

Introduction to Ethics

Fall 2012 TTh 10:00-11:40 Oxford Student Center 27

Instructor: David Marshall Miller

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to moral philosophy in seminar format. We will consider the classic questions at the heart of ethical inquiry: What is it to live a good life? What should we do? Is there a moral code? We will address each of the major ethical theories offering answers to these questions (Consequentialism, Deontology, and Virtue Ethics), as well as some leading alternatives. We will also discuss the status of morality and moral knowledge—i.e., moral objectivity and moral epistemology—as well as applications of moral reasoning in political and everyday life. Readings will consist of classic and contemporary texts. Throughout, we will concentrate on the evaluation and construction of philosophical arguments, emphasizing the methods of philosophy, both in reading and in writing.

Course Objectives

Students should gain a basic sensibility to good and bad argumentation and the ability to analyze arguments to identify their strengths and weaknesses. They should develop the reading, verbal, and writing skills needed to recognize and construct coherent and persuasive arguments. Students should also acquire a basic understanding of important issues of interest to moral philosophers and of the history of ethical thought.

Text

There are two textbooks for this course:

Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 2nd edition (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, editors, *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, 5th edition (Oxford University Press, 2012)

These texts should be available at the Oxford College Bookstore. Additional material will be made available via Blackboard. Please make sure you have signed onto the course.

Policies

All policies here outlined are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

Class Organization

Class meetings will consist primarily of open-ended discussions concerning the assigned reading. As noted below, students will be responsible for beginning class discussions, and students are expected to engage the discussion meaningfully.

One aim of this class is to teach the ability to argue convincingly. Stating your point of view loudly, assertively, or simply rudely is *not* equivalent to a convincing argument. Nor are insults, condescension, or *ad hominem* attacks legitimate refutations of another's position. In the course of discussion, try to keep your own statements modest while remaining sensitive and attentive to what others have to say. Effective response to criticism is an essential feature of good philosophy. By the same token, feel free to speak your mind, but allow others the same privilege.

Attendance

I will not record attendance in this class. However, I will pay attention to your participation, and it will play a part in your final grade. Missing one or two classes will not be a problem, but missing three or four will be trouble. Besides, you will not gain much from the (rather dense) readings if you do not attend class.

Readings

Special care has been taken to prevent the assigned reading from becoming onerous. In the ebb and flow of college life, it may nevertheless become difficult to stay on top of the reading. Also, note that some sessions require more reading than others. As a result, it is imperative that students *plan ahead*. Read ahead when you have the opportunity, so that you do not have to read too much when more is assigned or when you are otherwise occupied. Reading ahead gives you a valuable sense of where the class is going. If you know what is coming, you will be able to identify what is important about the present topic. However, be aware that reading philosophy is more difficult and time-consuming than reading for other contexts. We will discuss how to read philosophy in class.

You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts. That means you are expected to be prepared to ask meaningful and provocative questions about the reading. See the "Reading Questions" assignment below.

Electronics

The use of computers and other electronic devices (iPads, cellphones, etc.) in class has a tendency to distract attention and interfere with classroom discussion, even for those not actively using them. They are not to be used in class (unless necessary for a presentation or some other compelling purpose).

Assignments

Active Class Participation and Reading Questions

Students are expected to actively and regularly participate in class discussion. In particular, students are expected to prepare two thoughtful, written-out questions for each day of class on some portion of the reading to be discussed that day. Pick out some aspect of the reading that excites, puzzles, or otherwise strikes you as worth talking about. Then formulate a thoughtful question regarding it. Write two of these questions on a piece of paper or notecard and bring them to class, since you will occasionally be asked to raise them in class as a way of starting discussion.

Weekly Response Papers

Every week, the instructor will post a discussion prompt (or prompts) based on the reading. In response, students are expected to write a 1-2 page (double spaced, normal 10-12 point font, normal margins) essay. Some prompts will ask a specific question (typically, a yes or no question). Some prompts will ask you to develop an argument for a given position. Other prompts will ask you to comment on a text of your choosing. In all cases, the response paper should state a clear answer to the posed question (a thesis) and give reasons defending that position. The papers, that is, should be argumentative, not merely discursive.

Response papers will be graded pass/fail. It will not matter if you give the “right answer”—there usually will not be one. Rather, a paper will pass if it demonstrates a thoughtful, critical evaluation of the posed question. Most importantly, there should be a clear thesis, backed up by reasons. A paper that argues for a position will earn credit. Papers that merely describe or summarize a position or a text, or merely ask a series of questions, will not earn credit. Extensive feedback on these papers will be provided, especially toward the beginning of term.

Students can have two papers excused over the course of the semester. That is, you can fail or not turn in two responses without penalty. *Each* additional failure or missed response will lower your maximum possible grade in the class by half a letter score (e.g., from B to B-). This is a harsh penalty meant to encourage completion of the responses.

Since these are weekly assignments, late responses will not be accepted. Deadlines for responses will be discussed in class. They will be the same time each week.

Papers

Two 4-5 page essays will also be required in this course. For both papers, *complete* drafts will be exchanged with a partner—*by hard copy and by email*—who will then be responsible for comments and criticisms before the final paper is due. (Deadlines are listed on the course schedule.) All drafts, comments, and final papers must additionally be submitted to the instructor—*by hard copy and by dropbox*. Topics for the papers will be assigned.

Exams

There are no exams planned for this course. Should a final exam be administered, it will be given Monday, December 17, 2-5pm.

Evaluation

Evaluation in this class will be based on overall performance. Students should therefore strive to perform well in all aspects of the class. That said, a *rough* guide to the consideration given to each component is 20% for class preparation and participation, 20% for the response papers, and 30% for each longer essay.

Honor Code

The Honor Code is in effect in this class, as it is in all classes at Oxford College. Academic and personal integrity are serious matters, and will be treated as such in this course. The instructor and students alike are responsible for upholding both the spirit and the letter of the Code. Students must understand its content—especially regarding academic honesty, integrity, and plagiarism—and should clarify any questions they might have. All students are also expected to act with civility, personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property, including their intellectual property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their own efforts. Details about the Honor Code are available online:

http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/index.dot.

Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise. Ideas are best developed in discourse where criticism and suggestions are freely exchanged. You should not interpret the honor code to impact your ability to work together, and you are encouraged to do so. However, anything represented as your own work must be your own, with the remainder of submitted material properly attributed to its sources.

Citations

Plagiarism is not the same thing as incorrect citation style. I am not very concerned with how you cite sources, so long as they are cited in a way that enables the reader to find the source.

Nevertheless, there are standard conventions for citing sources, and it is worthwhile to begin using them early in your academic career. You will find some models on the course website. Additionally, there are software applications available that can help with citations (e.g., EndNote and Zotero), and you are encouraged to learn how to use at least one of these. See

<http://oxford.library.emory.edu/conduct-research/plagiarism-and-academic-honesty/citing-your-sources> for more information.

Accommodations

Students requiring special accommodations should contact the Oxford College Office of Access and Disability Resources at (770) 784-8415 to register.

Assessment

Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. I anticipate falling behind, in which case students are still responsible for keeping up with the reading in line with class discussion.

(Bb) indicates material on Blackboard.

August 30	Welcome
September 4	Introduction to Philosophy Russ Shafer-Landau (hereafter, RSL), "Introduction" Reading philosophy websites (Bb)
September 6	Philosophical Argument Argument Analysis Worksheet (Bb) Fallacy Primer (Bb)
September 11	Writing Philosophy Papers Writing Philosophy handout (Bb)
September 13	The Good Life RSL, chs. 1-4 Epicurus, <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i>
September 18	The Good Life Epictetus, <i>Enchiridion</i> Plato, <i>Crito</i> and <i>Phaedo</i> , selections
September 20	The Good Life Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , selections from Book I (pp. 124–134)
September 25	Consequentialism RSL, ch. 9-10 Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>
September 27	Consequentialism Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?" Parfit, "Innumerate Ethics"
October 2	Kant RSL, ch. 11-12 Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
October 4	Kant Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (continued) O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (Bb)
October 9	Deontological Ethics

	<p><i>Paper 1 draft deadline—email to partners.</i></p> <p>O'Neill, "Consistency in Action"</p> <p>Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"</p>
October 11	Paper Workshop
October 16	FALL BREAK
October 18	<p>Rawls</p> <p><i>Paper 1 due.</i></p> <p>Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i>, selections</p>
October 23	<p>Contractarianism</p> <p>RSL, chs. 13-14</p> <p>Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>, selections</p>
October 25	<p>Contractarianism</p> <p>Plato, <i>Republic</i>, selections from Books I-II (pp. 44-78)</p> <p>Gauthier, "Why Contractarianism?"</p>
October 30	<p>Pluralism</p> <p>RSL, 15-16</p> <p>Ross, <i>The Right and the Good</i>, selections</p>
November 1	<p>Virtue Ethics</p> <p>RSL, ch. 17</p> <p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, selections from Books II-X (pp. 134-177)</p> <p>Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"</p>
November 6	<p>Virtue Ethics</p> <p>RSL, ch. 18</p> <p>Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach"</p> <p>Held, "Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory"</p>
November 8	<p>Transition to Metaethics</p> <p>RSL, 19-21</p> <p>Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i></p>
November 13	<p>Moral Objectivity</p> <p>Plato, <i>Republic</i>, selections from Books IV, VI, and VII (pp. 82-107)</p> <p>Moore, <i>Principia Ethica</i>, selections</p> <p>Hare, <i>Freedom and Reason</i>, selections</p>
November 15	<p>Moral Relativism</p> <p>Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>, selections</p> <p>Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"</p>
November 20	<p>Moral Nihilism</p> <p><i>Paper 2 draft deadline—email to partners.</i></p>

	<p>Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>, selections</p> <p>Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i>, selections</p> <p>Mackie, <i>Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong</i>, selections</p>
November 22	THANKSGIVING
November 27	Paper Workshop
November 29	Ethics Applied
	Readings TBD
December 4	Debate Preparation
	<i>Paper 2 due.</i>
December 6	Debate
December 11	Summary and Review