

Phil 3000: Philosophical Ethics
Online session: Summer Session, 2020
Fordham University-School of Professional and Continuing Studies
Instructor: Nathan Metzger, Ph.D. (nmetzger@fordham.edu)

Welcome and How to Contact Me

Welcome to the study of philosophy! In this class, Philosophical Ethics, we'll talk about issues related to the nature of goodness and justice. Suffice it to say, the material in this course is very important!

Feel free to email me with any concerns or questions, large or small (nmetzger@fordham.edu). You should quickly get an answer from me. I'll also happily arrange a skype meeting by appointment.

Course Description

In this course, we'll discuss the nature of goodness and justice, and analyze moral theories that help make better sense of decisions. We'll also consider some vexing metaphysical questions concerning the reality of goodness, and consider how it might be that we can even speak of anything being 'good' or 'evil' at all. In addition, we'll look at the differences between modern theories of morality and ancient (and medieval) theories of virtue. Our studies will focus on the theories of Aristotle, Kant, and the utilitarians, and we'll use two contemporary philosophers--Michael Sandel and Russ Shafer-Landau, to guide us through these difficult philosophical waters.

Goals

-This course will introduce you to the difficult areas of philosophical ethics, and help you understand in detail the canonical normative theories that have shaped modern life.

-Like any philosophy course, this one will help hone your analytical skills, writing acumen, reading prowess, and ability to reason abstractly.

Books to Purchase

1. Michael Sandel: Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? ISBN: 0374532508

2. Russ Shafer-Landau: What Ever Happened to Good and Evil? ISBN: 0195168739

3. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins. ISBN: B006J8QAT2

Some of our readings will come from online sources, but since we'll be reading multiple pages from these three texts, it's best to purchase them. There are e-book versions of both the Sandel and the Aristotle texts, if that's easier for you than paper books.

Online Study

This is an online course. This class is run asynchronously, meaning that you won't ever be required to be online at a specific date or specific time for a 'live' class or discussion. Instead, you'll be able to access the material when it's convenient for you to do so (within certain

parameters). You have no commute for this class, and you can do very well in this course regardless of your location. **But this is not an independent study, and this is not a correspondence course.** (It's very important to remember that.) This is, despite being online, a regular class. As we'll see, there are many advantages to the online format.

Format

The course will consist of ten lecture/discussion units divided into three modules. Each of the ten units will be launched about a week apart. This is what every module will contain:

1) Introduction: To start every module, you'll see a short list of the goals for the module, as well as some things you'll want to make sure to look for in order to do well on the quiz and respond adequately on the discussion board. You'll also see a video of Yours Truly introducing the material for that unit.

2) Lecture. Usually, the lecture will consist of narrated power-point slides. Whatever the format of the lecture, you will be able to download a transcript, so that you can read along with the audio/video.

3) Other Videos: In addition to the video lecture, you'll sometimes have to watch various video clips that illuminate the ideas from the readings, or introduce additional ideas.

4) Quiz. Every unit will have a quiz. The quiz questions will be multiple choice, and based off the ideas found in the readings and lecture. The questions will be straight-forward. No trick questions or curve ball questions will be asked.

4) Discussion: The discussion board is a place for conversation and reflection. Every unit will include its own discussion forum. On these forums, you'll have the opportunity to share your own thoughts and ideas on the arguments given in the readings and lectures.

Assignments

You are graded on:

1) 10 Separate Discussion Forum Contributions. While you are free to do the readings and go through the lectures on your own schedule, you'll be required to take the quiz and contribute to the discussion forums by specific deadlines. The deadline for finishing the quiz and contributing to a unit's discussion forum will always be **the night before the launch day of the subsequent unit**. All new units will be posted on Tuesdays at noon. That means the quizzes and initial discussion board contributions must be completed by Monday night. See the schedule below for a detailed breakdown of due dates.

In addition to your own contribution, you should make sure to comment on at least one of your classmates' contributions, and you should also make sure to circle back and deal with any questions on your own comments, whether left by me or another student. **Discussion boards also serve as the attendance portion of your grade.** You should do everything in your power to not be late joining a discussion forum.

2) 10 Quizzes. The quiz grade is cumulative.

3) Four Response Papers: These papers should each be at least 1000 words long, and in response to the particular question (or questions) posed. Your paper grade will be based on how well you analyze, explicate, engage with, and argue with the arguments of the philosophers discussed in the lectures and readings, as well as how well you argue for the thesis you present. To repeat: this will require not just stating your own argument well (whatever it happens to be), but also dealing charitably with counterarguments, as found in the readings and lectures. Upon receiving your grade from me, you will have a chance to revise your papers for a better grade, **but revising is not required**.

3) Final Exam: The final exam will consist of multiple choice questions and short essays. It will be a take-home. You will have 24 hours to complete it.

Your grade will break down like this:

4 Response Papers: 15% each

10 Quizzes: 15% total

Final Exam: 15%

Discussions/Attendance: 10%

Keep in mind that I use the Fordham University Ledger as my guide for grading. This means, for example, that I consider an A to be outstanding and a B to be good.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Needless to say, plagiarism will not be tolerated. All plagiarized papers will result in the automatic grade of F. Please refer to Fordham University's Handbook to read in detail about the nature of plagiarism, as well as what constitutes academic integrity.

Late Policies

I do not dock your grade for late papers. We all have busy and stressful lives, especially given the strange situation we find ourselves in currently. Things come up at the last minute.

It's a bad idea to turn things in late, but if you need a few extra days to turn in a paper during the thick of the summer, by all means take the extra time.

However, you should remember that things are different for discussion boards. Successful conversations hinge on every student promptly responding by deadlines. Thus, frequent tardiness or no-shows on the discussion boards will result in a poor mark on that portion of your final grade.

In addition: all quizzes MUST be completed by the deadlines indicated.

Moreover, all papers and revisions must be turned in by the last day of the summer session (August 4th), with no exceptions. There is much to read and write during the course of a very short summer semester. There is not a lot of time to work with here, so it's best to stay on track. It's very important that you keep up!

Breakdown of the Semester

Orientation

(Tuesday, May 19th)

Before the summer session officially begins, I'll open the course on Blackboard and launch an asynchronous orientation session. The orientation materials will answer all of your questions about online study, and how this course will work. You'll also see links to various and very helpful technology-related things. At this time, you'll also see a detailed breakdown of all of the reading and writing assignments for the summer. You'll also have a chance to introduce yourselves to your fellow students on this module's discussion board.

Please try to introduce yourself to the group (on the discussion board) by the start of class.

Unit 1: Moral Skepticism, Part 1: Our Moral Malaise

(Tuesday, May 26th)

Reading: Selections from the Shafer-Landau text

We'll begin by talking about the state of moral thinking in the year 2020. Many people today insist that there isn't anything called 'morality' at all—not *really* anyway. Sure, there's what society says and what individuals say. But this is all part of a social construct. At the end of the day, what we call 'morality' is just an elaborate (but very practical) *fiction*. As long as people respect other people's ideas, be nice and tolerant (whatever *that* means), and live by their own truth (whatever *that* means), that's good enough, right? Well, we'll see. For one thing, even though people *say* that morality is only a social construct, they might not really believe it. Let's see if we can get to the bottom of this.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 1 by the evening of Monday, June 1st.

Unit 2: Moral Skepticism, Part 2: Is Morality Something Real?

(Tuesday, June 2nd)

Reading: Selections from the Shafer-Landau text

We'll continue our discussion of *moral skepticism*. Shafer-Landau is going to give a number of reasons why we should abandon moral skepticism and instead accept moral *objectivism*. Along the way, he'll introduce some needed philosophical distinctions, give us some great vocabulary to work with, and break down the arguments pro and con.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 2 by the evening of Monday, June 8th.

Unit 3: The Difficulty of Morality and Justice (Launch Date: Wednesday, June 14)

(Tuesday, June 9th)

Reading 1: Sandel Text: Chapter 1

Sometimes the right thing to do is *easy to see*. Sometimes it's not. This week, we'll continue our reading of Shafer-Landau's text, concentrating on some particularly vexing arguments against moral objectivism. We'll also begin our look at Michael Sandel's famous text called *Justice*.

Sandel wants to consider the ways that our moral thinking influence society at large. He wants to challenge our usual way of breaking down the idea of justice. While we *say* that justice is simply a matter of respecting people's rights to make their own decisions, perhaps justice means something more than this? Sandel will give us a number of examples to suggest that things might not be as they seem.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 3 by the evening of Monday, June 15th.

Unit 4: Utilitarianism & Libertarianism

(Tuesday, June 16th)

Reading 1: Sandel Text, Chapters 2 and 3

We'll read Sandel in order to get an overview of the theory called utilitarianism. There is much about this theory to admire! However, Sandel is going to point out what he sees as some of its potential flaws. We'll then continue our discussion of utilitarianism by considering freedom and the harm principle. We'll then discuss the political theory called libertarianism, and see its connections with utilitarianism.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 4 by the evening of Monday, June 22nd.

Unit 5: Kant

(Tuesday, June 23rd)

Reading 1: Selection from Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals

Reading 2: Sandel Text, Chapter 5

Kant's deontological theory is tremendously influential. It's good to look at this theory in some detail.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 5 by the evening of Monday, June 29th.

Unit 6: Aristotle, Part 1

(Tuesday, June 30th)

Reading 1: Selection from the Aristotle text

And now for something completely different. We'll spend the next four weeks taking a close look at Aristotle's astounding ethical treatise, *The Nicomachean Ethics*. To begin, we'll analyze Aristotle's useful insight concerning the ends of man, and the meaning of human nature.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 6 by the evening of Monday, July 6th.

Unit 7: Aristotle, Part 2

(Tuesday, July 7th)

Reading 1: Selection from the Aristotle text

Reading 2: Sandel Text, Ch. 8

We'll continue our look at Aristotle by focusing on what he has to say about virtue and discipline. As we'll see, Aristotle is going to emphasize themes that put pressure on many modern assumptions about the nature of rights, freedom, and even 'fairness'.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 7 by the evening of Monday, July 13th.

Unit 8: Aristotle, Part 3

(Tuesday, July 14th)

Reading 1: Selection from the Aristotle text

Reading 2: Selection from Plato's *MENO*

Reading 3: Selection from Shafer-Landau's text

At this point, we have another philosophical fodder to take on some of the most challenging questions posed by Russ Shafer-Landau, way back at the beginning of the summer, concerning the metaphysical status of morality. How can we ever come to *know* about morality? And what is the relationship between morality and God?

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 8 by the evening of Monday, July 20th.

Unit 9: Aristotle, Part 4

(Tuesday, July 21st)

Reading 1: Selection from the Aristotle text

Reading 2: Sandel Chapter 8

This week, we'll read Aristotle in tandem with Sandel's commentary on the great 20th century philosopher *John Rawls*. Rawls' political theory stands in stark relief from Aristotle's project. Given what we've read so far, we'll be able to see clear differences between the 'pre-modern' and 'modern' ways of thinking about morality and justice.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 9 by the evening of Monday, July 27th.

Unit 10: Goodness and Community

(Tuesday, July 28th)

Reading 2: Stanley Hauerwas: The Church as Disciplined Community

Reading 2: Sandel Chapters 9 and 10

We'll end the year by looking at Sandel's own notion of community and the good. As we'll see, Sandel is sympathetic to Aristotle most of all, yet has his own spin on things.

You must take the quiz and join the discussion forum for Unit 10 by the evening of Monday, August 3rd.

Exam

(Tuesday, August 4th)

I'll launch the exam on the morning of Tuesday, August 4th. It will be a Word Doc that you'll download, fill out, and upload back onto Blackboard. You'll have 24 hours to complete the exam.

All papers and all revisions are due on Tuesday, August 4th, by midnight.