

ENGL/IDIS 262  
Literature and the Way We Live  
Fall 2011  
MWF 5b 1:10-2:20

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Zinzendorf 301  
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#### REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Peter Singer and Renata Singer. *The Moral of the Story: An Anthology of Ethics Through Literature*. Malden, Ma.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.  
Simon Blackburn. *Being good: an introduction to ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.  
Peter Seidel. *2045: A Story of our Future*. Prometheus Books, 2009.  
Articles on Blackboard and reserve

**COURSE OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:** Because literature is a representation of reality and thus invites a variety of interpretations, it provides an ideal framework for reflection upon the moral life. In this course, through our reading and discussion of literary and ethical texts, as well as through related articles from a variety of disciplines, we will consider moral issues concerning: the environment; identity; duties to kin; love, marriage, and sex; racism and sexism. After completing this course, students should have an awareness of the complexity of moral issues and of the need for interdisciplinary understanding in informed decision-making. Students will be able to grapple with their own values and moral position taking and will have enhanced their capacity for moral discernment, criticism, and argument. They will appreciate how literature invites and challenges them to consider a variety of moral viewpoints, and they will be able to express their own moral viewpoints through discussion and writing.

**COURSE METHOD:** This course will consist primarily of reading, discussion, student presentations, and several writing assignments, including an ongoing journal.

**EVALUATION:** Journal (20%), student presentation (20%); essays (20%, 25%), attendance and participation (15%). Grade Scale: 93-100=A; 90-92=A-; 87-89=B+; 83-86=B; 80-82=B-; 77-79=C+; 73-76=C; 70-72=C-; 67-69=D+; 63-66=D; 60-62=D- . It is within the instructor's purview to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades for any assignments and for the final course grade.

**READING ASSIGNMENTS:** All students will complete the daily reading assignments detailed in the syllabus. In addition, each student will sign up to read one of the excerpted literary works, in its entirety, in preparation for his/her oral presentation. Each student will also be responsible for choosing a recently published secondary article from a scholarly journal in the discipline of his/her major, relating to the day's topic (not necessarily to the day's literary text), to be approved and put on reserve (2 copies) for the class to read at least one week in advance (see presentation evaluation sheet, attached).

**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS:** Student presenters will begin the day's discussion with an explanation of how the day's text relates to the moral topic under consideration (not mere plot summary). Since the rest of the class may have read only an excerpt (with which the presenter should be especially familiar), the presenter will be the authority on the text, prepared to help throughout the session with questions relating to background and context. The presenter will also explain how the article he/she has assigned (see above) sheds light on the moral issue at hand, and should conclude the presentation with two open-ended ethical questions (one on the literary text, one on the reserve article) designed to begin class discussion. The presentation should be 10-15 minutes in length, and a hard copy of the presentation should be handed in to the instructor (see presentation evaluation sheet, attached).

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** Apart from occasional in-class writing assignments, there will be three writing projects:

A. An ongoing journal, which I will collect daily, will be a crucial tool in preparing you for class and in generating discussion. Each journal entry will have three to four numbered components:

1. A general comment on the Singer or other main reading, written in light of the ethical issue under consideration. Please read the "Issue" section at the back of the Singer text, responding to any questions posed there. If the day's assignment includes more than one excerpt, choose and address just one of the texts. (100 or more words)
2. A hypothetical situation, real or imagined, that presents a dilemma related to the ethical issue at hand. (150 words or more)
3. A general comment upon the secondary, reserve article. How does it shed light for you on the current ethical topic (not necessarily on the literary text itself)? (150 words or more)
4. When a section of the Blackburn text has been assigned, comment on the reading, summing it up to the best of your ability (100 words or more)

\*\*\*\* At the right hand corner of the journal entry, record your name, the date the assignment is due, the author's name, the title of the work, and a total word count. (You should also include a word count at the end of each of the numbered sections.)

\*\*\*\*Your journal entries will be due at the start of each class, and if you have fulfilled the above requirements you will receive full credit for the entry. \*\*\* Since the journal is designed to enhance class discussion, entries submitted apart from class (due to an absence, even if the entry is submitted in advance) or at the end of class (unless typed) will receive no more than half credit.

B. A 4-5 page essay on a topic to be announced. \*\*See "Rubric" (attached).

C. A 4-5 page essay on a topic to be announced. \*\*See "Rubric" (attached).

Due dates for essays are firm. If for some extraordinary reason you must be late, you need to talk to me. Late papers automatically receive a lower grade.

*In preparation for creating an English Major Portfolio in your senior capstone seminar, please save both digital and hard copies of your work for this class, including drafts with peer and instructor comments.*

**ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:** I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for you to attend each class, promptly, with your assignment read and your journal entry completed. The success of our class depends upon how well we can articulate our individual and collective responses to the readings and to the complex moral issues they pose. I will read off your name at the beginning of each class, both to learn who you are and to keep track of your attendance. It is your responsibility to consult me if you are late or absent. Your participation grade will reflect your regular, voluntary engagement in class discussion. Full attendance without such engagement will earn no more than a grade of C for participation.

**\*\*Please turn off and put away all cell phones during class.**

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the misrepresentation of someone else's work as your own. This includes such instances as quoting directly from a published work without giving the author credit (i.e. proper citation), inserting the author's words as your own, using or "borrowing" another student's work, buying a paper from a professional service, etc. It is your responsibility to be familiar with what constitutes plagiarism and, in the event of uncertainty, to ask in a constructive manner about a writing in question before it is due in a final version. You are also required to keep all note cards and rough drafts on papers and assignments until given a final grade for that course. Evidence of plagiarism and cheating will be dealt with in accordance with

the college policy on academic honesty found in the Student Handbook. Please read this policy in its entirety. In the event of a suspected infraction – in fairness to your peers and the standards of the college – it is my job to send the materials in question to the Dean’s Office at which time you are given the chance to provide your perspective on the matter.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:**

Readings should be completed by the day on which they are listed. This schedule may be revised as the course progresses. I will announce changes in class. If you are late or absent, it is your responsibility to become informed of any changes.

**Week 1**      Mon. Aug. 29 Introduction

Wed. Aug. 31 Singer, Preface  
Blackburn, Intro.

“What Makes Us Moral,” *Time*

[http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1685055\\_1685076\\_1686619,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1685055_1685076_1686619,00.html)

**Week 2**      Wed. Sept. 7 **WHO AM I?**

Introduction

Ralph Ellison, from *Invisible Man*

Blackburn, pp. 9-19

**Week 3**      Mon. Sept. 12 Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey, from *Puberty Blues*  
Blackburn, 19-29

Wed. Sept. 14 James Baldwin, from *Giovanni’s Room*  
Blackburn, pp. 29-37

**Week 4**      Mon. Sept 19 Tom Wolfe, from *The Bonfire of the Vanities*  
Blackburn, pp. 37-46

Wed. Sept. 21 George Eliot, from *Middlemarch*  
Blackburn, pp. 47-50

Fri. Sept. 23 Film: *Educating Rita*

**Week 5**      Mon. Sept. 26 Discuss *Educating Rita*  
Blackburn, pp. 50-55

Wed. Sept. 28 William Shakespeare, from *Macbeth*  
Blackburn, pp. 56-65

**Week 6** Mon. Oct. 3 *Technology and Identity*  
“Where the Butterflies Go”: A Few Poems about Facebook  
<http://heathergracestewart.com/2010/08/13/a-few-poems>  
“New Networks Target Discomfort With Facebook” NPR podcast  
<http://www.npr.org/2010/12/01/131700947/new-networks-target>  
Lev Grossman, “Mark Zuckerberg,” *Time Magazine*  
[http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683\\_2037183\\_2037185,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683_2037183_2037185,00.html)  
Blackburn, 65-73

Wed. Oct. 5 **THE ENVIRONMENT: Climate Change/Global Warming**  
Al Gore, Nobel Lecture  
Start watching *An Inconvenient Truth*, to be completed for next class  
Start reading *2045: A Story of our Future*

**Fall Recess**

**Week 7** Wed. Oct. 12 *An Inconvenient Truth*  
Al Gore, “Climate of Denial”

**Week 8** Mon. Oct. 17 Bryan Walsh, “The Real Cost of Cheap Food,” *Time Magazine*  
<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1917458-1,00.html>  
Blackburn, pp. 74-81  
**Essay Due**

Wed. Oct. 19 “The Story of Stuff” <http://www.storyofstuff.com/>  
Blackburn, pp. 81-86

**Week 9** Mon. Oct. 24 Seidel, *2045: A Story of our Future*  
Blackburn, pp. 86-93

**Tues. Oct. 25, 7 p.m.: Required attendance at “Waste Land,” Snyder Room, HUB**

Wed. Oct. 26 Discuss “Waste Land”  
“Slow Violence”  
“Yellow River Pollution is Price of Economic Growth”  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16951806>  
Blackburn, pp. 93-97

Fri. Oct. 28 Film: “No Impact Man”

**Week 10** Mon. Oct. 31 Discuss “No Impact Man”  
Elizabeth Kolbert, “Green Like Me”  
[http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/08/31/090831crat\\_atlarge\\_kolbert](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/08/31/090831crat_atlarge_kolbert)  
Blackburn, pp. 97-102

Wed. Nov. 2 “Earth Beat”  
“Can’t See the Forest”  
“The Plastic Bag Wars”  
“The Economics of Unhappiness”  
“How to Hold on to Happiness in Hard Times”  
Blackburn, 103-107

