

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

SUMMER 2017 ♦ PHIL 010-01 ♦ MTWRF 1PM-3PM ♦ CAR BARN 205

INSTRUCTOR: Michael Randall Barnes ♦ EMAIL: mrb238@georgetown.edu

OFFICE HOURS: **location:** New North 214 – **time:** TBD (and by appointment)

**NOTE: SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CHECK BLACKBOARD REGULARLY FOR UPDATES. **

COURSE OVERVIEW

Philosophy, at its best, is a tool for helping us better understand and solve certain kinds of practical problems that emerge in concrete social and political contexts. As philosopher Elizabeth Anderson writes, the best philosophical reflection begins by considering any given problem “as it emerges in practice, in the experiences of the people who confront it.” To that end, this course will explore several concrete problems that have emerged in the context of Georgetown University, such as: whether or not Georgetown owes reparations to the descendants of the 272 slaves it sold to pay off its debts; whether its bookstore and athletic teams should sell or wear apparel made in sweatshops; whether the University should host on campus speakers with racist, homophobic, or otherwise bigoted views; and more. We’ll find that philosophical reflection and analysis is not only helpful for achieving a sharper understanding of the values at play in these various issues but also gives us the tools to take principled stances on them. In the course of investigating these questions, we’ll draw on work in moral philosophy, feminist philosophy, epistemology, and philosophy of language. We’ll also draw from a diverse set of materials, from traditional philosophical articles, to opinion pieces, documentaries, films, and more.

COURSE GOALS

The course has several goals, three of the most important are:

- (1) To introduce you to important texts and ideas in the broad fields of ethics and philosophy.
- (2) To cultivate your own thinking about central problems in ethics, especially as they bear on issues that you may encounter in your own life and the lives of those around you.
- (3) To improve your analytical reading and writing skills, which for philosophy involves: (a) recognizing the parts of arguments; (b) understanding how these parts work together; (c) critiquing the steps, reasoning, consistency, or validity of an argument, while remaining charitable.

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS:

ACTIVE CLASS PARTICIPATION: You are expected to participate regularly and thoughtfully. You should demonstrate that you have read the required material, and you should also engage with your classmates—active listening is an important component of this. Meetings with me outside of class may supplement, though not replace, participation in class discussions. **Participation, both its quantity and quality, is worth 15%.**

READING RESPONSES: To facilitate class discussion, you are expected to come to class most days with a **2-3 sentence written reading response**. This can be a question, comment, or connection, but it should be specific to at least one of the texts assigned for the day. We will sometimes share these responses at the beginning of class, and sometime I will ask for them to be emailed to me prior to our meeting. Completion of these responses **constitute 10% of your final grade.**

QUIZZES: We will have four **brief in-class quizzes** that will replace your reading responses. You will be given sufficient warning of when these will occur, and I aim to make the quizzes easy for anyone who has read the assigned text(s). Your cumulative grade from these quizzes **constitutes 10% of your final grade.**

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: You are required to write **two short papers** (4-6 pages) based on the prompt(s) that I provide. The prompt can be on any readings that we have done up to that point. The point of these papers is to help you build your philosophical writing skills. You must submit to SafeAssign. **Paper 1 is worth 20% of your final grade, and Paper 2 is worth 25%.**

REFLECTION PAPERS: Twice during the course, you will be asked to write an informal one-page paper that connects an issue raised in this course to your life outside this classroom. **Each is worth 10% of your grade.**

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS:

- Active Class Participation – 15%
- Short Reading Responses – 10%
- In-Class Quizzes – 10%
- Paper 1 – 20%
- Paper 2 – 25%
- Reflection Paper 1 – 10%
- Reflection Paper 2 – 10%

READINGS AND OTHER CLASS MATERIALS:

All readings and other materials will be available on Blackboard (<http://campus.georgetown.edu>).

COURSE POLICIES:

ATTENDANCE: Students are permitted only one “free passes” where they can miss class without excuse. Any unexcused absences after that bring your participation grade down 1/3 a letter grade. *Students who have more than five unexcused absences cannot pass the course.*

ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER AND ADA ACCOMMODATIONS: If you have a disability or believe you might and would like to receive accommodations in this course, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) to register as a student with a disability or for an evaluation referral. You should do this at the beginning of the term. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodation in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

If you find over the course of the term that additional accommodations are necessary, let me know so we can work together to make this course a beneficial experience. In general, students are encouraged to contact the instructor with suggestions, requests, or comments about how to best support their learning styles or needs.

TITLE IX: Please note: while I am available to discuss both academic and personal matters with students, if I am made aware of discrimination, harassment, or other crimes occurring at or in relation to Georgetown University I am bound by Title IX’s mandatory reporting rules. Under Title IX representatives of the University are required to report violations within 24 hours of being made aware of the problem. Georgetown’s confidential resources can be found here: <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/counselors>.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: When it comes time to write your papers, you must use the skills you have developed by thinking through the relevant issues on your own. You have all signed the **Georgetown University Honor pledge** and have agreed to be honest in your academic endeavors. I expect you to be familiar with both the letter and the spirit of the pledge.

The Honor Council adjudicates cases of suspected academic dishonesty. I will submit any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the Honor Council. Confirmed academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the assignment and/or course.

WRITING CENTER: Please consider taking advantage of the resources of the Writing Center. The Writing Center provides one-on-one peer tutoring focused on improving your writing skills. I encourage you to take your paper drafts to the Writing Center. Visit <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu> for more information. You can also schedule an appointment with a Writing Center tutor online on the center’s website.

LATE PAPERS: You are responsible for turning in your work on time. Each 24 hours that a piece of written work is late will result in the subtraction of 1/3 letter grade.

IN-CLASS BEHAVIOR: You are responsible for comporting yourself in an appropriate manner. This includes treating other members of the class with respect and courtesy. While philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively, the questions we will be discussing are likely to generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing, we must always make an effort to remain courteous and respectful to one another.

I promise to do my best to raise issues and to start discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But, I will only be able to do this if each of you helps me to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another.

Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we can help each other have a great class.

GRADE APPEALS: if you believe the work you submitted deserves a different grade than it received, you may ask in writing for reconsideration. Your request must be submitted *within one week*, but no sooner than *two days* after the assignment is returned. Your written request must *explain why* you believe the work deserves a different grade. It is expected that most appeals will not result in a change of grade, but if a change is made please note that the grade may be either higher or lower.

Instructional continuity: In the case of adverse weather preventing our class from meeting, I will send out an email with detailed instructions about what you should do in place of the class meeting. Unless prevented by weather conditions, you are responsible for checking your email before the scheduled start of class.

Lastly, you are responsible for being prepared for class. This includes reading assigned material, thinking about it so that you can ask intelligent questions, and arriving on time.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE: Course Overview and Introduction to Ethical Theory

M	John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor, <i>On Liberty</i> , chapter 1.
T	John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor, <i>On Liberty</i> , chapter 2-3
W	John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor, <i>On Liberty</i> , chapter 4.
R	Watch: Episode 06 of "Harvard University's Justice with Michael Sandel," available at http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-06/
F	Lori Gruen, "Seeking an Alternative Ethic"

WEEK TWO: Exploitation, Sweatshops, and Responsibility

M	Iris Marion Young, "From Guilt to Solidarity" Caitlyn Cobb and Santul Nerkar, "In Foul Trouble: Unlacing Georgetown's Relationship with Nike"
T	Alan Wertheimer and Matt Zwolinski, "Exploitation"
W	Jeremy Snyder, "Exploitation and Sweatshop Labor: Perspectives and Issues"
R	Matt Zwolinski, "Structural Exploitation"
F	Watch: <i>Mardi Gras: Made in China</i>

WEEK THREE: Hate Speech, Tolerance, and the Law

M	Editorial Board of Georgetown Voice, "Coulter's hate speech has no place here" Editorial Board of Georgetown Voice, "Ed Board Slack Chat: Should Jeh Johnson be disinvited?"
T	J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances"
W	Ishani Maitra, "Subordinating Speech"
R	Jeremy Waldron, <i>The Harm in Hate Speech</i> , chapter 3
F	John Paul Stevens, "Should Hate Speech Be Outlawed?"

WEEK FOUR: Oppression, Resistance, and Reparations

M	Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
T	Iris Marion Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression"
W	Lisa Tessman, <i>Burdened Virtues</i> , chapter 5
R	Sandra Lee Bartky, "On Psychological Oppression"
F	Rachel Swarns, "272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe to Their Descendants?"