PHIL 2306: ETHICS – FALL 2019
MW 9:00 – 10:20 AM, ULC 116

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Chris Lay
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Office Hours: MW 1:30-3:00 PM

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Teaching Assistant: Julisa Fernandez
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Required Materials

All course readings are made freely available on the course website.

Course Description and Objectives

Ethics, or ‘moral philosophy’, is often regarded as one of the more practical philosophical domains. Ethics is concerned with our standards of right and wrong conduct and, as such, comes to bear not just on our beliefs but on the actions we take in the world. So, the objective of the study of ethics is to determine how we should treat others, what responsibilities we hold toward society and ourselves, and—more generally—how we ought to live our lives.

In line with the above, this course will present a broad survey of the history of ethical theory in philosophy including classical texts from thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. These will be supplemented with essays and articles from more contemporary philosophers as we consider a variety of topics relevant to the ethical project, including: connections between race and ethics, issues of systemic and epistemic injustice, the possibility and range of moral responsibility, and who counts as a subject of moral concern.

Course Objectives

• Become familiar with major ethical arguments and figures
• Develop an ethically reflective attitude, where such an attitude encompasses the capacity to reasonably consider, evaluate, and make ethical arguments
• Cultivate more general skills of critical analysis, including considering multiple perspectives and evaluating your own thinking

Course Requirements

• Two exams (25% of final grade each)
• One final course paper (35% of final grade)
• Reading quizzes (15% of final grade total)

Please note that, while things like punctuality, preparedness, and participation do not have a dedicated percentage in your final grade, they are important to you. For instance, I take each of these into consideration when deciding whether to round up a final score that falls right between two letter grades,
to grant you leniency for late work, or to permit additional absences beyond the specified limit, among other things.

**Format**

Each class will consist of lecture and discussion of assigned readings with in conversational style. Reading assignments from the required texts are listed in the Course Outline. As each class is really an ongoing dialogue between the students and instructor, the reading should be done before class each day.

**Exams**

Exams will be offered on Blackboard. Each exam will be available for three specified days and will be due by 11:59 pm of the third day. Moreover, each exam will have a clearly indicated time limit. The Exam schedule is as follows:

- Exam #1: Available Oct. 18-20 (Covers weeks 1-8)
- Exam #2: Available Dec. 5-7 (Covers weeks 9-15)

*Note: Late exams will not be accepted.*

**Reading Quizzes**

Short writing assignments over the nightly readings will be given at random intervals throughout the course. Unless otherwise announced, these quizzes will all follow a uniform format so that students will always know what to expect. Detailed quiz instructions and reading tips are posted to Blackboard.

**Paper Extensions**

Your final course papers are to be submitted on the date and time specified in the Course Outline. Should circumstances outside your control make this impossible, you must request an extension from me. This can be done via email or in-person. Please note that extensions will not typically be granted on the day the paper is due (or the day just before), nor will more than one extension usually be granted per semester. You may be required to present documentation of the circumstances related to your extension request.

**Late Papers**

All papers submitted late (without an extension) will be docked one full letter grade for every 24-hour period (or fraction thereof) after the assigned due date and time. Papers that are more than three days late (72 hours, counting from the date/time the paper is due) will not be accepted, and you will receive a failing grade (F) for that assignment.

**Grading Policy**

Exams and papers will be given a numerical grade corresponding to the list below. Reading quizzes are pass/fail (either 100 or 0).

| Scale | A = 90-100 | B = 80-89 | C = 70-79 | D = 60-69 | F = 0-59 |
Attendance

Attendance is required and will be taken in each class. You are expected to arrive on time for class and leave only when the whole class is dismissed. If at some time you find that you will need to arrive late for class or leave early, you should contact your instructor beforehand. Should you wish to withdraw from the course, you should initiate the withdrawal before the midterm withdrawal deadline (November 1). Withdrawals after this point will receive a WF. Additionally, any student who misses more than four (4) classes unexcused will automatically be dropped from the course, which may result in a final grade of WF or F.

Accommodation for Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at the beginning of the semester. A disability determination must be made by this office before any accommodations are provided by the instructor.

Electronic Devices

It is the policy of this classroom that all electronic devices are to be off or silenced during class. This includes, but is not limited to: cell phones, laptops, tablets, and eReaders. If you are observed using electronic devices or should a device create a disturbance during class—for instance, if your phone rings during class—you may be asked to pack your things and leave the room. Exceptions: electronic devices are permitted in the event the Center for Accommodations and Support services has certified that you have a legitimate disability such that an electronic aid is necessary for you to learn.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to abide by the University standards for academic honesty. These standards can be located online at https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/student-conduct/academic-integrity.html

Other Course Policies

Please do not email your instructor about problems accessing assignments on Blackboard. If you encounter difficulties accessing material, open a ticket with University technical support and request within the ticket that your instructor be informed.

Course Outline

Week 1: On the Objectivity of Moral Principles

Aug 26 Course Introduction and Syllabus Review

Week 2: The Virtue of Questioning

Sept 2 Labor Day (No Class)
Sept 4 Plato, Euthyphro
**Week 3: Virtue Ethics, or Being the Right Kind of Person**

Sept 9         Plato, *Crito*

Sept 11        Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I: Sections 1-5, 7-8 and Book II: Sections 1-5

**Week 4: When Flourishing is in Our Control (and When It is Not)**

Sept 16        *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II: Sections 6-9 and Book III: Sections 1-5

Sept 18        Marx, "Estranged Labour", pp. 70-81

**Week 5: Deontology, or Doing our Ethical Duty**

Sept 23        Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Chapter 1

Sept 25        *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Chapter 2, pp. 22-42

**Week 6: Intentions vs. Actions**

Sept 30        *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Chapter 2, pp. 43-58


**Week 7: Hedonism and Utilitarianism, an Ethic of Pleasure and Pain**

Oct 7          Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* and *Principal Doctrines*


**Week 8: Utilitarianism Continued—Do the Consequences Say We Should Even Exist?**

Oct 14         *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 3 and 4

Oct 16         Benatar, "Why Coming Into Existence Is Always a Harm", pp. 28-42

**Week 9: What Does Consequentialism Imply About How We Should Treat Others?**

Oct 21         Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Oct 23         Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat"

**Week 10: Divine Command Theory—Can there be a Greater Ethic than the Universal?**

Oct 28         Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Problem I

Oct 30         *Fear and Trembling*, Problem II and Problem III “Agnes and the Merman”
**Week 11: Moral Doubt—Problems with Divine Command and the Possibility of Moral Nihilism**

Nov 1  **Withdrawal Deadline**

Nov 4  Dostoevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor”

Nov 6  Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Essay

**Week 12: Feminist Approaches and Revisions**

Nov 11  Held, “Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory”  
**Papers Assigned**

Nov 13  Hartsock, “Community/Sexuality/Gender: Rethinking Power”

**Week 13: Race and Ethical Concerns**

Nov 18  Alcoff, “Philosophy and Racial Identity”

Nov 20  Reed, “Antiracism: a Neoliberal Alternative to a Left”

**Week 14: Patterns of Injustice in Systems and Thought**

Nov 25  Marcuse, “One Dimensional Man”, Chapter 1, Bridle, “Something is Wrong...”

Nov 27  Fricker, “Epistemic Injustice and the Preservation of Ignorance”

**Week 15: The Possibility of Moral Responsibility, and Who is Morally Responsible?**

Dec 2  Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

Dec 4  Shoemaker, "Responsibility and Disability"

Dec 6  **Dead Day**

Dec 11  **Final Papers Due**

An electronic copy of this syllabus is available on Blackboard. The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. If there are changes, these will be announced in class and an updated copy will be posted to Blackboard.