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 1): Introduction to the course

Class 2 (September 8): Primo Levi: life and death in a camp

Class 3 (September 15): Dawid Sierakowiak: life and death in a ghetto

Class 4 (September 22): Visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; initial readings on the Jewish heritage and Christian anti-Jewish views; the rise of National Socialism

Class 5 (September 29): Christian anti-Jewish views; Adolf Hitler’s worldview

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

Class 7 (October 13): Germany’s attack on Poland, September 1939; German occupation and liquidation policies vis-à-vis Poles and Jews, 1939-1941

Class 8 (October 20): The Nazi “euthanasia” program, 1939-1941 and beyond

Class 9 (October 27): 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; Jews in Germany, 1939-1941; murders in Buchenwald, Spring 1941

Class 10 (November 3): Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union, June 1941; the Einsatzgruppen; the end of emigration and the beginning of deportations from the Old Reich

Class 11 (November 10): Genocide: the Wannsee Conference, January 1942; life and death in the ghettos, July 1941 to September 1944; concentration and extermination camps; massive deportations, 1942-1944

Class 12 (November 17): A conversation with a Holocaust survivor

Readings on Jewish responses to persecution and genocide; Jewish resistance; protests, the gathering of evidence, and the preservation of a historical record

Thanksgiving Holiday

Class 13 (December 1): Responses by non-Jews; the responses of Allied governments to the Holocaust; legacies of the Holocaust
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 1): Introduction to the course

No advance readings

Class 2 (September 8): Primo Levi: life and death in a camp


Class 3 (September 15): Dawid Sierakowiak: life and death in a ghetto

Dawid Sierakowski, *Diary* (entire book)

Class 4 (September 22): Visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; initial readings on the Jewish heritage and Christian anti-Jewish views; the rise of National Socialism

The Jewish religious and cultural heritage


General background on Judaism, German history, prejudice against “outsiders” and “misfits,” World War I, and the rise of National Socialism

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

Additional reading for graduate students


Class 5 (September 29): Christian anti-Jewish views; Adolf Hitler’s worldview

Christian anti-Jewish views

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

The platform of National Socialism

Arad, *Documents*, #1-#3

* Indicates readings available on the Blackboard Web site for this course
Hitler’s worldview

Arad, Documents, #4-5


Additional reading for graduate students


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

Overview

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

1933

Anti-Jewish actions

Hochstadt, Sources, #10, #12

Arad, Documents, #7-#11

Jewish responses

Hochstadt, Sources, #11

Arad, Documents, #14, #22, #27-#28

1935

The Nuremberg Laws, September 15, 1935

Arad, Documents, #32-#35 (parallel to #33 in Hochstadt, Sources, #13)

Jewish responses

Arad, Documents, #38-#39
1933-1937


1938-1939

A children’s story, 1938

Hochstadt, Sources, #16 (Please try to find additional information about and illustrations for The Poisonous Mushroom on the Web.)

Vienna after the Anschluss, 1938

Hochstadt, Sources, #17

The national anti-Jewish pogrom, November 9-10, 1938, and its aftermath

Arad, Documents, #49-#53

*Hans Berger, testimony in Richarz, Jewish Life in Germany, pp. 386-397

Emigration of Jews encouraged

Arad, Documents, #57-#58

U.S. responses to the plight of European Jews

Hochstadt, Sources, #26

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

Hitler’s “prophecy,” January 30, 1939

Arad, Documents, #59 (parallel in Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #770)

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 13): Germany’s attack on Poland, September 1939; German occupation and liquidation policies vis-à-vis Poles and Jews, 1939-1941

Overview

Bergen, War and Genocide, chap. 5, pp. 101-125 (Please see the maps on p. 130 in Bergen and on p. 644 in Noakes and Pridham, Nazism.)

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


J. Noakes and G. Pridham, Nazism, text on pp. 314-317 and documents #643-#650

Heydrich’s Schnellbrief, September 21, 1939

Arad, Documents, #73 (parallels in Hochstadt, Sources, #27, and Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #771)

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, text on pp. 327-328 and #653-#657

Hochstadt, Sources, #31

*“A Note of Heydrich’s on the Tasks of the Einsatzgruppen in Poland, July 2, 1940 (translation provided)

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

Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #679-#682, text at the bottom of p. 357 and #700-#703

Forced labor and the establishment of Jewish ghettos in Lodz and Warsaw, October 1939-October 1940

Forced labor and distinguishing marks

Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #779-#782 and text on pp. 453-454
Lodz

Arad, *Documents*, #83 (compare Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #783)

Warsaw

Arad, *Documents*, #100-#101 (compare Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #784)

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

Arad, *Documents*, #86 (compare Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, # 651

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

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #33

Class 8 (October 20): The Nazi “euthanasia” program, 1939-1941 and beyond

Overview


Philosophy and program

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #8

*Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, pp. 184-193 and 474-475

Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, text on pp. 389-390 and #719-#756, #762-#769 (compare

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #30, #32, and #34 (#30 parallels Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #739)

Opposition

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

*Paul Braune, Memorandum to Hitler, July 1940 (translation provided)

*Letter of Cardinal Bertram of Breslau to Reichs-Minister Lammers
(August 11, 1940) and letter of Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich to Justice Minister Gürthner (November 6, 1940); reprinted in “Correspondence: German Catholic Bishops’ Protest,” Thought 20(79): 751-760; December 1945


Class 9 (October 27): 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; Jews in Germany. 1939-1941; murders in Buchenwald, Spring 1941

War in Europe, 1940 and early 1941

Bergen, War and Genocide, chap. 6, pp. 131-144  (Please see the maps in Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, pp. 631-632.)

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

Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, text on pp. 442-443 and #771-#778 (#771, Heydrich’s Schnellbrief, parallels Arad, Documents, #73, and Hochstadt, Sources, #27)

Arad, Documents, #63

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

Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #797-#799, text at top of p. 471, and #803-
#806

Arad, Documents, #98

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. 95-104 and 222-223

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


Jews in Germany, 1939-1941

Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, text on pp. 464-465 and #792-#796

Murders in a concentration camp, Spring 1941

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #55

Class 10 (November 3): Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union, June 1941; the Einsatzgruppen; the end of emigration and the beginning of deportations from the Old Reich

Overview


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

Arad, *Documents*, #59 (parallels Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #770)

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

Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #810-#813 (#811 parallels Arad, *Documents*, #169, in part)

Arad, *Documents*, #170

Heydrich’s assignment, July 1939

Arad, *Documents*, #106 (parallels Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #824)

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 (#814 parallels Arad, *Documents*, #171)
Arad, *Documents*, #176-#180, #195 (#177 is often called “the first Stahlecker report”; #180 is called “the Jäger report”) (#177 parallels #815 in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*; #178 parallels #820 and #821; and #180 parallels #817)

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

Hochstadt, *Documents*, #35-#36 (#36 parallels, in part, #819 in Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*)

Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #822-#823

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

*Longerich, Unwritten Order*, chap. 12, pp. 115-125 and 227-230

The Jews in the Old Reich: the yellow star, no emigration, and mass deportations, September 1941 to July 1942

Arad, *Documents*, #68 (parallels Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #836)

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

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #45

Class 11 (November 10): Genocide: 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

The Wannsee Conference, January 1942

Bergen, *War and Genocide*, p. 159


Arad, *Documents*, #115

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

Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, #851
Starvation, the use of gas for killing human beings, additional deportations, massacres, and extermination camps, 1942-1944

Hochstadt, Sources, #43 (parallels Arad, Documents, #191)

Arad, Documents, #124, #187, #127-#130 (#124 parallels Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #866)

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

Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, text on pp. 550-552, #856, #862, #869, #889, #895 (parallels to #862 in Arad, Documents, #163, and Hochstadt, Sources, #67)

*Engel, The Holocaust, doc. 14, pp. 99-100

Hochstadt, Sources, #48

Arad, Documents, #134, #158

Hochstadt, Sources, #68, #73, #74

Arad, Documents, #212

Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #917-#918

Himmler’s speech in Posen to SS group leaders, October 1943

Hochstadt, #52 (parallels in Arad, Documents, #161, and Noakes and Pridham, Nazism, #642 and 910a)

Additional readings for graduate students

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

Hochstadt, Sources, #53-#54, #56, #62, #71

Class 12 (November 17): A conversation with a Holocaust survivor

Readings on Jewish responses to persecution and genocide; Jewish resistance; protests, the gathering of evidence, and the preservation of a historical record

Overview

Bergen, War and Genocide, chap. 7, pp. 193-203, and chap. 8, pp. 205-219

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, #148, #154, #157, #166


Hochstadt, *Sources*, #60-61, #69-71

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

Arad, *Documents*, #181-183, #186, #196-197, #199-200, #202, #209-211, #213 (#196 parallels Hochstadt, *Sources*, #57)

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

Thanksgiving Holiday

Class 13 (December 1): Responses by non-Jews; the responses of Allied governments to the Holocaust; legacies of the Holocaust

Protests, resistance, evidence-gathering, and rescue by non-Jews

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


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

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

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #47, #50

The responses of Allied governments to the Holocaust

Hochstadt, *Sources*, #72, #75

Legacies of the Holocaust

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

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 one- or two-page 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 weekly journals should be brought to each class session and handed in.

There will be two other 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 6th, and the paper itself will be due on Thursday, October 20th.

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 8th, 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%

Having encountered and reported instances of plagiarism in 2002 and again last spring, I would urge every member of the class to be scrupulous about citing and quoting the work of others. Please review the guidance of the Honor Council’s handbook regarding proper citation of sources. If you complete all assignments on time and submit your own work, you cannot fail this course. If you fail to acknowledge the writings of others properly, both you and I are likely to go through an Honor Council review, and you are at risk of receiving the grade of F for the course.
If you discover that you will need to be absent from a class session, please notify me of that fact in advance. If you find that you are going to have trouble meeting the deadline for a written assignment, please send me an e-mail message in advance of the deadline, and we will try to work out an alternative deadline that is compatible with your current circumstances. Papers that are submitted late without your having made these arrangements in advance will be penalized.

Again, and on a more positive note, the success of this course will depend primarily on your having read and thought carefully about the readings for the week’s seminar session. Please analyze the readings, trying to place them in their historical context. Also, please compare and contrast the primary and secondary sources as you read them.

My hope is that all of us in the course can learn something about what it means to accept moral responsibility, especially when such an acceptance comes into conflict with our own interests or career plans. On the other hand, we will during this course discover how easy it is to become a bystander – never directly harming others but nonetheless remaining silent and doing nothing when we would potentially have been able to help.