Did the devil do it? In our 21st century, the world is confronted almost daily by what is seen as the presence of evil. We recognize the harm done by natural forces, storms, or diseases. But what about the evil deliberately caused by humans? Religion, art, and literature in the Western world gives us a long history of evil. Polytheism said evil was a force outside of ourselves and belonged to gods and goddesses. But what happened in monotheism? Was the serpent in the Garden of Eden evil? And what about the fallen angels? Who was Satan? We’ll begin with the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians in the 4th century BCE and work our way through the Babylonians and Zoroastrianism into Christianity, Gnosticism, the Inquisition, and the Reformation. What is the Malleus Maleficarum? We’ll see Satan freezing in Dante’s “Divine Comedy”, but burning in Milton’s “Paradise Lost”. What about Faust and Mephistopheles? And we can’t ignore the witchcraft trials that consumed Europe and Salem, Massachusetts. So, did the devil do it?

Ellen O’Brien, holds a B.A. from St. Catherine’s University in St. Paul, Minnesota, an M.L.A. from the Johns Hopkins University, a J.D. from the University of Maryland School of Law, and an M.A. from St. Mary’s University and Seminary. She practiced law for thirty years while also continuing her theological studies, primarily in the area of the Hebrew Bible. She has taught previous courses for Osher at Towson University, the most recent being on Exodus.

The Bible was produced in an age and culture foreign to most American eyes and ears. Thus we need a new pair of glasses to read the Bible authentically. As well, we need to think like a Jew of 1st century Israel in order to properly interpret the Bible. Using the most up-to-date Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant scholarship, Father Bob will attempt to tackle eight issues that will help the ordinary person come to a greater appreciation of the Bible. These eight issues are the Bible as a book of faith; how literally do we take the Bible; the Bible as a composite of various literary styles; the Bible as the Word of God and the words of humans; conflicting theologies within the Bible; the Bible as an association of many images; the Bible as one story made up of many stories; and the second coming of Christ as a dominant theology within the New Testament. This is an introduction and not an in-depth study. However, what you learn in these eight weeks will help you read any passage of the Bible with greater understanding than ever before. Come and learn about the greatest and most widely read book ever written! Please bring a Bible to class, any version. This is a repeat of the course offered in spring 2017.

Rev. Robert E. Albright is a retired Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. He served as the Catholic Campus Minister at Towson University for 26 years before his retirement in July 2006. Through teaching a scholarly approach to the Bible over the past 50 years, Father Bob has explored greater interfaith issues at the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies of Baltimore. He has studied twice in Israel at the International Center for Holocaust Studies and has been to Israel over 18 times, leading study tours and retreats and doing private research in Biblical sites and studying the Palestinian-Israeli situation. Father Bob is engaged in numerous Catholic/Jewish endeavors, including a funded program to educate Jewish and Catholic high school students in each other’s tradition.
THE QUR’AN AND MODERN SOCIETY
Ahmed Achrati

Session I and II
Wednesday, 11:00 a.m. (begins on March 4)
Fee: $130 ($65 for each session)
Consisting of eight sessions, this introductory course provides the students with a basic background of the Qur’an, its structure, foundational narratives, interpretations, and importance in shaping Muslims’ attitudes in key areas: violence, ethics, gender, art and philosophy. What is a Muslim? This course will review the tenets of the Islamic faith and how they are observed. We will learn about Muhammad, his life, and the creation of a Muslim community. We will examine how Muslims are responding to modern changes and the various reforms that are attempted.

Ahmed Achrati, Ph.D., is a retired professor who taught languages, anthropology, and religious studies at various institutions including Georgetown University, University of Illinois, and Howard Community College. His publications on religion and rock art in leading journals span various topics.

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES: Nonviolence
Edward Fotheringill

Session II
Tuesday, 11:00 a.m. (begins on April 7)
Fee: $65
Most of us would prefer to avoid violent situations. This in itself, however, does not mean we are nonviolent beings. Why? Because when we are provoked to the point where we feel threatened or abused, our normal response is to fight back with violent thoughts, words, and actions. It is not only seen as normal, but sometimes even courageous. The bedrock of nonviolence, however, turns everything on its head. The truly nonviolent person does not respond to such provocation with violent thoughts, words, and actions—he or she endures the threat or abuse without retaliation (NOTE: This is not cowardice). Where does this inner strength come from? It seems utterly mysterious. In this course, we will examine the nature of nonviolence, and give evidence of nonviolent ideology and action in the lives of Mohandas Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton, and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Edward Fotheringill is an adjunct professor of philosophy and intellectual history in the Department of Humanistic Studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). He was a senior lecturer of philosophy at Towson State University and at Goucher College for many years. In the fall of 2019, he taught a course at Osher entitled “The Origins of Existentialism”.
EVERYDAY SPLENDORS: Novels of Charles Dickens and George Eliot
Jacqueline (Jan) Wilkotz

Sessions I and II
Wednesday, 1:00 p.m. (begins on March 4)
Fee: $130 ($65 for each session)

Before the young Vincent Van Gogh became an artist, his years working in Victorian London fostered his lifelong love of English fiction; his favorite novelists were Charles Dickens and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). He understood how their work honored emotional generosity, even in lives lived in narrow circumstances. In our own time, is it still possible to consider novels as a realistic form that illustrates anything as old-fashioned as everyday moral beauty? Can those long, rich books tell us much about how to become more fully human, more fully aware of others’ humanity?

To help answer such questions, we will concentrate on Dickens’ “David Copperfield,” “Great Expectations,” and “Bleak House;” and Eliot’s “The Mill on the Floss” and “Middlemarch.” Dickens is often comic and Eliot, philosophic—both are profound.

Jacqueline Wilkotz, professor emerita at Towson University, has a Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley and taught literature and women’s studies for nearly four decades at TU. She has taught several previous courses on literature for Osher.

BIG THANKS
to all Osher Volunteers who help to make Osher a success.
“TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD”: Whose Story Is It?
Jon Aaron

Sessions I and II
Tuesday, 3:00 p.m. (begins on March 3. Class will not meet on March 17 but will meet on March 31.)
Fee: $130 ($65 for each session)

"To Kill a Mockingbird" has remained beloved and relevant since its publication in 1960. Reflecting initially on the novel's first draft, published in 2015, “Go Set a Watchman,” we will celebrate the author's gift to the American literary tradition by delving into the class's core questioning of “To Kill a Mockingbird" as we ask, “Whose Story Is It?” We will consider the following over the course of our discussion: historical ideas at the heart of the novel (constitutional tenets and Jim Crow); thematically related Harlem Renaissance poetry and art (Langston Hughes and Aaron Douglas); film and video excerpts (“A Night at The Garden” and a TED talk by Chimimanda Adichie); James Baldwin’s essay “The Creative Process”; musical and lyrical connections to Broadway songs from “Ragtime,” “Big River,” “Evan Hansen,” and “Hadestown”; and Aaron Sorkin’s re-imagining of the novel in his Broadway play. The eclectic nature of our discussions is designed to allow each participant to discover the voices and perspectives—untold stories—embedded in Harper Lee's rich narrative.

Enrollment is limited to 35 students.

Jon Aaron has taught English, history, and performing arts at McDonogh School for 44 years. He has a B.A. from Boston University and M.L.A. from the Johns Hopkins University. He has offered this course previously in the JHU Osher program, Beth El Synagogue, and McDonogh School and has enjoyed how it has evolved. Jon is passionate about creating conversations around universal themes that deepen appreciation of how literature, art, film, and history complement one another and provide insight into our lives and our world.

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