

Department of Psychology, Syracuse University

## **Why Good People Do Terrible Things**

PSY 400, 3 credit hours  
Spring Semester, 2015  
Monday, 3:45 – 6:30, 103 Huntington Hall

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### Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Readings will be distributed in class or posted on Blackboard

### Prerequisites and other guidelines

Students should already have credit for either PSY 205 (Foundations of Human Behavior) or PSY 209 (Foundations of Human Behavior, Honors section).

Please turn off all phones and beepers before class begins—or set them to “vibrate” if you need to be available for urgent calls. And other than emergencies, please no texting in class!

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>, located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309, or call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters,” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

Students who are interested in getting extra help with the course material are encouraged to make use of the services provided by the Tutoring Center at [www.tutoring.syr.edu](http://www.tutoring.syr.edu).

### Course Overview and Objectives

It is tempting for people to distance themselves from evil behavior, and it is easy to conclude that terrible things are done by terrible people who share nothing in common with “us.” In this class, however, we will review research and scholarship on the ways in which otherwise ordinary people come to tolerate, justify, and participate in behavior that would ordinarily violate their moral standards. Research in social psychology will be emphasized, but readings will be drawn from a variety of sources. Concrete real-world examples to be discussed in class will also represent a wide range of contexts in which reprehensible behavior can occur—wartime, civil disorder, educational settings, the business world, families, athletic competition, etc. Genocide will play a particularly large role in our readings and discussions.

Students who complete the course will become familiar with some of the core conceptual approaches to understanding how people—including *themselves*—who might otherwise appear to be ordinary, decent human beings could engage in moral transgressions and play a role in the victimization of others.

### Course Requirements

Attendance will be taken and is necessary to keep up with course material. Keeping up with the readings is also essential.

On at least 4 days (TBA), a two-page long reflection paper, derived from the assigned readings and on a topic or topics to be announced in advance, will be due at the beginning of class. Papers should be double-spaced, in 12-point font, with “normal” margins. Scoring of these papers will be based on content and the quality of the writing.

Twice during the semester, you will take a quiz (multiple choice and short-answer) on the material covered during the preceding weeks of class. The final will be a short-answer test.

### Final grading

Quiz 1	20%
Quiz 2	20%
Short answer final	30%
Attendance and participation	10%
Reflection papers	<u>20%</u>
	100%

## Course Outline and Assignments

The following sequence of topics and specific readings is *subject to change*. Readings are to be done *before* the class for which they are assigned.

### **Week 1, January 12: *Class Introduction***

### **NO CLASS WEEK 2, JANUARY 19 (MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY)**

### **Week 3, January 26: “Bad” people?**

#### Readings:

Anderson, S. (2012, July 19). Greg Ousley Is Sorry for Killing His Parents. Is That Enough? *New York Times Magazine*.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/greg-ousley-is-sorry-for-killing-his-parents-is-that-enough.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/greg-ousley-is-sorry-for-killing-his-parents-is-that-enough.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

Bhattacharjee, Y. (2013, April 26). The Mind of a Con Man. *New York Times Magazine*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/magazine/diederik-stapels-audacious-academic-fraud.html?pagewanted=all>

Leftwich, A. (Summer, 2002). I gave the names. *Granta*, 78, 9-31.

Landesman, P. (2002, September 15). A woman’s work. *New York Times Magazine*, 82-89, 116, 125, 130-132.

Griggs, R. A. (2014). Coverage of the Stanford Prison Experiment in introductory psychology textbooks. *Teaching Of Psychology*, 41, 195-203.

### **Week 4, February 2: *Doing nothing can also be terrible: Bystanders, Pluralistic Ignorance, and Psychic numbing***

#### Readings:

Darley, J. M., and Batson, C.D. (1973). “From Jerusalem to Jericho”: A study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, 100-108.

Power, S. (2003). “A problem from hell”: *American and the age of genocide* (preface. pp. xi-xxi). New York: Harper Collins.

Slovic, P. (2007). "If I look at the mass I will never act": Psychic numbing and genocide. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2, 79-95.

**Week 5, February 9: *They made me do it: Basic social influence***

Readings:

Asch, S.E. (1955). Opinions and social pressure. *Scientific American*, 193, 31–35.

Hatzfield, J. (2003). *Machete Season* (pp. 10-16, 71-76). New York: Picador.

Blass, T. (2002). Perpetrator behavior as destructive obedience: An evaluation of Stanley Milgram's perspective, the most influential social-psychological approach to the holocaust. In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 11-42). New York: Oxford University Press.

Browning, C. R. (1992). *Ordinary men: Reserve police battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (Chapters 1 & 18, pp. 1-2, 159-189). New York: Harper Collins.

**Week 6, February 16: Movie, "The Fog of War"**

**Week 7, February 23: *Rationalization, justification, and the slippery slope***

Readings:

Tavris, C. & Aronson, E. (2007). *Mistakes were made (But not be me)*. (Chapter 1). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Hatzfield, J. (2003). *Machete Season* (pp. 21-27, 47-51). New York: Picador.

Martens, A., Kosloff, S., Greenberg, J., Landau, M. J., & Schmader, T. (2007). Killing begets killing: Evidence from a bug-killing paradigm that initial killing fuels subsequent killing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33, 1251-1264.

**Week 8, March 2: *Dehumanization (AND QUIZ 1)***

Readings:

Smith, D. L. (2007). *The most dangerous animal: Human nature and the origins of war* (Chapter 10). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Bourke, J. (1999). *An intimate history of killing* (Chapter 7). London: Granta Publications.

Haslam, N. (2015). Dehumanization and intergroup relations. In M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology: Vol. 2: Interpersonal relations and group processes* (pp. 295-314). Washington: APA Press.

## **NO CLASS MONDAY, MARCH 9, (SPRING BREAK)**

**Week 9, March 16: *Labeling and action identification: are you advancing your career, scheduling trains or sending people to their deaths?***

### Readings:

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Escaping the self* (Chapter 4). New York: Basic Books.

Bratanova, B., Loughnan, S., & Bastian, B. (2011). The effect of categorization as food on the perceived moral standing of animals. *Appetite*, 57, 193-196.

Newman, L. S. (2001, May). The banality of secondary sources: Why social psychologists have misinterpreted Arendt's thesis. Paper presented at "Eichmann in Jerusalem: Forty years later", conference held at DePaul University, Chicago, IL.

**Week 10, March 23: Movie, "*The smartest guys in the Room*"**

**Week 11, March 30: "*I*" didn't do it: *Deindividuation and the assembly line of evil***

### Readings:

Diamond, J. (1992). *The third chimpanzee* (chapter 16, pp. 276-309). New York: Harper Perennial.

Smith, G. (2012, March 14). *Why I am Leaving Goldman Sachs*. *New York Times*.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/14/opinion/why-i-am-leaving-goldman-sachs.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/14/opinion/why-i-am-leaving-goldman-sachs.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

Edmondson, G. (2007, October 10). BMW's Quandt Family Faces Its Nazi Past. *Bloomberg Business Week*.  
<http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2007-10-10/bmws-quandt-family-faces-its-nazi-pastbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>

Bergen, D. (2003). *War and Genocide* (Chapter 3, "From Revolution to Routine: Nazi Germany 1933-1938," pp. 53-80). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

**Week 12, April 6: *Are we letting terrible people off the hook?***

Readings:

Rosenbaum, R. (1995, May 1). Explaining Hitler. *The New Yorker*, pp. 50-73.

Miller, A.G., Buddie, A. M., & Kretschmar, J. (2002). Explaining the Holocaust: Does social psychology exonerate the perpetrators? In L. S. Newman & R. Erber (Eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The social psychology of the Holocaust* (pp. 310-324). New York: Oxford University Press.

Newman, L. S., & Bakina, D. A. (2009). Do people resist social-psychological perspectives on wrongdoing? Reactions to dispositional, situational, and interactionist explanations. *Social Influence*, 4, 256-273.

Ismail, I., Martens, A., Landau, M. J., Greenberg, J., & Weise, D. R. (2012). Exploring the effects of the naturalistic fallacy: Evidence that genetic explanations increase the acceptability of killing and male promiscuity. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42, 735-750.

**Week 13, April 13: *QUIZ 2— and movie, “Hotel Rwanda”***

**Week 14, April 20: *Can terrible people do good things?***

Readings:

Rochat, F., & Modigliani, A. (2000). Captain Paul Grueninger: The chief of police who saved Jewish refugees by refusing to do his duty. In T. Blass (Ed.), *Obedience to authority: Current perspectives on the Milgram paradigm* (pp. 91-110). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Chang, I. (1997). *The rape of Nanking: The forgotten holocaust of World War II* (Chapter 5, pp.105-139). New York: Basic Books.

Green, D. W. (2013, August 5). The man who saved 5,200 Jews died.  
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/this-day-in-jewish-history/.premium-1.541643>

**Week 15, April 27: Short answer final**

