

# Thoughts about Genocide

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## **Course Description:**

Philosophers have been slow to contribute to Genocide Studies, and to this day, there are relatively few notable works by major thinkers on the phenomenon of genocide. In this course, we will discuss several major thinkers who took up this challenge and attempted to think through the root causes and implications of the phenomenon of genocide in the modern age. We will examine Tzvetan Todorov's reconstruction of the encounter of Europeans with the Native American Other; Hannah Arendt's insights into the banality of evil; Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer's analysis of the dialectic of enlightenment; Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*; Zygmunt Bauman's critique of modern bureaucratic rationality; and Catharine MacKinnon's observations into the meaning of the assaults on women, so common in cases of genocide and other mass atrocities. We will discuss their insights, the answers they offered, and the paths they have opened for thinking about human evil and mass atrocities.

## **Course Requirements:**

**Full attendance.**

**Weekly reading assignments:** Students are required to read the assigned items for every week.

**Essay papers:** Students are required to submit three essay papers, each two pages long. Each paper should address one reading item, analyzing its main argument and

presenting an opinion (for instance, is it convincing; could there be another explanation for the events/phenomena discussed; is it consistent with what you know of other genocides or cases of mass murder; does it neglect some important historical/political/moral issues, etc., according to the context).

The final grade is determined by attendance, participation in discussions during class and the essay papers.

**Final paper:** Students may submit a final research paper: either an exercise (a short, ten page long paper) or a seminar paper. Exercises must be submitted by September 30, 2016. Seminar papers must be submitted by the end of January 2017.

## **Reading List:**

### **1. What is Genocide?**

Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupies Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), pp. ix-xv; pp. 79-95.

"Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," *The United Nations Human Rights Website*:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CrimeOfGenocide.aspx>

### **2. Genocide and the Making of the Other**

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), pp. 127-167.

### **3. Evil: Radical or Banal?**

Hannah Arendt, "Total Domination," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1968), pp. 437-459.

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 276-298.

Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 159-189.

#### **4. Moral Responsibility and the Other**

Guest lecture: Prof. Annabel Herzog, *Emmanuel Levinas, Evil and Responsibility* (tentative title).

#### **5. White Victims, Black Victims, Or: When Genocide Comes Back Home**

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

#### **6. Modernity, Enlightenment and Genocide**

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 1-34.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 169-200.

#### **7. Gendered Genocide**

Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Turning Rape into Pornography: Postmodern Genocide," In *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, edited by A. Stiglmayer (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1994).