

## PHIL 2050-02: Ethics

Lecture Hours: TR 9:30 – 10:45, Beracha Hall 216

Office Hours: By Appointment

Instructor: Mr. Jeremy Skrzypek

Instructor's Email: [jskrzyp1@slu.edu](mailto:jskrzyp1@slu.edu)

### Course Description:

This course will be a rigorous introduction to the area of philosophy known as *Ethics* or *Moral Philosophy*. The course will be split into three sections. In the first section we will cover an area of moral philosophy known as *Metaethics*. Here we will analyze questions such as:

*What is moral philosophy or ethics? How does one approach ethical issues philosophically?*

*What is the source of morality? Are there any objective moral truths?*

*How can we come to know what is right and what is wrong?*

In the second part of the course we will cover an area of philosophy known as *Ethical Theory*. Here we will analyze questions such as:

*What is valuable? What fundamental principles can I use to guide my actions?*

*What sorts of duties or obligations do I have?*

*Is there a particular way that I should live my life? What sort of person should I strive to be?*

In the third part of the course we will cover an area of philosophy known as *Applied Ethics*. Here we will analyze questions such as:

*Do we have a moral obligation to help those in need? If so, to what extent?*

*Is abortion ever morally permissible?*

*Are any kinds of sexual acts objectively immoral?*

*What sorts of obligations do we have to non-human animals? Is it wrong to kill them for food?*

For a large portion of the course, our approach in investigating these issues will be to read from the texts of some of the most famous ethical philosophers in history: *Jeremy Bentham* and *John Stuart Mill*, *Immanuel Kant*, *Aristotle*, and *Thomas Aquinas*. Although we will be spending a lot of time discussing how these questions have been addressed historically, the answers we will consider will be shown to be relevant for both contemporary philosophy and our own lives today. This will become apparent from various written assignments and class discussions throughout the course.

### Course Objectives:

Over the course of the semester we will attempt to achieve four main objectives:

*(1) Students will be introduced to, and have at least a basic understanding of, the ethical theories espoused by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas, as well as a familiarity with some of the issues addressed by later philosophers within those traditions.*

*(2) Students will be able to understand and evaluate arguments in philosophical texts pertaining to the ethical theories above, as well as issues in metaethics and applied ethics.*

*(3) Students will learn how to think clearly and creatively when addressing ethical issues and begin to form and defend their own arguments for or against certain ethical views.*

*(4) Students will be able to apply these arguments to real-life situations.*

## Required Texts:

1. John Troyer (editor), *The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill* (Hackett Publishing: 2003)
2. Immanuel Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, Second Edition (Hackett: 1995)
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Edition (Hackett: 1999)
4. Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, Second Edition (Hackett: 2003)
5. Various articles posted on course website (as indicated below with \*)

## Recommended Texts:

1. Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Fourth Edition (Hackett: 2008)

Note on texts: Students are expected to bring their own copies of the assigned readings to each class. This includes the articles posted on the course website. It is the responsibility of each student to print out these documents ahead of time and bring physical, hard copies to the appropriate classes, as the use of laptops, smartphones, or other electronic devices will not be permitted during class time. If any student has any problems obtaining any of the texts or printing any of the assigned readings, he or she is urged to contact the instructor as soon as possible.

## Assignments:

### 10% = Short Deconstructive Essay

Each student is to write a short essay (roughly 2-3 double-spaced pages) deconstructing and briefly evaluating a “real-life” ethical argument. More details will be given on the day the essay is assigned (see dates below).

### 25% = Longer Constructive Essay

For the longer essay (roughly 5-6 double-spaced pages) each student is to give a synopsis of one of the ethical theories covered in class and explain how someone might argue for a particular ethical conclusion within that framework. He or she will also consider objections to that conclusion from within the same framework and from other competing frameworks. Like the short essay, more details will be given on the day the essay is assigned.

### 15% = Silent Debate.

For this assignment, students will be split up into groups of two. Within these groups, each student will defend, in writing, a position contrary to the position defended by his or her partner on a particular issue in applied ethics. The “debate” will involve an initial argument from each side, a response to the initial argument from each side, and a reply to that response from the original arguer. All of this will be in writing (thus, *silent* debate) and will take place over a few weeks. Students should write a total of about 3-4 pages for this assignment.

### 20% = Midterm.

The midterm exam will cover all of the readings and topics discussed in class up to that point. It will include multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and an essay question. All students must take the exam on the day it is held unless prior permission is given by me.

### 20% = Final Exam.

The final exam will cover all of the readings and topics discussed in class after the midterm. It will also include multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and an essay question. All students must take the exam on the day it is held unless prior permission is given by me.

10% = *Three-Minute Throwdowns*.

Periodically throughout the course, certain classes will begin with what I will call a “Three-Minute Throw-down”. At the start of these classes, students will be asked to write down on a sheet of paper their answers to five quick questions that I will ask related to the readings assigned for that date. This should only take about three minutes. There will be a total of thirteen throw-downs over the course of the semester. The scores from each student’s three lowest scoring throw-downs will be dropped. This includes throw-downs that the student has missed due to being absent on the day the throw-down was held, as all missed throw-downs will be given a score of 0/5. There will be no opportunities for making up missed throw-downs. Moreover, students will not be told ahead of time which classes will feature these “Throw-downs”, so attending class regularly, arriving on time, and consistently having the assigned readings read for the dates that they are due will be essential to one’s success in this aspect of the course.

### Grading:

Although essays, exams, debates, and “Throwdowns” will be weighted differently (based on the figures above), each particular assignment will be graded on a one-hundred point scale as follows:

<b>A</b> = 100 – 93	<b>C+</b> = 79 – 77
<b>A-</b> = 92 – 90	<b>C</b> = 76 – 73
<b>B+</b> = 89 – 87	<b>C-</b> = 72 – 70
<b>B</b> = 86 – 83	<b>D</b> = 69 – 60
<b>B-</b> = 82 – 80	<b>F</b> = <60

*Note on late assignments:* Unless specified otherwise, all essays and assignments are due in hard copy at the end of class on the dates listed below, barring any adjustments in the schedule by me. Any papers not received by the end of class on the date they are due will receive a **TEN POINT deduction** (based on the assignment’s 100-point scale) **PER DAY**. No assignments will be accepted more than five days after they are due.

### University Policies:

#### *Disability Services Academic Accommodations:*

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Once successfully registered, the student also must notify the course instructor that they wish to access accommodations in the course.

Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at Disability\_services@slu.edu or 314.977.3484 to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about the student’s eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor’s course roster.

Note: Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one are encouraged to contact to Disability Services.

### Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at: [http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic\\_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf](http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf).

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

### **[Tentative] Schedule for Readings and Assignments:**

Tuesday, August 23: **Class Introductions, Syllabus Overview, What is Moral Philosophy or Ethics?**

Thursday, August 25: **Metaethics: Introduction, Moral Skepticism** [Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (Selections); Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"]\*

Tues., August 30: **Metaethics: Ethical Objectivism** [Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics", pp. 1-11; Pojman, "Who's to Judge?"]\*

Thurs., September 1: *Same topic continued*, **Criteria for Evaluating Ethical Theories**

Tues., September 6: **Ethical Theory: Utilitarianism: Pain and Pleasure** [Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in *The Classical Utilitarians*, pp. 8-22, 62-71, 92-94]

Thurs., September 8: **Ethical Theory: Utilitarianism: Higher Pleasures?** [Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *The Classical Utilitarians*, pp. 95-122, 122-147]

Tues., September 13: **Ethical Theory: Utilitarianism: Act vs. Rule** [Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism"]\*

Thurs., September 15: **Problems for Utilitarianism** [Nozick, "The Experience Machine"]\*

Tues., September 20: **Ethical Theory: Deontology: The Categorical Imperative** [Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 1-18]

Thurs., September 22: *Same topic continued* [Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 19-48]; Short Essay Assigned

Tues., September 27: **Ethical Theory: Deontology: Particular Ethical Conclusions** [Kant, *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, in *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 77-141]

Thurs., September 29: Problems for Deontological Ethics [TBA]

Tues., October 4: Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics: Happiness [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B I (pp. 1-18)]

Thurs., October 6: Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics: Virtue [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B II (pp. 18-30)]; **SHORT ESSAY DUE**

Tues., October 11: Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics: Pleasure and Contemplation [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B X (pp. 153-167)]

Thurs., October 13: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Tues., October 18: **NO CLASS** (Fall Break)

Thurs., October 20: Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics: Friendship [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B VIII (p. 119-129)], **Problems for Virtue Ethics**

Tues., October 25: Ethical Theory: Natural Law: Happiness, Good and Evil, Virtue [Aquinas, Selections #1]\*

Thurs., October 27: Ethical Theory: Natural Law: Law [Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, in *On Law, Morality and Politics*, pp. 10-24, 26-28]

Tues., November 1: *Same topic continued* [Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, in *On Law, Morality and Politics*, pp. 40-51, 76-77]; Longer Essay Assigned

Thurs., November 3: Ethical Theory: Natural Law: Particular Ethical Conclusions [Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, in *On Law, Morality and Politics*, pp. 130-143, 164-172; Selections #2\*]; **Problems for Natural Law Theory**

Tues., November 8: **Applied Ethics: Social Justice** [Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"]\*; Silent Debate Assigned

Thurs., November 10: **Applied Ethics: Social Justice** [Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies"]\*; **Silent Debate Checkpoint #1**

Tues., November 15: **Applied Ethics: Abortion** [Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"]\*

Thurs., November 17: **Applied Ethics: Abortion** [Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"]\*; **Silent Debate Checkpoint #2**

Tues., November 22: **Applied Ethics: Elected Issue** [TBA]\*; **LONGER ESSAY DUE**

Thurs., November 24: **NO CLASS** (Thanksgiving Break)

Tues., November 29: **Applied Ethics: Elected Issue** [TBA]\*; **Silent Debate Checkpoint #3**

Thurs., December 1: **Second Half Summary, Review for Final Exam, Student Evaluations; SILENT DEBATE DUE**

Tues., December 13 (8:00-9:50): **FINAL EXAM**