ETHICS AND THE HOLOCAUST (SHOAH)

PHIL-439-01
PHIL-639-01

Goals and Objectives

The primary aims of this course are to provide an overview of the Jewish Holocaust that occurred in Europe between 1933 and 1945 and to examine the moral questions raised by the attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. Attention will also be devoted to programs of persecution and murder directed against Poles, the Roma and Sinti (sometimes called “Gypsies”), and people afflicted with genetic disorders, mental illness, intellectual disabilities, or physical handicaps.

We will begin by reading the accounts of two victims of the Jewish Holocaust, Primo Levi from Italy and Dawid Sierakowiak from Poland. We will next visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in an effort to gain an overview of the major events in the escalating Nazi campaign against the Jewish people. Our readings during the subsequent seven sessions will devote detailed attention to the Jewish religious heritage, to Christian anti-Jewish views, and to the major events in the history of the Holocaust. We will rely especially on reading and seeking to interpret primary-source materials. In the next-to-last class session we will have the privilege of speaking with a Holocaust survivor. The final class session will provide a review of the semester's work and attempt a synthesis of what we have learned.

In each class session we will focus particular attention on the moral decisions faced by perpetrators, collaborators, victims, bystanders, resisters, and rescuers during the Holocaust. In some cases we will read and critique the ethical arguments put forward by the people in these various categories. In other cases we will try to discern what moral justifications they would have attempted to provide for their actions or omissions.

Audiovisual materials shown in class or placed on reserve will supplement the readings.

This class is a seminar, so the instructor will seldom do more than frame several issues at the beginning of the class session. The quality of the ensuing discussion will depend primarily on the dedication of each student to reading and assimilating the assigned texts.
Overview of Topics

Class 1 (September 2): Introduction to the course

Class 2 (September 9): Primo Levi: life and death in a camp

Class 3 (September 16: Rosh Hashanah): Dawid Sierakowiak: life and death in a ghetto

Class 4 (September 23): Visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; initial readings on the Jewish heritage; Christian anti-Jewish views; National Socialism

Class 5 (September 30): The Jewish heritage; Christian anti-Jewish views; National Socialism

Class 6 (October 7): Nazi anti-Jewish policies, January 1933 through August 1939; Jewish life in Germany and Austria during this time

Class 7 (October 14): Germany's attack on Poland, September 1939; German occupation and liquidation policies vis-à-vis Poles and Jews, 1939-1941

Class 8 (October 21): The Nazi “euthanasia” program, 1939-1941

Class 9 (October 28): Germany's attacks on multiple European nations, April 1940-May 1941; German plans for European Jews; ongoing deportations; life in the Jewish ghettos, January 1940 to June 1941; murders in Buchenwald, Spring 1941

Class 10 (November 4): Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, June 1941; the Einsatzgruppen; the Wannsee Conference, January 1942; life and death in the ghettos, July 1941 to September 1944; concentration and extermination camps; massive deportations, 1942-1944; genocide

Class 11 (November 11): Jewish responses to persecution and genocide; Jewish resistance; resistance and rescue by non-Jews; the responses of Allied governments to the Holocaust

Class 12 (November 18): A conversation with a Holocaust survivor

Thanksgiving Holiday

Class 13 (December 2): Review and synthesis
Textbooks

Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust*, 8th ed. (Lincoln, NE, and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 1999) [Arad, *Documents*]


Readings

Class 1 (September 2): Introduction to the course

No advance readings

Class 2 (September 9): Primo Levi: life and death in a camp


Class 3 (September 16: Rosh Hashanah): Dawid Sierakowiak: life and death in a ghetto

Dawid Sierakowski, *Diary* (entire book)

Class 4 (September 23): Visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; initial readings on the Jewish heritage; Christian anti-Jewish views; National Socialism

General background

Bergen, *War and Genocide*, chaps. 1 and 2, pp. 1-51

The Jewish religious and cultural heritage


Engel, *The Holocaust*, chap. 2, pp. 1-13

Class 5 (September 30): The Jewish heritage; Christian anti-Jewish views; National Socialism

Christian anti-Jewish views

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #1-#5, #7

The worldview and rise of Hitler and the National Socialist Party


Adolf Hitler, Excerpts from a speech given August 13, 1920; English translation in Engel, *The Holocaust*, doc. 2, pp. 89-90

* Indicates readings available on the Blackboard Web site for this course
* Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (1943 English translation), pp. 3-4,34-35, 51-65, and 679

Additional readings for graduate students

*“Protocols of the Elders of Zion [excerpts],” in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, eds., The Jew in the Modern World, pp. 363-367


Class 6 (October 7): Nazi anti-Jewish policies, January 1933 through August 1939; Jewish life in Germany and Austria during this time

General

Bergen, War and Genocide, chaps. 3 and 4, pp. 53-100

1933

Hochstadt, Sources, #10

Arad, Documents, #7, #8, #10, #11

Hochstadt, Sources, #11

Arad, Documents, #14-#16, #21, #24, #26, #27

1935

Arad, Documents, #32-#35

1933-1937


1938-1939

Hochstadt, Sources, #16, #17

Arad, Documents, #49-#51, #53

Hochstadt, Sources, #22, #24

*Hans Berger, testimony in Richarz, Jewish Life in Germany, pp. 386-397
Arad, #57-#59

Hochstadt, #26

*New York Times editorialson the voyage of the St. Louis, June 8 and 9, 1939

Additional assignments for graduate students

Please check the New York Times and the London Times online archives for contemporaneous reports on the national anti-Jewish pogrom of November 1938 in Germany (often called “Kristallnacht”).

Engel, The Holocaust, chaps. 3 and 5, pp. 14-25 and 38-49

Class 7 (October 14): Germany's attack on Poland, September 1939; German occupation and liquidation policies vis-à-vis Poles and Jews, 1939-1941

General

Bergen, War and Genocide, chap. 5, pp. 101-125

Policies, planning, and initial stages of implementation, August-October 1939


Arad, Documents, #73.

Atrocities committed by the Einsatzgruppen and the German army, protests against the atrocities, and deportations, September 1939-February 1940

Hochstadt, Sources, #28

*Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #653-#657

Hochstadt, Sources, #31

Plans for, and atrocities within, the “General Government,” November 1939 to October 1940

*Noakes and Pridham, #679-#682, #700-#703
The establishment of Jewish ghettos in Lodz and Warsaw, December 1939-October 1940

Arad, Documents, #83, #100, #101

Himmler's recommendations for the treatment of ethnic minorities in the East, May 1940

Arad, Documents, #86

The U.S. State Department response to developments in Europe, June 1940

Hochstadt, Sources, #33

Additional reading for graduate students

*Peter Longerich, ed., Die Ermordung der europäischen Juden (1989), #4 (pp. 46-47) (in German)

Class 8 (October 21): The Nazi “euthanasia” program, 1939-1941

General

Bergen, War and Genocide, chap. 5, pp. 125-129

Philosophy and program

Hochstadt, Sources, #8

*Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #719-#724, #740, #727, #729-#737, #748-#753, #762

Hochstadt, Sources, #30, #32

Opposition

*Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #757-#761

*Peter Matheson, ed., The Third Reich and the Christian Churches (1981), pp. 84-89

*Letters of Cardinal Bertram and Cardinal Faulhaber to German government officials, August and November 1940
A cost-benefit analysis

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #34

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #763

Additional readings for graduate students

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #741-#747, #764-#769

Class 9 (October 28): Germany's attacks on multiple European nations, April 1940-May 1941; German plans for European Jews; ongoing deportations; life in the Jewish ghettos, January 1940 to June 1941; murders in Buchenwald, Spring 1941

War in Europe, 1940 and early 1941

Bergen, *War and Genocide*, chap. 6, pp. 131-144

Plans for a Jewish reservation in Poland, September 1939 to March 1940

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, text on pp. 442-443 and #771-#777

Arad, *Documents*, #63

The Madagascar Plan, then Poland again, July-December 1940

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #797-#806

Arad, *Documents*, #218

A plan for deportation “to the East,” probably to the Soviet Union, December 1940 to July 1941

*Peter Longerich, *The Unwritten Order* (2001,2003), chap. 10, pp. 96-104

Life in the Jewish ghettos, 1940 to June 1941

Please reflect on our earlier reading of Dawid Sierakowiak's diary.

Arad, *Documents*, #88, #92, #102, #103, #107-#109

Engel, *The Holocaust*, doc. 10, p. 95

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #785
Murders in a concentration camp, Spring 1941

Hochstadt, Sources, #55

Class 10 (November 4): Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, June 1941; the Einsatzgruppen; the Wannsee Conference, January 1942; life and death in the ghettos, July 1941 to September 1944; concentration and extermination camps; massive deportations, 1942-1944; genocide

General


Hitler's earlier “prophecy” about the consequence of a world war

Arad, Documents, #59

Pre-war discussions about the enemy and about how the war should be waged

*Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #810-#813

Arad, Documents, #170

Heydrich's assignment, July 1939

Arad, Documents, # 106

The assault of the German army and the Einsatzgruppen, July to December 1941

*Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, text on pp. 487-489 and #814, #814a

Arad, Documents, #176-#180, #195 (#177 is often called “the first Stahlecker report”; #180 is called "the Jäger report)

Engel, The Holocaust, doc. 13, pp. 98-99

Hochstadt, Documents, #35

A qualitative change in the scope of killing in August or September or October 1941?

*Longerich, Unwritten Order, chap. 12, pp. 116-125
The Jews in the Old Reich: the yellow star, no emigration, and mass deportations, September 1941 to July 1942

Arad, *Documents*, #68

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #828, #835, #837-#839, #841a, #842-#846

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #45

The Wannsee Conference, January 1942

Engel, *The Holocaust*, doc. 12, p. 97

Arad, *Documents*, #116

Arad, *Documents*, #117 (compare Hochstadt, *Sources*, #42)

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #850, #851

Hitler's reiteration of his “prophecy,” January 1942

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #543

Starvation, the use of gas for killing human beings, additional deportations, massacres, and extermination camps, 1942-1944

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #43, #45

Arad, *Documents*, #124, #187, #127-#130

Please reflect on our earlier reading of Primo Levi's memoir.

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #788, text on pp. 550-552, #856, #866, #869, #889, #895


Hochstadt, *Sources*, #48

Arad, *Documents*, #134, #158

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #67, #68, #73, #74

Arad, *Documents*, #212

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #917
Himmler's speech in Posen to SS group leaders, October 1943

Hochstadt, #52

Additional readings for graduate students

Engel, *The Holocaust*, chaps. 4, pp. 26-37, and 6, pp. 50-61

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #53, #54, #56, #62, #64, #69, #71

Class 11 (November 11): Jewish responses to persecution and genocide; Jewish resistance; resistance and rescue by non-Jews; the responses of Allied governments to the Holocaust

General


Jewish responses in Germany

*Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #830, #833, #833a

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #64

Jewish responses in Poland

Arad, *Documents*, #104, #105, #110-#113, #125, #126, #135, #138, #139, #143, #145, #154, #157, #166


Hochstadt, *Sources*, #60, #61, #69, #70

Jewish responses in the Soviet Union (and its occupied territories)

Arad, *Documents*, #181-#183, #186, #196, #197, #199, #200, #202, #209-#211, #213; compare Hochstadt, *Sources*, #57, #69, #70

Engel, *The Holocaust*, doc. 17 and doc. 18, pp. 102-103

Survival, escape, and resistance in the camps

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #69, #70
Protest, resistance, evidence-gathering, and rescue by non-Jews

*Elisabeth Schmitz (a Protestant high-school teacher in Berlin), “Memorandum on the Jewish Question,” September 1933


Arad, Documents, #155, #156, #192, #194

Engel, The Holocaust, doc. 26 and doc. 27, pp.109-110

Hochstadt, Sources, #47, #50

*Inge Scholl, ed., The White Rose, Munich 1942-1943 (1983), the six leaflets of the White Rose, reprinted on pp. 73-93

The responses of Allied governments to the Holocaust

Hochstadt, Sources, #72, #75

Additional readings for graduate students

Engel, The Holocaust, docs. 20-25, pp. 105-109

Class 12 (November 18): A conversation with a Holocaust survivor

Spiegelman, Maus I (entire book)

Thanksgiving Holiday

Class 13 (December 2): Review and synthesis

Bergen, War and Genocide, Conclusion, pp. 221-228

Browning, Ordinary Men (entire book)

Additional reading for graduate students

Engel, The Holocaust, chap. 8, pp. 81-87
Course Requirements

The most important requirement for the course is the timely and thoughtful reading of the assigned texts in advance of the seminar session at which they will be discussed.

Each student will be asked to maintain a weekly journal in which he or she reacts briefly to the current week's readings, notes unanswered questions, and generalizes about the readings and/or topics covered to date in the course. The journals will be submitted for review by the instructor at the mid-point and the end of the course.

There will be two writing assignments, a mid-semester paper not to exceed 10 double-spaced pages for undergraduates or 15 pages for graduate students. This paper can review a book or article not assigned in the course, critique one or more readings assigned in the course, or discuss a topic. A topic and a list of readings to be used will be due on Thursday, October 7th, and the paper itself will be due on Thursday, October 21st.

There will be a final term paper in this course, no more than 15 pages in length for undergraduates or 25 pages in length for graduate students. This paper should demonstrate your ability to think and argue philosophically about an ethical dimension of the Holocaust. The final paper will be due on Thursday, December 9th, one week after the last seminar session.

Approximately once each month there will be an additional session scheduled for graduate students enrolled in the course. These extra sessions are required by the Philosophy Department and the Graduate School and will permit more detailed discussion of topics that we mutually agree to explore. Undergraduate and special students are welcome to attend these additional sessions but are not required to do so.

The components of the final grade will be as follows:

- Final term paper: 40%
- Thoroughness and timeliness of completing reading assignments, as reflected in class participation and journal: 35%
- Mid-semester paper: 25%