Introduction to Ethics

Summer 2021
Second Main Session (July 6 – August 7)
M–Th 10:45am –12:45pm

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Office hours: TR 1:15pm-2:15pm or by appt

Course Description

Apologies reflect that it is important that harms are addressed. You will inevitably harm others and experience harm yourself. But what exactly do apologies do? What does it mean to be responsible for harming another person? Some harms are not the result of personal wrongdoing. What do we do about harms that no individual person is responsible for? In this course we will grapple with these questions. In order to answer these practical questions, we must examine more abstract ones: What is morality? How do we have moral knowledge? Isn’t it all just subjective anyway? We will focus on (1) reasoning critically about ethical situations and ethical disagreement and (2) making our reasoning actionable.

Required Texts

All texts will be available online

Requirements

1. 4 Short reflection papers (no more than 1000 words)
2. 1 Argument summary (no more than 1000 words)
3. 1 Written Exam

Grade Breakdown

Weekly reflection papers 40 %
Argument summary 10%
Final exam (take home) 30 %
Participation 20 %

(Tentative) Reading Schedule

What is morality? Why should I be moral?

7/6 Tuesday
   Topic: Introduction to the course; What is morality?
Introduction to Ethics

Reading: Shafer-Landau, chps. 1-2 of Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?
Select Bioethics and Ethics bowl cases

7/7 Wednesday
Topic: What is morality? (cont.); Meta-ethics
Reading: Hobbes, excerpts from Leviathan; Aristotle, book II of The Republic

7/8 Thursday
Topic: Why should I be moral?
Reading: Dodds, “Dependence, care and vulnerability”

Reflection Papers due Friday 7/9 by 11:59pm

Agency, Wrongdoing, and Responsibility

7/12 Monday
Topic: Agency
Reading: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry on Agency; Dennett, Conditions of Personhood

7/13 Tuesday
Topic: Free will

7/14 Wednesday
Topic: Personal wrongdoing and responsibility
Reading: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry on Responsibility; Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

7/15 Thursday
Topic: Holding ourselves and others to account
Reading: Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”

Reflection Paper due Friday 7/16 by 11:59pm

Ethical Knowledge

7/19 Monday
Topic: Uncertainty
Reading: Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"; Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theory”

7/20 Tuesday
Topic: Testimonial Injustice
Introduction to Ethics

Reading: Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”

7/21 Wednesday
Topic: Epistemic humility
Reading: Ballantyne, “Debunking Biased Thinkers”

7/22 Thursday
Topic: Skepticism
Reading: Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”

Argument Summary due Friday 7/23 by 11:59pm

Political Philosophy

7/26 Monday
Topic: The state
Reading: Wolff, In Defense Anarchism

7/27 Tuesday
Topic: Ethics, the law, and rights
Reading: Arendt, excerpt from “Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man” from The Origins of Totalitarianism and Hobbes, excerpts from Leviathan

7/28 Wednesday
Topic: Universalism
Reading: Khader, Introduction and chapter 1 of Decolonizing Universalism

7/29 Thursday
Topic: Systemic injustice
Reading: Young, “The Five Faces of Oppression”

Reflection Paper due Friday 7/30 by 11:59pm

Apology and Reconciliation

8/2 Monday
Topic: Anger
Reading: hooks, “Killing Rage”; Srinivasan, “Aptness of Anger”

8/3 Tuesday
Topic: Apology
Introduction to Ethics

Reading: MacLachlan, “Public Apology”, Watson, “Did You Apologize?”

8/4 Wednesday
Topic: Reparations
Reading: Taiwo, “Reconsidering Reparations”

8/5 Thursday
Topic: Is it ever too late?
Reading: Norlock, “Imaginary relations with the dead”

Reflection Paper due Friday 8/6 by 11:59pm

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS CLASS

Policies and accommodations:

- I do not deduct marks for late work. If you need an extension, you need to ask me 48 hours in advance. I will be generous with pre-arranged extensions, but if you have not arranged an extension, you cannot hand in your work late, except in the case of a serious emergency.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following Georgetown policies regarding academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Suspected cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be rigorously investigated and penalized as severely as possible. I reserve the right to submit any assignment to any plagiarism detection service of my choosing.
- Students with disabilities or nonstandard learning needs are invited to talk to me as early as possible in the term so that we can design a study and assignment plan that works for you. Please feel free also to check in with me about whether that plan needs to be fine-tuned as the term progresses. Students are also strongly encouraged to discuss their needs and make arrangements with the Academic Resource Center on campus.
- Religiously observant students who require accommodations should speak to me by the second week of class so that we can plan a schedule.
- Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Please speak to me about any accommodations you might need as a pregnant person or as a parent.

Support and self-care:

- I am happy to talk to you at any point about getting any sort of support you need throughout the term, whether that be academic, emotional, legal, psychological, medical, or other. There are many campus and off-campus resources, and I am happy to help you find them.
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Sexual misconduct: I am committed to supporting victims of sexual misconduct in whatever way I can. Georgetown University prohibits sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking. Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Please know that as a faculty member I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. However, University policy also requires faculty to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

- 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

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct are available on an external website. (Links to an external site.)

Appealing a grade:

- You can appeal any grade that you believe does not accurately represent your work. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your assignment is returned. They must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade.

Turnaround and feedback:

- If you have a concern and send me a message, you can expect a response within two business days. Please allow up to two weeks for assessment submission feedback.