Course Description:

On September 11, 2001, Americans watched as a dramatic series of events unfolded. We were soon to learn that the destruction of the World Trade Center, the attack on the Pentagon, and the crash of an airplane in Pennsylvania were the result of the actions of a network of terrorists referred to as Al Qaeda – the same network believed to be responsible for the U.S. embassy bombings in Africa in 1998, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000 and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. In 2009, on Christmas Day, an Al Qaeda terrorist attempted to blow up a plane bound for Detroit from Amsterdam only to be stopped by some courageous passengers and members of the flight crew. While Osama Bin Laden’s death on May 2, 2011 was seen as the beginning of the dismantling of the main Al Qaeda leadership, Al Qaeda affiliates in places like Yemen and Syria continue to terrorize to this day. The attack on the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012 where Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed has been linked to Al Qaeda groups. As I write this syllabus, the U.S. government is actively involved in a campaign to defeat ISIS/ISIL, a terrorist organization operating in Iraq and Syria that started as an Al-Qaeda organization (the two have since split in a power struggle) and terrorists in Paris, France have attacked a satirical newspaper office killing twelve.

Many would say September 11 and the days following were some of the darkest days in our nation’s history. We were witnessing evil firsthand. Others, however, might say that September 11 and the days following were the brightest in our nation’s history. America, our citizens and our values were challenged and Americans met that challenge through truly heroic and altruistic acts. How do we explain such behavior? How can humans commit such horrific acts against one another and, yet, also be capable of such kindness and sacrifice?

Consider other recent examples of great political evil and heroism. Beginning in 2003, in Darfur, Sudan, between 200,000 to 400,000 people were killed and over 2 million displaced from their homes according to United Nations estimates in what both President George W. Bush and the international community called at the time a “genocide.” And, yet, the international community failed to act decisively to end the murder, rape and starvation that was occurring there and millions are still displaced and facing severe hardship, renewed killings there as well as in other areas of Sudan. There are worrisome signs of genocidal actions continuing to occur today in countries such as Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia.

Genocide has not been uncommon in the 20th and 21st centuries – 800,000 Armenians were killed in Turkey by the government during World War I; six million Jews were killed by the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s; 2 million people died from starvation and execution by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1970s; in 1994, 800,000 Rwandans were killed in about 100 days; between 1992-1995, over 200,000 people were killed in a process known as “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia. Why do such acts occur? Why does the international community not respond more forcefully? And, conversely, how do we explain the extraordinary acts of a few who in the face of genocide resist and risk their own well-being and the lives of their family members to rescue victims?

In this class, we will examine what political psychologists have learned about good and evil and how it is manifested in the political world. We will study the psychological, social and political underpinnings of terrorism, genocide, torture and mass killings. We will investigate how emotions and perceptions of threat lead us to be willing to violate individuals’ basic rights and civil liberties. And, then, we will consider what factors contribute to heroic and altruistic behavior – why some people are willing to risk their lives to help others, for example, by defying political authority.
We are extremely fortunate this semester that as a class we will have the opportunity to travel to New York City where we will visit several sites relevant to our course of study. In particular, we will visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust and their exhibit “Meeting Hate with Humanity.” In addition, we will visit the recently opened 9/11 Memorial Museum. My husband, a first responder at the Pentagon site on 9/11, will travel with us and share his experiences as well. And, we will also do a walking tour on the history of slavery, an institution representing a particularly dark part of the American past that highlights in important ways many of the issues we will be discussing in this class about good and evil.

To guide us in our discussions, the course will be oriented around a consideration of the ethical/moral requirements for human behavior. We will strive, as we study these issues, to consider the question posed by ethicists, “How should we live?” We will consider the roots of our morality (religion, reason, emotion, consequences, law, relationships, self-interest, etc.) and how psychological and political factors may prohibit or promote moral reasoning and action.

**Assigned Texts:**


**Suggested Readings:**


Course Requirements:

1) **Class Participation:** All students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to engage in class discussion. For this reason, class discussion is a significant portion of your final grade. Your grade for class participation will begin at a “C” and then go up or down depending on the quality of your participation. Because this is a seminar and dependent on good discussion, preparation and active participation is essential. Simply attending class but not participating is not sufficient. **Students who miss more than 3 classes unexcused will be docked one letter grade increment from the FINAL grade (from a B+ to a B, for example) for every day missed after the third.** (15% of your grade)

2) **Reading Quizzes:** Because good class discussion depends on having done the reading carefully, most weeks (typically on Thursdays) we will have a short reading quiz (approximately 8 total, about 5-10 questions each). The questions will be short-answer. (20% of your final grade)

3) **Reading Reflection Papers:** On a rotating basis, a third of the class will be responsible for writing a 2-4 page reading reflection paper. In this paper, students are expected to reflect on an issue or point they found particularly interesting in the reading for that week. The paper should include a discussion of why that issue/point was of interest to you – this may include, for example, a point you did not understand, or one with which you disagreed or one that contradicted or supported earlier reading for the course. The paper might include a consideration of the question “How should I live?” and the philosophical theories we discuss and how they relate to the readings for that week. They may also be used as the basis for developing the larger paper as described in Requirement #5. These papers should be brought to class and used as the basis for comments and discussion. Students not responsible for a paper that particular week are still expected to come to class prepared and ready to address the discussion questions described in Requirement #4. Papers should use proper citation form (parenthetical citations) and include a reference section (see handout posted on Moodle for how to cite correctly in this class). (20% of your final grade)

4) **Discussion Leader:** After the first few sessions of class, the class discussion will be lead primarily by students (with involved guidance by me). Two to three students (each student will serve as discussion leader two times throughout the semester) will be responsible for leading class discussion each week. This entails thorough reading of the materials for that particular week and consideration of the supplementary reading for the week (see assignment outline below). The students will formulate discussion questions to distribute to the other students (by email) by midnight at least two full days before their scheduled class discussion. The questions should address the concepts, methods, findings, ethics and evaluations of the reading materials. In addition, the students should facilitate discussion of the implications of the findings for practical politics. During the class meeting, the students will be responsible for structuring the discussion in whatever way they feel is most fruitful for accomplishing the goals listed above. In addition, the students may, if desired, utilize audio/visual materials to demonstrate concepts and to promote discussion and evaluations of the readings. However, the grade assigned for the discussion will be based on the quality of the discussion, not the ‘flashiness’ of any presentation. Students should meet with me ahead of time to discuss ideas and go over discussion questions before the class. (15% of your final grade)

5) **“How Should I Live?” Paper:** Each student is required to write a 8-10 page research/thought paper which uses what we have learned and discussed in class to consider how they want to answer the question “How Should I Live?” for themselves. The papers must be grounded in the


readings discussed in class but can also draw on personal experience. Students will want to
consider the examples of good and evil we discussed in class and discuss at least one or two of
them explicitly, showing a good understanding of the events and the scholarly theory. Then, you
will want to relate this topic and theories in someway to your personal life choices and
experiences. For example, you might consider your own experiences or even potential
experiences with an unjust authority figure who tried to induce you to engage in inappropriate or
unethical acts. Answer the question Zimbardo poses “What makes people go wrong?” (p5). Or,
you might consider an opportunity you had or could make for yourself to sacrifice on behalf of
another who is suffering. What does it take to be a hero? What does the research tell us about
why people make the choices that they do to act justly or unjustly? Righteously or unrighteously?
What have you learned about yourself when faced with difficult decisions? How do you want to
live your life and why? What really matters to you? Given what you have learned in reading
about the influence of psychological and social factors in affecting the performance of evil and
altruistic behavior, how will you confront opportunities and challenges in your life? What moral
and ethical principles will guide your decisions? Students will be expected to share these papers
with the class in a presentation during the last 2 weeks of class.

A first draft (the entire paper should be written) of your paper will be due to me and to
your two peer reviewers (see #6) by 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 7. Your final papers will be
due by 8:00 a.m. on Monday, April 20 (email to me and to your two peer reviewers). As with
any research paper, you are expected to use appropriate citations in the body of your text when
you paraphrase and/or quote from another source. In addition, you should have a works
cited/reference page at the end of your paper. I have posted on Moodle a short hand out with
eamples of how to cite appropriately and we will go over this in class as well. If you have any
questions, you should be sure to ask me before turning in your paper. (20% of your final grade)

6) Peer Review: You will be expected to serve as a peer reviewer for two of your colleagues “How
Should I Live?” papers. Students must turn in a completed draft of their paper to their peer
reviewers and to me no later than 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 7. Peer reviewers will be
expected to complete a “Peer Reviewer Response Sheet” that they will return to their peer and will
turn into me for a grade in class on Thursday, April 9. Peer reviewers are also expected to come
to the final presentations with a brief, written paragraph commenting on the paper after it is
presented as well as two questions for that peer who is presenting (this should be typed, at least
500 words, double-spaced). (10% of your final grade)

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Students who need special accommodations should see me at the beginning of the term and meet with Gina
Parris in the Office of Disability Services.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY and FURMAN’S STATEMENT REGARDING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
“Integrity gives the educational enterprise its legitimacy. Honesty, respect, and personal responsibility are
principles that guide academic life at Furman, in and out of the classroom. Academic misconduct in any
form (plagiarism, cheating, inappropriate collaboration, and other efforts to gain an unfair academic
advantage) threatens the values of the campus community and will have severe consequences, such as
failure in the course, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.

If you have any question about what constitutes plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, it is
your responsibility to consult with me so that you will fully understand what I expect of you in this course.
If you have any doubts, ask! You should also be familiar with the Academic Integrity & Plagiarism and
Academic Integrity at Furman materials available at www.furman.edu>academics>academic integrity information. Furman’s policy on academic dishonesty can be found at http://furman_notes.furman.edu/p&p.nsf> Standard>Search>121.5."

Although it is unlikely, students should be aware that this syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of any changes. Please note that the dates are approximations. My primary interest is that you learn the material and learn it well. If we decide to spend more or less time on a topic (because you find it easy, difficult or just particularly interesting), so be it. If you are feeling uncertain about where you should be with the reading, just ask me.

Finally, because of the inherent distraction, no laptop computers, phones, IPads, etc. are permitted to be used during class.

Course Outline:

January 13: Introduction

January 15: No class – Professor at Southern Political Science Association Meeting

January 20 and 22: Introduction to Political Psychology and Ethics; Also, How to lead a good discussion
   Read: Rachels readings on Ethics (On Moodle)

Week 3 (January 27 and 29): Torture: Abu Ghraib and Beyond
   Read: Zimbardo, The Lucifer Effect, Chapter 1, 12, 13 (86 pages total);
   Film: Quiet Rage: the Stanford Prison Experiment (see also Stanford Prison Experiment Slide Show)

Week 4 (February 3 and 5): Torture: Abu Ghraib and Beyond (cont.)
   Read: Zimbardo, Chapter 14, 15 (119 pages)
   Film: “Ghosts of Abu Ghraib”, Frontline (see also “Torture”, Frontline film)

   Ethical questions to consider for WEEKS 3 AND 4: What would a utilitarian say about the use of torture? How would the categorical imperative guide us in evaluating torture? Which approach do you prefer? What do the psychological findings offer us in terms of understanding the causes and consequences of torture?

Week 5 (February 10 and 12): Terrorism:
   Read: Origins of Terrorism: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 9 (70 pages) and From Understanding Terrorism, Chapter 1 “Reflections on International Terrorism: Issues, Concepts, and Directions” (36 pages)
   Film: “Al Qaeda’s New Front”; Suggested also “Hunting Bin Laden”; “Faces of the Enemy” and “Return of the Taliban”

Ethical Questions to Consider: What role does religion play in guiding our morality? What does consequentialism offer us in terms of evaluating terrorist acts – do the ends justify the means? Are their absolute moral rules that should guide our behavior in the case of terrorism?

Supplementary Readings


**Week 6 (February 17 and 19): Genocide**

**Read:** *The Roots of Evil*, Chapters 1-11 (147 pages)

**Film:** “The Triumph of Evil” (Rwandan genocide)

**Supplementary Readings:**


**Ethical questions to consider:** Do psychological/social/political explanations for genocide make us any less morally culpable for allowing it to occur? Do they make the perpetrators less morally culpable? What should we do with these psychological findings to promote better moral decision-making?

**Week 7 (February 24 and 26): Genocide**

**Read:** *The Roots of Evil*, Chapters 11-18 (132 pages)

**Film:** “On Our Watch,” Frontline (Genocide in Darfur)

**Week 8 (March 3 and 5): Intolerance**
Read: *With Malice Toward Some* Chapters 1-4 (94 pages)  
Film: Watch “Skokie: Rights or Wrong;” Take Harvard Implicit Association Study online

Ethical questions to consider: How does reason guide us morally? How do emotions interact.shape our reasoning process? How should they?

Supplementary Readings:  


March 10-12: Furman Spring Break

Week 9 (March 17 and 19): Perceptions of a Common Humanity  
Read: *The Heart of Altruism*, Chapters 1-5, 10-12  
Film: “9/11”

Ethical questions to consider: Which ethical approach (consequentialism, principle-based moral theory, Aristotlianism, an ethic of care, etc.) are most consistent with the findings in this book regarding the origins of moral behavior?

Supplementary Readings:  

Week 10 (March 24 (NOTE - We will be watching Film in evening at 7 pm) and March 26: Rescuers during Genocide  
Read: *The Altruistic Personality*, Preface, Chapters 1 – 3, 5 - 8, 10  
Film: “Schindler’s List”

Supplementary Readings:  

Ethical Questions to Consider: How would ethical egoism and psychological egoism explain the acts of Oscar Schindler? Does the self-interest motivating his behavior make his actions any more or less moral? How well do these theories explain the acts of the rescuers discussed in the Oliners’ text? What moral theories seem to better explain these rescuers’ decision-making process?

Week 11 (March 31 and April 2): Political altruism
  Read: An Ordinary Man
  Read: Zimbardo, The Lucifer Effect (Chapter 16) “Resisting Situational Influences and Celebrating Heroism”
  Film: “Beyond Belief”

Week 12 (April 7 (Class/film Tuesday night at 7 pm) and April 9): Political Solutions
  Read: Kristof, “Save the Darfur Puppy”
  Slovic, “If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act: Psychic Numbing and Genocide”
  Selected readings from Power
  Franco and Zimbardo, “The Banality of Heroism”
  Film: “Hotel Rwanda”
  April 7 (Tuesday): Drafts of paper due to me and your peer reviewers;
  April 9 (Thursday): Peer reviews due to peers and me;

Ethical Questions to Consider: Slovic says, “We cannot depend only upon our moral feelings to motivate us to take proper actions against genocide” (p.23) and he encourages us to understand “the psychological factors that allow politics to trump morality” (p. 23). We created the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948 – and yet, since that time, there have been at least five more genocides (depending on the definition one uses) in the world. Given the readings for today, consider the following questions:

1) What role does/should reason play in moral decision making? How do emotions often trump reason?

2) What should we do with these psychological findings regarding the limits and potentialities of humans? How do we use political institutions and procedures to ensure that we act morally? What kinds of changes need to be made to current policies (international law, education, domestic policy) given our own psychological limitations?

April 12-14: TRAVEL TO NYC – Museum of Jewish Heritage, 9/11 Memorial Museum, Slavery Walking Tour

April 16: No class – Professor at Midwest Political Science Association Meeting

April 20 (MONDAY): PAPERS DUE BY 8:00 AM (EMAIL TO ME AND YOUR PEER REVIEWERS)

April 21 (Tuesday) and 23 (Thursday): “How Should I Live?” Paper Presentations

April 28 (Tuesday): Paper Presentations

April 30 (Tuesday, 8:30 to 11 am): Paper Presentations, Class Evaluations and Reflections