willful separation from, and lack of concern for, the ‘common good.’ Evil occurs when the capacity for empathy exists and is ignored.”

Unitarian Universalist and Methodist Minister, Rev. Rebecca Parker - “Evil can never be denied or destroyed. It operates within and behind masks - and its fraud fools even those who wear its mask. Resisting evil requires advanced wisdom, courage and skill... Evil is not mysterious, not insignificant, and not rare. It is ordinary, life-destroying and pervasive.”

Unitarian Universalist Minister and Author of this Curriculum, Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael - “Evil is a force, greater than individual determination, but channeled and catalyzed by human intervention that desecrates the sacred quality of being (its essential and eternal dependency and interconnection). Conversely (to show what for me is opposite of Evil), God is a force, greater than individual determination that announces the sacred quality of being (its essential and eternal dependency and interconnection). Evil is perpetuated by distance, by the breaks, splits, and chasms that grow between otherwise inseparable aspects of being. Distance need not be physical. Distance can be psychological - between one’s ego and one’s conscience. Distance can be intellectual - between one’s rational conclusions and their physical and emotional force. Distance can be emotional or spiritual - between our experience of our own pain and our ability to empathetically experience another’s pain.”

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Class One: *Why Study Evil?*

Pre-work, to be completed in preparation for Class One:

- Read the Class Expectations, Purpose, and Bibliography (Study Guide, 2-5)
- Read A Collection of Definitions of Evil (Study Guide, 6-8)

Welcome

Class Covenant

Mini Lecture I - “*Why I Study Evil*”

Check In - “*Why have you chosen to take this class?*”

Review: Class Expectations, Materials, Purpose, and Some Definitions of Evil

Questions for private journaling, then small-group reflection:

- Do you use the word evil?
- Are you comfortable using the word “evil?” Why or why not?
- Do you have a felt sense of what you mean when you regard something as “evil?”
- Can you describe what it is that makes something “evil?”

Video: *Considering our capacity for evil* -

The Milligram Experiment, “A Study on Obedience”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCVII-_4GZQ

Questions to Consider while watching the video:

- What questions and considerations regarding the nature of evil arise for you, after watching this video?

- To what extent is evil systemic, and to what extent is it individual? Or said another way: to what extent is evil the product of social, cultural, or institutional contexts, and to what extent is evil the product of an individual willfully acting alone.

Narratives: Concerning the Rwandan Genocide

- I. **From Chua, Amy: World on Fire p. 165-166:** “The tragic case of Rwanda illustrates the most extreme form of majority supported, democracy-assisted efforts to exterminate an economically dominant ethnic minority. Historically, Rwanda’s roughly 85 percent Hutus were cultivators, whereas the roughly 14 percent Tutsis were herdsman. ‘This was the original inequality: cattle are a more valuable asset than produce,’ writes Philip Gourevitch. After 1860, when Mwame Kigeri Rwabugiri, a Tutsi ascended the Rwandan throne, the stratification between Hutus and Tutsis intensified. Rwanda essentially became a feudal kingdom in which Tutsis were overlords, and Hutus their vassals. Still, the line distinguishing Hutu and Tutsi was much more porous than it would become later: The two groups spoke a common language, intermarriage occurred, and successful Hutus could ‘become Tutsi.’ In classic divide-and-conquer fashion, the Belgian colonizers injected a sharper and much more divisive sense of ethnicity into Rwandan society—a sense of ethnicity that also happened to corroborate the Belgian’s own ‘scientific’ beliefs about racial superiority. To facilitate their own goals of colonial subjugation, the Belgians perpetuated the myth that the Tutsi - usually stereotyped as lanky, light skinned, and thin-lipped—were genetically superior to, and thus born to rule over the supposedly stockier, darker, thick-lipped Hutus. ...The Belgians conducted a ‘census’ then issued ‘ethnic’ identity cards... openly favored the “more intelligent, more active, and more refined” Tutsis, giving them superior education and assigning them all the best administrative and political position... while the Hutu majority was reduced to a humiliated pool of forced labor. Over the years, what French scholar Gerald Prunier has called ‘an aggressively resentful inferiority complex’ deepened and festered... and the Hutu political activists that called for ‘majority rule’ and ‘democratic revolution’ were not seeking equality—but revenge.”

- II. **From Brooks, David: The Social Animal, p. 283:** “The French journalist Jean Hatzfeld interviewed participants in the Rwandan genocide for his book *Machete Season*. The participants were caught up in a tribal frenzy. They began to perceive their neighbors in radically perverse ways. One man Hatzfeld spoke with murdered a Tutsi who lived nearby: ‘I finished him off in a rush, not thinking anything of it, even though he was a neighbor, quite close on my hill. In truth, it came to me only after-

ward: I had taken the life of a neighbor. I mean, at the fatal instant I did not see in him what he had been before; I struck someone who was no longer either close or strange to me, who wasn't exactly ordinary anymore, I'm saying like the people you meet every day. His features were indeed similar to those of the person I knew, but nothing firmly reminded me that I had lived beside him for a long time.'"

Discussion Questions for considering these narratives:

- Do you see evil at work in these narratives?
- Can you pinpoint the source of evil in these narratives?
- Can you pinpoint the nature of evil in these narratives?
- What would be a less extreme manifestation of this same evil, something that we might all personally participate in, from time to time?

Evolving Definition of Evil:

Homework

- **Class One homework, to be completed in preparation for Class Two:**
 - Read the Introduction to Lance Morrow: *Evil, an Investigation*, p. 1-13
 - (Extra reading, for a deeper engagement) Read Section One of the Reader including: Introduction, Jennifer L. Geddes: *Evil after Postmodernism*, and Ron Rosenbaum "Rescuing Evil," from *First Things*.

Closing Quote:

'If I look at the mass I will never act. I will only act if I look at just one.'
- Mother Theresa

Class Two: Evil After Postmodernism

Welcome -

Mini Lecture II - “Postmodernism and Evil - Evil in the Liberal Religious Context”

Responses to the Reading - Focus Questions for Discussion:

- Lance Morrow considers the difference between understanding and describing evil. He concludes that it may be impossible to understand evil, but possible to describe it. He also allows that “people’s views of evil tend to be generational, formed by particulars of personal and historical experience.” Do you agree or disagree with his conclusions?
- What have you experienced that you are willing to describe as evil?
- What have you read or heard about that you are willing to describe as evil?

Reflective Material: Concerning the 9-11-2001 Terrorist Attacks

1. Photograph from September 11, by Wislawa Szymborska

TRANSLATED BY CLARE CAVANAGH AND STANISŁAW BARAŃCZAK

*They jumped from the burning floors—
one, two, a few more,
higher, lower.*

*The photograph halted them in life,
and now keeps them
above the earth toward the earth.*

*Each is still complete,
with a particular face
and blood well hidden.*

*There’s enough time
for hair to come loose,
for keys and coins*

to fall from pockets.

*They're still within the air's reach,
within the compass of places
that have just now opened.*

*I can do only two things for them—
describe this flight
and not add a last line.*

2. Video: Exhibit 13, The Blue Man Group - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K-tIV0Xf5jQ>

Journaling:

What images, words, or moments haunt you from the September 11th terrorist attacks? Why do you suppose you are haunted by these specific images, words or moments? Is evil shown or exhibited by these images, and if so, how? If you did not experience the September 11th terrorist attacks or if you did not experience them in a way that allows you to answer these questions, choose a life experience that fits.

Narrative: On Osama Bin Ladin, and the 9-11, 2001 terrorist attack, from Wikipedia:

“Bin Laden initially denied but later admitted involvement in the attacks. On December 27, 2001, a bin Laden video was released. In the video, he said, ‘It has become clear that the West in general and America in particular have an unspeakable hatred for Islam....It is the hatred of crusaders. Terrorism against America deserves to be praised because it was a response to injustice, aimed at forcing America to stop its support for Israel, which kills our people...We say that the end of the United States is imminent, whether Bin Laden or his followers are alive or dead, for the awakening of the Muslim umma (nation) has occurred.’ Shortly before the U.S. presidential election in 2004, in a taped statement, bin Laden publicly acknowledged al-Qaeda's involvement in the attacks on the U.S. and admitted his direct link to the attacks. He said that the attacks were carried out because, ‘we are free ... and want to regain freedom for our nation. As you undermine our security we undermine yours.’ Bin Laden here said he had personally directed his followers to attack the World Trade Center.”

In bin Laden's November 2002 "Letter to America," he explicitly stated that al-Qaeda's motives for their attacks include

- U.S. support of Israel

- Support for the "attacks against Muslims" in Somalia
- Support of Russian "atrocities against Muslims" in Chechnya
- Pro-American governments in the Middle East (who "act as your agents")
- Support of Indian "oppression against Muslims" in Kashmir
- The presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia
- The sanctions against Iraq

Questions for considering this narrative:

- Do you see evil at work in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the source of evil in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the nature of evil in this narrative?
- What would be a less extreme manifestation of this same evil, something that we might all personally participate in, from time to time?

Evolving Definition of Evil:

Homework

- **Class Two homework, to be completed in preparation for Class Three:**
 - Read Chapter 4 of Lance Morrow, *Evil, an Investigation*, pg. 34-38.
 - Read the first piece in Section Two of the Reader: Shultz, William. "What Torture Has Taught Me" *The UU World*, Winter: 11,1, 2006.
 - (Extra reading, for a deeper engagement) Read the second piece in Section Two of the Reader: Augustine, Saint, of Hippo. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Book 2*, between CE 397 and CE 398 (selections).
 - (Extra listening, for a deeper engagement) Listen to NPR, "The Bad Show," Radio Lab, season 10, episode 5, section on the Milligram experiment. <http://www.radiolab.org/story/180092-the-bad-show/> (minutes 8:45 through to 25.00).

Closing Quote:

“A Callery pear tree became known as the ‘Survivor Tree’ after enduring the September 11, 2001 terror attacks at the World Trade Center. In October 2001, the tree was discovered at Ground Zero severely damaged, with snapped roots and burned and broken branches. The tree was removed from the rubble and placed in the care of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. After its recovery and rehabilitation, the tree was returned to the Memorial in 2010. New, smooth limbs extended from the gnarled stumps, creating a visible demarcation between the tree’s past and present. Today, the tree stands as a living reminder of resilience, survival and rebirth.”

- *From the 9/11 Memorial Website: <http://www.911memorial.org/survivor-tree>*

Class Three: Two Foundational Religious Concerns - Evil and Theodicy, Evil and Freedom

Welcome -

Video: “Science of Evil” National Geographic, - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_3RIIxpAJ0

Mini Lecture III - “*Evil and Theodicy, Evil and Freedom*”

Responses to the Reading and Lecture - Focus Activity and Questions:

- Consider your freedom. Place yourself on a continuum from wholly determined to wholly free. Why did you place yourself where you did?
- Rev. Dr. William Schultz challenges our conventional understanding of the first principle of our Unitarian Universalist Association, the *inherent worth and dignity of every person*. Does this principle serve as an essential moral code for you? Why or why not?
- How do you rectify the dichotomy of a good god or an essentially benevolent universe with the reality of evil?

Narrative: On Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, from Roger Shattuck “Narrating Evil,” from Geddes, Jennifer. *Evil After Postmodernism* pg.52-53:

“Seventy-five years ago a homicide shocked the nation: Nathan Leopold (age 20) and Richard Loeb (age 19), two precocious college graduates in Chicago, each from a wealthy family, kidnapped and murdered a fourteen-year-old boy from their neighborhood. They then tried to extort a ransom from the boy’s family.

...The two youths were not deprived nor mistreated. They could look forward to a brilliant future. Why this seemingly senseless crime? They sought the thrill, the kind of elation Baudelaire imagined in a momentary experience. But they planned this empty crime over a long period of time. They hoped it would demonstrate that they could conceive and carry out a perfect crime. They sought a physical and sexual bond by sharing the responsibility for such an inhuman action. ...And such a crime would demonstrate their superiority to and exemption from the ordinary laws of mankind.

The young men's defense was conducted by Clarence Darrow. ...In his summation, Darrow cited the Nietzsche influence ...and turned it into a mitigating influence. Of Loeb, the more intellectual of the two: 'Your honor, it is hardly fair to hang a nineteen-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the university.' Of Leopold: the fact the he lived and practiced the superman myth was evidence of a 'diseased mind.' The judge sentenced Leopold and Loeb to life plus ninety-nine years."

Questions for considering this narrative:

- Do you see evil at work in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the source of evil in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the nature of evil in this narrative?
- What would be a less extreme manifestation of this same evil, something that we might all personally participate in, from time to time?

Evolving Definition of Evil:

Homework

Class three Homework, to be completed in preparation for class four:

- **Watch one movie:** "12 Years a Slave," director Steve McQueen, "City of God," directors Fernando Meirelles, Kátia Lund; "Fallen," director: Gregory Hoblit; "Seven," director: David Fincher, "The Ring," director: Gore Verbinski, "Dark Matter," director: Chen Shi-zheng, "Boys Don't Cry," director: Kimberly Pierce, "American History X," director Tony Kaye; "Mississippi Burning," director: Alan Parker or "The Ox-Bow Incident," director: William A. Wellman.
- **Prepare to report:** Prepare to share a synopsis of the movie as well as your personal experience of the movie, especially your experience of the evil portrayed.
- **Read:** Morrow, Lance: *Evil, an Investigation*, Chapter 7 "The Axis of Wrong," pg. 49-56

Closing Video: "Anthem" by Leonard Cohen -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDTph7mer3I>

Class Four: Evil and Conscience, Evil and Intention

Welcome

Mini Lecture IV: “*Conscience and Intention*”

Video: Henry Fonda’s Monologue on *Conscience* from the “Ox Bow Incident” directed by William A. Wellman (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lljIrAfBzYs>)

Responses to the Reading and Video - Focus Question:

- Do you trust your conscience to detect evil? Why or why not? Might you have blindspots? Are there ways for you to refine your conscience’s ability to detect evil?
- If someone contributes to an evil act or result without intending to contribute (without awareness of the evil they are committing or allowing), have they done evil?
- What is some evil you have participated in, that your conscience later called you to rectify?

Movie Summaries: Small Group Sharing

- Group members actively listen while each group member give a synopsis of the movie, and report on their personal experience, especially their experience of the movie’s depiction of evil.
- When each group member has shared, begin a discussion, considering especially your personal responses to the films, and how the idea of conscience and intention play into your understanding of what is, and what is not, evil.

Narrative: The Rifleman’s Dilemma, Morrow, Lance. *Evil, an Investigation*, p.74-5

“I was a rifleman toward the end of the war, and my squad was moving out in advance of the American lines—in a no-man’s-land. We came to a small river, and we captured eight Germans there. They were little more than kids, 16 or 17 years old.

We had a dilemma. We were very far from our lines. We couldn’t take them prisoner and bring them back to our own people. The country was too dangerous, and we had our assignment. And we could not let them go.

We made them turn their back and face the river. Then we went down the row and shot each of them in the back of the head... Funny, they were so obedient. Germans! They just stood there in the line and waited their turn to be shot.”

{The soldier recounting the story is asked: “Do you ever think of it now, and does it bother you.”}

“Sometimes, but it doesn’t really bother me. We had seen so much. Our friends had died, we’d seen them blown up, dying in all sorts of horrible ways. This was something we had to do and we did it.”

Questions for considering this narrative:

- Do you see evil at work in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the source of evil in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the nature of evil in this narrative?
- What would be a less extreme manifestation of this same evil, something that we might all personally participate in, from time to time?

Evolving Definition of Evil:

Homework:

• Class Four homework, to be completed in preparation for Class Five:

- Read the first piece in Section 3 of the Reader: Peck, M. Scott. People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil, New York: Touchstone, p.47-65
- Watch: Bloom, Paul. Just Babies - The Origin of Good and Evil <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLrzetNHAYo>
- (Extra Reading for a deeper engagement) Read the second piece in Section 3 of the Reader: Geddes, Jennifer ed. evil after postmodernism: “Reflexivity of Evil - Modernity and Moral Transgression in the War in Bosnia” by Thomas Cushman. p. 79-100

Closing Video: “Biko” by Peter Gabriel http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDaLEG-b_mo8

Class Five: Evil as Hiding

Welcome -

Mini Lecture V: “*Indifference and Confession*”

Video: Matthew Cordle “I Killed a Man” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mmp-K_EshSL4

Responses to the Reading and Videos - Discussion

- Consider the experiments in Paul Bloom’s video, were you surprised by any of the outcomes? Do you come to the same conclusions as Bloom?
- Would you equate evil with “a sick soul” as M. Scott Peck does?
- How do you feel watching Matthew Cordle’s video?
- How has the practice of confession (whether religious or secular) served you?

Video: “Sympathy for the Devil” by the Rolling Stones <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRXGsPBUV5g>

Narrative, Read Dramatically: The Case of Hartley and Sarah, Peck, M. Scott. *The People of the Lie* p. 108-111 (excerpts)

Roles:

Sarah

Hartley

M. Scott Peck

M. Scott Peck: (Aside) I first saw them a week after Hartley had been discharged from the state hospital. A month before, at 11 o’clock on a Saturday morning, Hartley had cut both sides of his neck with a straight-edge razor. Bare-chested, he walked out from the bathroom into the living room, where Sarah was balancing their checkbook and announced -

Hartley: I just tried to kill myself again.

M.Scott Peck: (Aside) Because they had recently moved into the area, Hartley was referred for follow up care to our clinic. His discharge diagnosis was ‘involuntal depressive reaction.’ He was on high doses of antidepressant and tranquilizing medication. When I went out to the waiting room to greet him, Hartley was sitting silently next to his wife, staring into space with dull eyes. I felt tired looking at him.
(To Hartley) I’m Dr. Peck, come on into my office.

Hartley: Can my wife come too?

Sarah: (Smiling, sweetly) If it’s all right with you, Doctor.

M. Scott Peck: (Aside) Her smile... somehow it was incongruous with the faintly bitter expression conveyed by the tight wrinkles around her mouth. ...I led them both into my office.

(To Hartley) Why did you want your wife to come in with you?

Hartley: I’m more comfortable when she’s close to me.

M. Scott Peck: (Aside) I must have looked quizzical.

Sarah: (Smiling gaily) Hartley’s been that way for the longest time, Doctor. He hates to let me out of his sight for a moment.

M. Scott Peck: Is that because you’re jealous?

Hartley: (Dully) No.

M. Scott Peck: Then why?

Hartley: I’m scared.

M. Scott Peck: Scared of what?

Hartley: I don’t know, I’m just scared.

Sarah: (Interrupting) I think it’s because of his thoughts, Doctor. (To Hartley) Go on, Hartley, you can tell him about your thoughts.

Hartley: (Silent)

M. Scott Peck: What thoughts is she talking about?

Hartley: (Monotone) My thoughts about kill.

M. Scott Peck: Kill? You mean you have thoughts about killing?

Hartley: No just kill.

M. Scott Peck: I'm afraid I don't understand.

Hartley: It's just a word thought, the word just comes into my mind, mostly in the morning. When I get up and start shaving and start looking at myself in the mirror. It's just there.

M. Scott Peck: You mean like a hallucination?

Hartley: No, just a voice, when I'm shaving, in the morning.

M. Scott Peck: Do you shave with a straightedge razor?

Hartley: (Nods)

M. Scott Peck: It sounds as if you want to kill someone with your razor?

(Aside) Hartley looked frightened. It was the first sign of emotion I had seen on his face.

Hartley: No, it's not a feeling, just a word.

M. Scott Peck: Well, you apparently wanted to kill yourself. Why was that?

Hartley: I feel so horrible. I'm no good to anyone. I'm nothing but a burden to Sarah.

M. Scott Peck: Is he a burden to you Sarah?

Sarah: (Cheerfully) Oh, I don't mind. I would like to be able to have a little more time to myself. And of course we don't have enough money.

M. Scott Peck: So he is a burden to you?

Sarah: The Lord supports me.

M. Scott Peck: Why is it that you don't have enough money?

Sarah: Hartley hasn't worked for eight years, he's been so depressed, the poor dear. But we get by on what I make at the telephone company.

Hartley: I used to be a salesman.

Sarah: He did manage to work the first ten years we were married, but he was never really very aggressive - were you dear?

Hartley: I made over twenty thousand dollars in commissions alone the year we got married.

Sarah: Yes, but that was in 'fifty-six. That was a boom year for electrical switches. Anyone who happened to be selling switches then would have made that kind of money.

Hartley: (Silent)

M. Scott Peck: Hartley, why did you stop working?

Hartley: My depression, I felt so awful in the mornings. It must have been my words.

Sarah: Go on dear, tell the doctor about the other words.

Hartley: Well, sometimes there are other words like cut or hammer. ...sometimes blood.

M. Scott Peck: Those are all angry words.

Hartley: I'm not angry.

M. Scott Peck: (To Sarah) What do you think? Do you think he's angry?

Sarah: (Gayly smiling) Oh, I think Hartley hates me.

M. Scott Peck: (Aside) I stared at her in amazement. I had begun to suspect the truth of this, but I hardly expected her to be so calmly aware of it.

(To Sarah) Aren't you worried that he might hurt you?

Sarah: Oh, no. Hartley wouldn't hurt a fly - would you dear? ...He couldn't hurt me. He's such a weakling.

Hartley: (Expressionless, silent.)

Questions for considering this narrative:

- Do you see evil at work in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the source of evil in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the nature of evil in this narrative?
- What would be a less extreme manifestation of this same evil, something that we might all personally participate in, from time to time?

Evolving Definition of Evil:

Homework

- **Class Five homework, to be completed in preparation for Class Six:**
 - Read: Morrow, Lance. *Evil, an Investigation*, "Us and Them," p. 175-178
 - Watch Video: Anderson Cooper's Version of the Doll Test, 2010 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSdKy2q6pEY>)
 - (Extra Reading for deeper engagement) Read the first piece in Section 4 of the Reader: Wheatley and Jones ed. *Soul Work: Anti Racist Theologies*, p. 171-185 ("Not Somewhere Else, But Here" by Rebecca Parker.)
 - (Extra Reading for deeper engagement) Read the second piece in Section 4 of the Reader: Sachs, Rabbi Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference*, p.45-66 ("Exorcizing Plato's Ghost")
 - (Extra Videos for a deeper engagement) Study finds: "White kids are far more negative about racial interactions than Black kids are," 2012 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC1nRepRSxo>) and Kids Speak Their Minds on Race, 2012 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC1nRepRSxo>)

Closing Quote:

“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.” - Kurt Vonnegut

Class Six: Us and Them, Evil as Distance

Welcome -

Mini Lecture VI - “*Evil as Distance*”

Video: Chris Rock on the Confederate Flag: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZ8_49BRSiw

Responses to the Reading and Video - Focus Questions:

- Have you ever felt that you were being regarded as “them,” not “us,” that you were seen as an outsider, or that you were not accepted for some aspect of your person? How did it feel?
- When you watched the children respond to the questions about skin color in the Doll Test video how did you feel?
- Racism in the United States is often referred to as a systemic evil, perpetuated not as much by the prejudicial intentions of individuals but by customs, institutions, collective fears. How are other systemic evils (such as violence against women or exploitation of children) perpetuated?

Video: “Us and Them” by Pink Floyd: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb-2WVepAUQ>

Narrative: From the diaries of Warsaw, Morrow, Lance: *Evil, an Investigation* p.257

“Warsaw’s Jewish Historical Institute assembled a collection of personal records (available in English Translations as *Words to Outlive Us*). Most of the writers of these accounts are unknown. Some of the stories are unbearable to read. Themes, sometimes of immense moral complexity, thread through the scraps and diaries. There are more than enough glimpse of what might be called the sporting beast—for example, an SS officer’s execution of a young Jewish mother with a baby on her shoulder, to whom the officer had, a moment before, given a loaf of bread. Or this, recorded by an anonymous woman: ‘One day a small Jewish boy was killed on Biala Street as he attempted to pull a carrot lying in the gutter on the Aryan side through a hole in the fence. A German spotted him,

inserted his gun in the hole, and killed the boy with one well-aimed shot.’ One Samuel Putterman writes: ‘One officer drove a small sports car. This gentleman would zigzag down Leszno Street, firing all the while at pedestrians. It was a game.’ Through such scenes runs a vibration of Caligula’s boast: ‘Remember, I can do anything to anyone’ - the pleasure that power takes is it’s own vicious freedom.”

Questions for considering this narrative:

- Do you see evil at work in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the source of evil in this narrative?
- Can you pinpoint the nature of evil in this narrative?
- What would be a less extreme manifestation of this same evil, something that we might all personally participate in, from time to time?

Your Evolving Definition of Evil:

Homework

Class Six homework, to be completed in preparation for Class Seven:

- Read: Morrow, Lance. *Evil, an Investigation*, “Hope,” p. 259-266
- Read Section 5 of the Reader: Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*, “The Gospel According to Shug”
- Prepare your Definition of Evil for presentation. You are welcome to present a prose piece, poetry, a drawing, a video, etc. *Each participant will be given ten minutes total - five minutes to present and five minutes to engage questions.*

Closing Quote:

“The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognize God’s image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals, are different from mine? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.”

— Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*

Class Seven:

Conclusion - Personal Definitions and Commitments

Welcome -

Personal Definitions -

Each participant will be given ten minutes total - five minutes to present and five minutes to engage questions.

Journaling -

Reflect back on the sharing, our discussions and your personal work. Consider the narratives, the videos, the readings, the class comments that were the most difficult for you. You are welcome to look back at your own notes or the class materials. Consider any moments of insight, when you were suddenly seeing something differently or perhaps from a different angle. Spend a few minutes journaling these recollections. If there is time, we will meet in small groups to share these insights.

Commitment -

Perhaps we are powerless as individuals to conquer, to rid the world of evil. Still, like anything else that has a life, an existence (in the abstract sense), it requires sustenance to survive and can be fed by individual actions or systemic realities. What will you do, now and in the future, so that you do not feed evil? Do your best to provide a single, achievable goal.

Sharing of Commitments -

The commitments will be shared as a litany, with brief pauses between each one, but without any commentary.

Gratitude and Closing -

Class Evaluation -

Please complete the class evaluation on the following two pages, and turn it in before you leave. Your feedback will be deeply considered and will help your leader(s) provide a better experience for others.

Class Evaluation

Course Title:

Dates of Course:

Names of Facilitator(s):

1. Please rate the following on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Your additional comments or suggestions are welcome – please add them to the “Any other comments” section at the end of this form.
 - Content _____
 - Pacing _____
 - Organization of materials _____
 - Quality of readings and assignments _____
 - Class discussions _____
 - Facilitators’ skills _____
 - Adequacy of meeting space(s) _____
 - Class met my expectations _____
 - Overall rating _____
2. Do you think this class should be offered again in the future? _____ (Y/N)
Why or why not?
3. If yes, what comments or suggestions would you pass on to future facilitators?
4. If yes, would you be interested in facilitating or co-facilitating this class in the future?
5. What activity(ies) or aspect(s) of the class did you especially like, and why?

6. If there was an activity or aspect of the class that you feel did not work in this context, please describe it and explain why it didn't work for you.
7. To help us with scheduling future programs, please let us know when you would be most likely to attend adult RE events (days of the week, times of day, time of year).
8. Any other comments?

Your name & contact information (optional)

If you would like feedback from the class facilitators or Lifespan RE Committee, or if you would like to discuss serving our religious education program, please let us know how to reach you.

NAME

EMAIL

PHONE