

Professor Jan Dowell

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Lecture: Asynchronous, online

Office Hours: Zoom by appointment.

Course Description:

This is a general introduction to ethical theory and theories of justice. We will consider, among other topics, the relationship between God and morality, a few prominent general theories of what makes an act right or wrong, the relationship between one's own interests and morality, challenges to morality's authority, as well as the factual status of moral claims. Attention will also be given to ethical issues of special contemporary concern. Roughly, the first half of the class will address timeless issues in ethics and several general understandings of what makes actions morally right will be considered and assessed. The second half of the class will address issues of ideal and corrective justice. In the last section, we will address the question of what, as a matter of justice, the United States owes to those it subjected to (or descendants of those it subjected to) anti-Black racial injustice.

Course Readings and Assignments: All readings and assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

Weekly Structure: Each week I will post a power point presentation, typically on Mondays. These presentations introduce you to the week's readings and assignments. You'll then have the remainder of the week, until midnight the following Sunday (Eastern Standard Time), to complete both readings and assignments, unless otherwise specified.

Note: Students are responsible checking their email regularly and keeping on top of the course schedule and assignments by consulting course emails and this syllabus.

Final Grade Breakdown

Three shorter writing assignments (10%, 15%, and 20%, respectively): 45%

Discussion posts: 25% (dates to be announced on Blackboard)

Final paper: 30%

Course Policies

Academic Integrity: Students must submit their own papers onto Turnitin on Blackboard. Assignments not submitted to Turnitin will not count as completed.

Artificial Intelligence: Use of Artificial Intelligence is prohibited for the completion of any course assignment. A central goal of this course is to help you develop your own voice as a writer and to think independently. This aim is defeated if you don't write your own assignments.

Late work: Students will lose one-third of a letter grade for each day that an assignment is late, except when an extension has been granted prior to the due date (e.g., An A to an A-, a B+ to a B). This policy is non-negotiable. If you don't think you will be able to turn your assignment in on time, you will need to contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the due date to receive an extension or accommodation. (In some emergency situations, an extension may be granted even if I have not been contacted in advance of the due date.)

University Policies

Academic Integrity: <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu> You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the university's academic integrity policy. Violations of this policy will result in a failure for the assignment and report of the violation to the dean. Second offenses will result in course failure as well as a second report to the dean.

Religious Observances: See http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm

Note: If you plan to avail yourself of the university's policy regarding religious observances, you **MUST** notify Professor Dowell by the end of the second week of class.

Disability Services: If you believe you need accommodation for a disability, please see the Office of Disability Services (ODS) <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu> for an appointment to discuss your needs. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations. *Since accommodations require early planning and are generally not offered retroactively, please contact the ODS* (phone: 315-443-4498, location: 804 University Avenue) *as soon as possible*.

Student Mental Health: Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. For this reason, it is important that you develop the skills and resources to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns during your college years. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center makes available (<https://experience.syracuse.edu/bewell/>) and seek support for health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days/year at 315-443-8000. Resources are also available through the Wellness Leadership Institute (<https://experience.syracuse.edu/bewell/well-being/wellness-leadership-institute/>).

Tentative Course Schedule (subject to changes announced on Blackboard)

Skepticism about Morality and Moral Theorizing

Week 1: 1/16-19

Central Questions:

1. What is the source of morality? God? Or something else?
2. Are we capable of acting rightly, even when it is not in our interests?

Readings:

- Introduction to course, Plato's *Euthyphro*
- Finish Plato; start Joel Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism."

Week 2: 1/22-1/26

Central Questions:

1. Is Psychological Egoism true?
2. Is morality just a matter of social convention or personal preference?

Readings:

- Finish Feinberg, start Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethical Relativism".
- Finish Russ Shafer-Landau.

Assignment: First paper due (See Blackboard for details.)

Moral Theories

Week 3: 1/29-2/2

Central Questions:

1. What makes an action morally right or morally wrong?
2. How can we tell which actions are morally right and which are morally wrong?

Readings:

- Start John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2.
- *Utilitarianism*, chapters 2 & 4

Week 4: 2/5-9

Central Questions: The same questions as Week 3 with a different answer explored.

Readings:

- Finish Mill, chapter 4
- Start Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (excerpts)

Week 5: 2/12-16

Central Questions: The same questions as Week 3 with a different answer explored.

Readings:

- Finish Kant
- Ann Cudd & Seena Eftekhari, "Contractarianism"

Assignment: Second paper due (See Blackboard for details.)

Justice

Week 6: 2/19-23

Central Questions:

1. What makes an action, policy, or institution just or unjust?
2. How can we answer that question? What do we need to think about in order to answer it?

Readings:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, excerpts
- More Rawls

Week 7: 2/26-3/1

Central Questions:

1. What is the difference between ideal justice and reparative or corrective justice?

2. Does Rawls' ideal theory help us answer questions about repairing racial injustice?

Readings:

- Charles Mills
- Mills, Tommie Shelby

Week 8: 3/4-8

Central Questions: Continued discussion of Week 7, question 2.

Readings:

- Finish Shelby
- Evaluation and discussion

Assignment: Third paper due (See Blackboard for details.)

Racial Justice and Reparations

Week 9: 3/18-22

Central Questions:

1. What are some examples of state sanctioned or state supported racial injustice in the US?
2. Does the US now owe victims or descendants of victims of such injustices any form of compensation as a matter of corrective justice?

Readings:

- Tulsa massacre
- Institutional racism in housing and education.

Week 10: 3/25-29

Central Questions:

1. What issues do we need to think about in order to answer question 2 from Week 9?
2. What are some reasons we might answer "no" to this question?

Readings:

- Derrick Darby
- Christopher Morris

Week 11: 4/1-5

Central Questions: Applying our discussion of Morris to the Tulsa Massacre.

1. Morris argues that descendants of enslaved people in the US are not owed compensation for slavery. Can his argument be extended to show that descendants of the Tulsa massacre are not owed compensation for the injustices against their ancestors?
2. What about victims who are still living?

Readings: No new readings.

Week 12: 4/8-12

Central Questions:

1. Does Morris have the correct theory of corrective justice?
2. If he doesn't, what are his faulty assumptions?
3. If he doesn't, what is the correct theory of corrective justice?

Readings:

- Bernard Boxill.

Week 13: 4/15-19

Central Questions:

1. What is Boxill's theory of corrective justice?
2. What are some of its advantages?
3. Is Boxill's theory of corrective justice more plausible than Morris's?
4. Why or why not?

Readings:

Week 14: 4/22-26

Central Questions: Applying what we've learned.

1. What does corrective justice *in general* require, according to our best theory?
2. Does it require reparations for descendants of the Tulsa massacre?
3. Does it require reparations for descendants of enslaved people in the US?
4. Does it require reparations for those harmed by state sanctioned or supported racial discrimination, for example, in housing and education?

May 6: Final paper due by 5 p.m. on Turnitin.