

PHIL3000 – Philosophical Ethics

Thursdays 6:00pm – 8:45pm
Leon Lowenstein Bldg. 514
Office hours: Thursdays 10:00-12:00pm, 913A

Instructor: Michael Hannon
mhannon11@fordham.edu

Course Description

What is there to live for? Is there anything worth pursuing apart from money, love, and our own self-interest? How can we live an *ethical* life? This course is a systematic introduction to the most important and historically influential ethical theories. We will discuss a variety of perspectives, including cultural relativism, egoism, utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. In addition to studying ethical theories, we will also think about various ethical issues to illuminate the similarities and differences between these views. For example, we will ask whether we have a moral duty to donate our money to charity, whether we are ever morally permitted to lie or kill, and whether anyone is ever morally responsible for anything.

Course Objectives

You will learn to identify and explain some of the main positions in philosophical ethics, while also cultivating a critical perspective on those arguments and views. More generally, this course will enhance your ability to read, think, discuss, and write clearly and in a philosophical way. I hope you will enhance intellectual abilities that are important for life as a whole, beyond the knowledge and skills required for any particular profession.

Required Texts

PDF versions of all readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Recommended Reading:

Russ Shafer-Landau's *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Course Requirements

Two Essays (Essay 1: 25%; Essay 2: 30%)

Research and writing are important parts of this course. In each essay you will formulate a thesis statement, argue for it, and defend it from possible objections. Your discussion should manifest a good understanding of the relevant literature. I will give you a list of topics in advance, although you may choose your own topic instead. If you would like to pursue a different topic than one I have suggested, please discuss it with me beforehand. The first paper should be approximately 1500 words and is due on **February 26th**. The second paper should be approximately 1800 words and is due on **April 1st** (and no, this is not an April Fools' prank!).

Essays are due at 11:59pm on the due date. They must be emailed to me. Late papers will be lowered one grade initially (e.g., an A to a B, etc.) and an additional grade every subsequent 24 hours. You are encouraged to use secondary sources if they are relevant, but you are not required to do so. Please use any consistent style for citations (MLA, Chicago, Harvard, etc.). More information about your essay assignments will be provided in class.

Final Exam (35%)

The final exam is scheduled for **May 12th**. This in-class exam will consist of ten definitions, four short answer questions, and two essays. Two days before the exam, I will provide you with eight short answer questions and four essay questions to study. The exam will be a random selection of four of these short answer questions and two of these essay questions. We will have a class study session a week prior to the final exam to help prepare you; however, in order to be fully prepared for this exam, you must do the assigned readings every week, attend and participate in class regularly, and begin to study well before the exam questions are released. The exam will test your knowledge and understanding of the assigned readings and material covered in class.

Participation and Attendance (10%)

Discussion is a crucial part of this course, so please come to each class with questions and comments of your own. Also, remember that the quality of your contributions is more important than how often you contribute.

Absences

Regular attendance is expected and required. The University's policy about absences is that the maximum number of total excused and unexcused absences will not exceed two class meetings for a course that meets once a week (such as ours). Also, unexcused absences will negatively affect your course grade. Excused absences for personal illness require verification such as a physician note on official letterhead or prescription pad, or confirmation from the Fordham Student Health Center.

Absences may not be used as an excuse for failing to submit assignments. If you are going to be absent on a day when an assignment is due, you must email the assignment to me before the start of class on the day it is due. Assignments received after this time will be considered late.

Class Format

There will typically be two readings per class. We will discuss one reading per half and take a 10-minute break between these two parts.

Plagiarism

Please see Fordham University's policy on plagiarism in your Student Handbook. The salient details: (a) "plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own ideas what has come from another source", and (b) "plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate". A first offence will likely result in a zero for the assignment (or worse) and a second offence will likely result in a failure of the course.

Grading Scale

| | | | |
|----|----|----|---|
| A | B+ | C+ | D |
| A- | B | C | F |
| | B- | C- | |

Schedule

| Date | Topic | Readings |
|--------|--|--|
| Jan 21 | Ethical Relativism & Ethical Universalism | 1. Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" |
| Jan 28 | Utilitarianism | 1. Mill, "Hedonism" & "Utilitarianism" 2. Smart, "Extreme & Restricted Utilitarianism" |
| Feb 4 | Utilitarianism & Charity | 1. Singer, "Famine, Affluence, & Morality" 2. Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics: Against Helping the Poor" |
| Feb 11 | Critiques of Utilitarianism (Essay 1 topics provided) | 1. Williams, "Critique of Utilitarianism" 2. Wolf, "Moral Saints" |
| Feb 18 | Egoism & Morality | 1. Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism" 2. Hobbes, "Egoism as the Beginning of Morality" |
| Feb 25 | Kant's Deontological Ethics | 1. Rachels, "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?" 2. Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" |
| Feb 26 | First Essay Due (25%) | |
| Mar 3 | Treating Others as Ends | 1. Foot, "Morality as a System of Hyp. Imperatives" 2. O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Famine Problems" |
| Mar 10 | Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (Essay 2 topics provided) | 1. Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn" 2. Aristotle, "The Nature of Virtue" |
| Mar 17 | Spring Break – No Class | |
| Mar 24 | Holy Thursday/Easter – No Class | |
| Mar 31 | Relativism & Understanding | 1. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues" 2. Annas, "Being Virtuous & Doing the Right Thing" |
| Apr 1 | Second Essay Due (30%) | |
| Apr 7 | Ironism, Hedonism, & the Good Life | 1. Wallace, "This is Water" 2. Wallace, "Good Old Neon" |
| Apr 14 | Happiness, Love, and Death | 1. Brickman, "Lottery Winners & Accident Victims" 2. Moller, "Love and Death" |
| Apr 21 | Freedom, Luck, & Moral Responsibility | 1. Nagel, "Moral Luck" 2. Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility" |
| Apr 28 | A Revaluation of Values | 1. Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil" |
| May 5 | Exam Review | No readings |
| May 12 | Final Exam – In Class (35%) | |

You are expected to read the material prior to class.

Some tips

At no stage in one's life is reading philosophy easy. In order to make your reading efficient and rewarding, you must maintain a sympathetic but critical attitude to the text. This can often be best achieved by approaching the text with a number of general questions in mind:

- What conclusion does the author wish to reach?
- Why is that conclusion interesting?
- What is the argument, and is it valid?
- Should the premises of the argument be accepted?
- If we accept the argument and conclusion, what else follows?

Guidance on how to write a good philosophy paper

Pryor, J. "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper" (online).

Martinich, A.P. 2005. *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*.

Vaughn, L. 2006. *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*.

Strunk, Jr., W. 1918, reprinted 1999. *The Elements of Style*.

Fordham Writing Center

The Writing Center is a service free to all Fordham students that seeks to encourage and improve student writing of all levels and disciplines. Their aim is to provide personalized instruction that will develop your skills and help you become a more confident writer. The Writing Center is located in the Lowenstein Building, room 302e.

Phone: 212-636-6417 Hours: Monday-Thursday: 9:30AM-7:30PM Friday:9:30AM-2:30PM

Accessibility

Your success in this course is important to me. I recognize that there are multiple ways to learn and that this multiplicity should be acknowledged in the structure of university courses and the evaluation of their participants. Thus, I encourage students registered in the course to discuss their learning styles and comprehension requirements with me during my office hours or at another arranged time, if necessary.

Disabled students are also strongly encouraged to avail themselves of the services provided by the Office of Disability Services (ODS), including the provision of note-takers, transcribers, and sign-language interpreters. Please contact the main ODS office at Rose Hill at 718-817-0655. You should first register with the ODS and then meet with me once you have a letter from them outlining what accommodations (if any) are appropriate. We will discuss how those accommodations can be integrated into the course.