

Contemporary Ethical Dilemmas, Spring 2008: An(im)alogies of Moral Monstrosity

Dr. Ralph Acampora, Heger Hall (Room 104G) M/F 11:15-12:40, phirra@hofstra.edu

Investigation

Do atrocities of slavery, genocide, extreme misogyny, and animal exploitation have anything in common—such as massive scale or institutional structure? If so, (how) does that matter ethically? If not, (why) are some boundaries of moral comparison not to be crossed? Should grave kinds of immorality be analyzed separately, and on what terms? Is the category of ‘evil’ ever appropriate or is the very concept of wickedness exhausted?

Objectives (cf. www.hofstra.edu/Academics/Colleges/HCLAS/PHI/phi_goals_objectives.html)

- *compare* forms of oppression factually and *analyze* them ethically (7, 2-3)
- *bear witness* to historical, recent, and ongoing moral atrocities (8)
- *defend* and/or *critique* (post-)modern conceptions of evil (5, 3)
- *discuss* controversy and sensitive issues with courage and respect (4)

Evaluation

- *examination*: 2 tests (short-answers and essays) = 30% each
- *composition*: 1 paper (several pages length) = 20%
- *participation*: oral involvement and group-work = 20%

Books (first four are required, last one is recommended; other texts tba on e-reserve)

Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals & the Holocaust, Patterson (Lantern, 02)

The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery, rev. ed. Spiegel (Mirror, 1996)

Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust, Laurence Thomas (Temple, 1993)

The Lives of Animals, Tanner Lectures – J M Coetzee (Princeton University Press, 2001)

The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil, Claudia Card (Oxford University Press, 2002)

Guide to Understanding the Foundations of Ethical Reasoning, Paul and Elder (2003)

Policies

Attendance is mandatory and rewarding; plagiarism is prohibited and penalized (as per Hofstra protocol). It is expected that we will tend to dining and toileting needs, as well as any desires for private conversation, before or after—but *not during*—our classtime.

Schedule of Assignments and Topics

28 Jan: introduction – syllabus and handout

1 Feb: atrocity paradigm – AP chap. 1

4 Feb: human supremacy – ET chap. 1

8 Feb: inner/outer evil – Kekes rdg. (e-reserve)

11 Feb: animal villains – ET chap. 2

15 Feb: human condition – VE chap. 2

22 Feb: industrial slaughter – ET chap. 3

25 Feb: moral community – VE chap. 3

29 Feb: breeding and culling – ET chap. 4

3 Mar: evil characterized – VE chap. 4

7 Mar: abattoirs – ET chap. 5

10 Mar: doubled psyches – VE chap. 5

14 Mar: mid-term examination

24, 28 Mar: Coetzee & Costello – LA pp. 15-72 (Darfur: rec. rdg. on www)

31 Mar, 4 Apr: slavery parallels – DC entire (Sudan: rec. rdg. on www)

7,11 Apr: institutional differences – VE chps. 6,7

14,18 Apr: power & sex → war/rape & zoo/porn – AP chap. 6 & reserve rdg.

25,28 Apr: domestic abuse (wives, kids, pets) – AP chap. 7 and rsv. rdg.

2 May: victims and perpetrators – AP chps. 8,9

4 May: writing workshop and course evaluation

Reading period: term paper

Finals week: last examination