Introduction to Moral Theory

Syracuse University
Spring 2022
Mondays & Wednesdays 10:35 – 11:30
Falk Room 100

Prof. Karin Nisenbaum
Office: Hall of Languages 537
Office Hours: Mondays 2:00 – 4:00

Course Description

Daily life confronts us with many situations when we need to make difficult decisions about how to act, or when we need to step back and evaluate our feelings about what we, or others, have done. In such moments, we ask ourselves questions such as: What is the morally right or wrong thing to do? What would a virtuous person do? What are my duties to others? How should I feel in this situation? In this class, we will discuss various different views on how to answer these questions. For example, when we are trying to decide whether an action is right or wrong, should we consider the consequences of the action, or our duties to others, or whether we want to be the sort of person who would characteristically perform the action in question? We will also discuss various different theories about what we are doing when we ask these sorts of questions. When we say that an action is wrong, are we making an objective claim about which we can be mistaken, offering our own personal opinion, or expressing an emotional reaction? By exposing ourselves to different ethical theories, thinkers, and concepts, our ultimate aim will be to challenge, defend, or gain clarity on our own ethical convictions, as well as those of others.

Texts

The following texts are available for purchase at the Bookstore:

Stephen Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics*. Westview, 1998. **(PE)**

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*. Hackett, 2002 **(U)**

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge. 2012. **(G)**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*. Hackett, 1999.
(NE) Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*.
Hackett, 1998. **(GM)** Schopenhauer, *On The Basis of Morality*.Hackett, 1999. **(OM)**

In addition, I refer to some readings on the syllabus as '**on Blackboard**.' These readings will be uploaded as PDFs in the Module for the corresponding week on our Blackboard page.

Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance, Participation, and Quizzes (20%)

Attendance is mandatory, but taking attendance is a waste of valuable class time. Please let me know in advance if you have a good reason for missing class. You are responsible for contacting a classmate to ask about material you have missed if absent. After doing so, you can come and talk with me during office hours. Your discussion leaders will keep track of unexcused absences.

You are expected to attend all classes and discussion sessions and to do the assigned reading for each class. Mere attendance is not enough; you must also be ready to answer questions and participate in class discussion. There may be a few **pop quizzes** or **short in-class writing assignments** throughout the semester, to ensure that everyone is keeping up with all of the readings. These will count towards your participation grade.

*Short Writing Assignment (20%, due on **February 23**)*

A selection of two questions will be given on **February 16**. You will have one week to answer one of the two questions. The assignment is due at midnight on **February 23**. Regardless of which question you choose to answer, each answer should be approximately 2 to 4 double-spaced pages (font size 12). No collaboration between students is permitted. More detailed instructions will be given closer to the date of the assignment.

Midterm Exam (20%, during our regular class period

*on **March 23**) Final Paper (20%, due on **May 4**)*

You will submit a final paper by noon on **May 4**, the day our last meeting. The paper should be approximately 5 to 7 double-spaced pages (font size 12). Paper topics and more detailed instructions will be given a few weeks before the due date.

*Final Exam (20%, two-hour exam covering the entire semester on **May 12**)*

Classroom Expectations and Rules

Please make sure to turn off your phones. **No laptops are allowed in class.** If this poses a serious problem for you, please write to me and I will try to accommodate you.

I will occasionally post announcements on the course's Blackboard site. **Please make sure to check the site and your email regularly.**

Writing Assignments and Grading Policies:

Writing assignments and the grading rubric will be discussed in greater detail in class.

- **Extensions** will be granted only if there are extenuating circumstances.
- **Late papers** will receive a penalty of a letter grade each day (an A paper will become an A- the day after it is due.) Papers more than three days late will not be accepted.
- Assignments must be submitted on Blackboard via Turnitin. Papers must be **12-point typeface THROUGHOUT, double-spaced, with one-inch margins**. The first page should include your name, the date,

course number and my name. Always **number your pages** and **staple** the pages together.

- You will not only be graded on your ideas, but also on how you convey your ideas.
  Content counts, but so do structure, grammar, and spelling.

- There will be no paper rewrites.
- There will be no makeup exams, unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- There will be no extra credit.
- All grades are final and are not subject to revision. Please do not write to me to request a change of your grade. That is unfair to other students and will not be looked upon favorably.

Office hours:

You do not need to make an appointment to come see me during my office hours; I have set this time aside to talk with you about the material from this course. Yet you do need to make an appointment to see me outside office hours if you have classes or labs during my office hours. I will often need a few days notice to schedule an appointment, so please plan accordingly.

Email:

I am willing to answer brief questions over email, yet please keep in mind that I don't check it frequently during weekends or after 5:00 p.m. Before you email me, please consider whether your question could be answered in another way (i.e., by checking your syllabus or speaking with a classmate). **Please note that I will not answer questions about assignments during the 24 hours before they are due.**

Accessibility:

I welcome students with diverse learning styles and needs. If you have a disability and require accommodations for this course, please speak with me privately as soon as possible so that your needs may be appropriately met. If you have not already done so, you should register with Disability Services (Center for Disability Resources, 804 University Avenue, Suite 303), the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities.

Religious Observances Policy: I recognize the right of students to be absent from class for faith-based observances. Students must register their expected absences on MySlice (Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification). The deadline for notification is **February 14**, coinciding with the drop deadline.

Mental Health: Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. As such it is essential that during your

college experience you develop the skills and resources effectively to navigate stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315.443.8000. I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, any attempt by a student to represent the work of another as his or her own, will not be tolerated. Students should not collaborate on assignments or essays (unless explicitly instructed to do so). All instances of plagiarism will be dealt with according to SU's policy on academic integrity, as outlined on the University's Expectations and Policies website: https://class.syr.edu/academic-integrity/policy/

The Writing Center offers assistance with essays for any course. Experienced writing consultants can help native and non-native speakers alike with a written paper's focus, development, organization, clarity, citations, or grammar. Details about all meetings will remain private. To make an appointment, see https://thecollege.syr.edu/writing-center/

Reading Schedule

I reserve the right to change the reading schedule based on our pace and emerging interests. Please come to class on each date with the relevant text in hand (unless they are PDFs), and make sure to do each reading assignment before the class.

Week One

January 24 M — First day of classes - Introduction

January 26 W — Katherine Zoepf, "A Dishonorable Affair" **(On Blackboard)** David Sedaris, *Engulfed by Flames*, excerpt **(On Blackboard)** Dana Goodyear, "Grub," from *The New Yorker* **(On Blackboard)**

Week Two

January 31 M — Mark Timmons, "Moral Relativism" **(On Blackboard)**

February 2 W — "Philosophical Ethics" & "Metaethics: The Basic Questions"
PE: 3-14 & 17-26

Week Three

February 7 M — Naturalism & Theological Voluntarism
PE: 27-38 & 39-47

February 9 W — Theological Voluntarism (Continued) & Rational Intuitionism Plato's "The Euthyphro" **(On Blackboard)**
PE: 49-54
Recommended: The Ideal Judgment Theory, **PE:** 55-61

Week Four

February 14M The Error Theory and Ethical Relativism
PE: 63-71

Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong,* pp. 15-49 **(On Blackboard)**

February 16 W Noncognitivism
PE: 71-79
Ayer, "Critique of Ethics" **(On Blackboard)**
SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED

Week Five

February 21 M Mill & Utilitarianism
PE: 109-113 and **U:** Ch. 1

February 23 W MILL
PE: 113-122
U: first two paragraphs of Ch. 2 and all of Ch. 4
SHORT WRITING ASSIGNEMENT DUE

Week Six

February 28 M MILL
PE: 123-132
U: rest of Ch. 2 and all of Ch. 3

March 2 W MILL
PE: 132-138
U: Ch. 5
Recommended: Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" **(On Blackboard)**

Week Seven

March 7 M KANT
PE: 139-147
G: Preface

March 9 W KANT
PE: 147-152
G: Ch. 1

March 13 – 20 Spring

Break Week Eight

March 21 M KANT
PE: 152-163
G: reread Ch. 1; first half of Ch.2 (to Ak. 4:428)

March 23 W **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week Nine

March 28 M KANT
PE: 163-169
G: rest of Ch. 2 (Ak. 4:428-4:445)

March 30 W KANT
PE: 169-173
G: Ch. 3

Week Ten

April 4 M NIETZSCHE
PE: 177-186
GM: Preface and First Essay

April 6 W NIETZSCHE
PE: 186-190
GM: Second Essay

Week Eleven

April 11 M Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," selections **(On Moodle)**.

April 13 W **NO CLASS**

Week Twelve

April 18 M ARISTOTLE
PE: 191-201
NE: Bk. 1

April 20 W ARISTOTLE
PE: 203-208
NE: reread Bk. 1; Bk. 2

Week Thirteen

April 25 M ARISTOTLE

PE: 208-210
NE: reread Bk. 2; Bk. 3; and Ch. 3-9 of Bk. 4

April 27	W	ARISTOTLE **PE:** 210-216 **NE:** Bk. 6

<u>Week Fourteen</u>

May 2	M	ARISTOTLE **NE:** Bk. 8 and Bk. 9
May 4	W	Final Exam Review **FINAL PAPER DUE**

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, May 12th from 7:30 – 9:30 p.m.