**PHIL 010-20 – INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS**

**Summer 2016 – Syllabus**

Instructor: Daniel Threet

Email: dkt23@georgetown.edu

Note on email: I’ll aim to respond to emails within 48 hours, but when class deadlines are approaching, response times may slow—plan ahead and email sooner than later.

Office Hours: By appt

Meetings: MTWR 3:15-5:15, Maguire 102, July 11-August 12 (Summer 2)

**Course Description:**

Ethics examines some of the most enduring and difficult practical questions: how ought we determine how to act? what kind of people ought we aim to be? when do the ends justify the means? This course will serve to introduce students to philosophical ethics, by surveying the major traditions in normative ethics and some of the more contentious debates about how to apply ethical theories (e.g., animal rights, abortion, and our responsibility to address global poverty). Reading will include Russ Shafer-Landau's *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, along with selections of John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, Rosalind Hursthouse, and others. Students will be responsible for writing three short to medium-length essays, taking a final exam, and participating in regular discussion.

**Course Goals:**

* Read seminal philosophical work in normative, applied, and meta-ethics and apply it to contemporary issues.
* Learn to analyze and formulate philosophical arguments, in class discussion and through formal and informal writing.
* Refine skills for critical and cogent argumentative writing.

**Required Texts:**

(1) Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics,* third edition. Oxford University Press.

ISBN 978-0199997237.

(2) Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals.* Trans. James Ellington. Hackett

Publishing. ISBN 978-0-8-7220166-8.

*Students may use online alternatives, but be aware of differences in translation and look for an edition that includes Akademie numbers (guide numbers in the margins).*

(3) Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, *The Classical Utilitarians*. Hackett Publishing.

ISBN 978-0872206496.

*Online alternatives are also available here, and there is no worry about translation, but students who use other texts are responsible for ensuring they read the selections that are assigned (pagination refers to this edition).*

(4) All other texts supplied via Blackboard.

**Components of Class Grade:**

* Class participation: 20% (see below for details)
* First formal paper: 10%
* Second formal paper: 25%
* Third formal paper: 35%
* Final exam: 10%

**Assignments:**

The assignment prompts for the three formal papers will be put on Blackboard throughout the semester. The first paper will be a 2-page trial run with writing philosophical arguments. The second and third papers will be roughly 5-page papers that ask you to respond to an argument from our reading. We will discuss the form of the comprehensive final exam in class before the exam.

**Honor Code:**

You are expected and required to uphold standards of academic honesty in this course. You should be familiar with the Standards of Conduct outlined in the Georgetown Honor System and on the Honor Council website (<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/>). I am committed to academic integrity and obliged to uphold the Honor System. I will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

**Late Policy:**

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be subject to a half-grade late penalty for each day they are late. (An ‘A’ paper turned in 24 hours late will be docked to an A-, within 48 hours will be docked to a B+, etc.). Contact me in advance of the deadline if there are extenuating circumstances, so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

**Grade Appeals:**

If you believe you deserved a grade different from what you received on an assignment, you may request reconsideration of the grade if you submit a written request within one (1) week of receiving the grade. The request should include a full explanation of why you think the work deserves reconsideration. Most appeals will not result in a change to the grade. Be aware that reconsideration could result in a higher or lower grade.

**Basic Grading Standards:**

(This is most pertinent for the formal papers. The language here is borrowed from Professor Kate Withy. Feel free to ask me for more information about the elements of good papers.)

**An ‘A’ paper** displays a sophisticated understanding of the arguments under discussion and their immediate and distant implications; it makes an original or interesting contribution (not obvious from the reading or lectures) and provides compelling reasons for agreeing with it; it is elegantly written, and it is clearly and logically structured. ‘A’ papers are extraordinary.

**A ‘B’ paper** displays a solid grasp of, and thoughtful engagement with, the arguments and positions under discussion, and it begins to explore their implications; it includes the student’s own interpretive contribution, along with good reasons for agreeing with it; it is clearly organized, coherently argued, on-topic and well-written. ‘B’ papers are good papers.

**A ‘C’ paper** is relevant; shows familiarity and engagement with the material; it may misunderstand or misrepresent key ideas in the texts; it may have few of the student’s own ideas or interpretations, or insufficiently explained reasons in support of these; it may have some reasoning problems or gaps; it may have some stylistic or structural problems; or it may be a little dogmatic (i.e., offering unargued claims). A ‘C’ paper indicates that the student should work on reasoning skills, writing clearly, and/or thinking through the material more deeply.

**A ‘D’ paper** may exhibit any of the following: it is off-topic; it displays a weak or spotty grasp of the material; it has little original content; it provides few (if any) reasons for agreeing with the positions argued for, or consists mainly in summary; it is unclearly written or organized; it may be dogmatic; and it may be too short or too long. A ‘D’ paper indicates that the student should seek assistance with academic writing (see the Resources section of the syllabus).

**An ‘F’ paper** is plagiarized (either in whole or in part), or it does not engage with the material, or it is well short of (or well over) the suggested page length, or it cannot be understood.

**ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

Paper 1: Due 7/19

Paper 2: Due 8/2

Paper 3: Due 8/10

**PARTICIPATION**

Active participation in class discussions is absolutely essential to doing well in the course. In our class discussions, we will not simply be studying philosophy, we will be “doing philosophy”—the conversations themselves are where a lot of the substantive work of the course is done. Class participation will account for 20% of your overall grade. What kind of class participation is expected in a philosophy classroom? The following are ways of making yourself an active and helpful contributor:

(1) Read the assigned material at least once before class. Outline the argument, and paraphrase for yourself what you think the author’s conclusion is and how she argues for that conclusion. Write down three or four questions about the article. Those questions can be about the definition of terms or ambiguities in the writing. More substantively, they can be questions about confusions you had when you tried to understand the argument, or places you felt unconvinced by what you read. Imagine what kinds of questions other philosophers we’ve read would ask of this author, and write down those questions as well. Have those questions ready when you come to class.

(2) In class itself, in addition to asking your prepared questions, be ready and willing to raise new questions about things that come up as others speak. It can be helpful to everyone involved if you express confusion when you don’t understand what’s been said. I may ask the class as a whole to consider questions that didn’t occur to you when you were reading, and it’s important that you’re willing to talk even when you aren’t fully confident about what you have to say. Good participation is not simply about demonstrating preparedness and your own knowledge; just as often it is about being willing to experiment and think aloud with others. An ‘A’ grade in participation does not require that everything you say is brilliant.

(3) Be a respectful collaborator in the classroom. A respectful collaborator gives others a chance to speak, remembers what others has said and credits their contributions, and helps others by asking follow-up questions of other students’ comments. Respectful disagreement is also possible. Just as you would tell a good friend when you think they are wrong, because you want to help, think of your classmates as partners. In fact, if we treat the authors we read in the same manner, we are likely to develop more charitable, sophisticated understandings of the material.

(4) Speaking up is essential, but it’s not the only way to participate. Some of us are shyer or less comfortable talking in front of large groups. To some degree, that’s something that has to be overcome in the philosophy classroom, as you have to be willing to talk to do well as a participator. You can make additional contributions, however, by emailing me questions in advance of class or by asking your class partners and friends to raise questions. Coming to talk with me in office hours is also a good way to try out ideas in a smaller environment before introducing them in class discussion.

How will you know how you’re doing? There will be one formal opportunity to see your participation grade, at the mid-way point of the semester, as I will send everyone a short note with their current participation grade and a description of how they could improve, if needed. The participation grade is a holistic and qualitative assessment, though, so the halves of the semester are not weighted in any formulaic manner. You can also get a better sense of this at any time by coming to speak with me in office hours.

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is mandatory. Part of the ambition of the course is to “do philosophy” together—where that means constructing, testing, and evaluating arguments together in common. As such, attendance plays a role in determining your participation grade. In condensed summer courses, this is even more important. The first unexcused absence will be waived. After that, all unexcused absences will result in a half-letter deduction from your participation grade, unless there are unforeseen emergencies (e.g., medical emergencies, deaths in the family, etc.).

**LAPTOP/TABLET/PHONE POLICY**

There are good reasons to ban devices like laptops and tablets in the classroom: we are generally less good at multitasking than we think (see, e.g., http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\_releases/2013-01/uou-fma011813.php), the rare student who spends the class streaming Final Four games distracts everyone around him or her, and conversation can be impeded by a wall of screens. That said, since this class relies heavily on PDF reading assignments and I do not want to encourage you to print out reams of paper, laptops and tablets are conditionally allowed in class. Turn off wifi/cell service on all devices you plan to use during class, and use them only to access PDFs and notes. If there is any evidence that laptops are being used for other purposes, we will move to a strict no-laptop policy. Even when you are being discreet about it, your classmates can see when you are not listening to their contributions.

**COURSE READING SCHEDULE**

Readings from Shafer-Landau’s *Fundamentals of Ethics* are indicated by chapter number (e.g.,

the first chapter is *FoE* 1).

Readings from Kant’s *Grounding* and the Bentham and Mill reader make reference to the page

numbers of those editions. If you do not have those editions, talk to me in advance about the assignment.

All other texts are available as PDFs on Blackboard unless otherwise noted.

Course schedule subject to change; this list is provisional.

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| 7/11 M | Introduction, *FoE* Introduction |
| 7/12 T | *FoE* 19 - Relativism  PDFs: Wilkinson, Prinz, Harman |
| 7/13 W | *FoE* 20-21 (Nihilism, Arguments Against Objectivity) |
| 7/14 R | Animal ethics  PDF Regan; Craig Watts video link; Farm Sanctuary website |
| 7/18 M | *FoE* 7-8 (Psychological Egoism, Ethical Egoism) |
| 7/19 T | PDFs: Rand, Plato  FIRST PAPER DUE |
| 7/20 W | *FoE* 5-6 (Morality and Religion, Natural Law) |
| 7/21 R | Abortion  PDFs: Marquis, Little |
| 7/25 M | *FoE* 9 (Consequentialism)  Bentham TBD |
| 7/26 T | *FoE* 10 (Difficulties)  Bentham TBD |
| 7/27 W | Mill TBD  PDF Pettit |
| 7/28 R | Global poverty  PDFs: Singer, Williams |
| 8/1 M | *FoE* 11-12 (Kantian Perspective Fairness and Justice, Autonomy and Respect) |
| 8/2 T | Kant TBD |
| 8/3 W | Kant TBD  PDF Korsgaard |
| 8/4 R | Trolley problems  PDFs: Thomson, Kamm |
| 8/8 M | *FoE* 17 (Virtue Ethics)  PDF Hursthouse |
| 8/9 T | *FoE* 18 (Feminist Ethics)  PDF Held |
| 8/10 W | *FoE* 13-14 (Social Contract Tradition, Scanlonian Contractualism) |
| 8/11 R | Review |

**RESOURCES**

* Academic Resource Center

http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/academic/about-us

*The ARC facilitates a number of accommodations for students with disabilities.*

* Writing Center

http://www.library.georgetown.edu/writing-center

Lauinger 217A

*The Writing Center provides general advice and feedback on academic writing.*

* Academic Integrity Guidelines

http://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system/useful-information

* Counseling and Psychiatric Services

http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/mental-health/

Rear of Darnall Hall, 202-687-6985

* Health Education Services

http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/health-promotion

Poulton Hall, Suite 101

* Student Health Center

http://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/medical-care

Ground Floor, Darnall Hall, 202-687-2200

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. University policy requires faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct. Contact: Jen Schweer, MA, LPC Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention (202) 687-0323 jls242@georgetown.edu; Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) (202) 687-6985 els54@georgetown.edu