

**Religion and Morality**  
**Professor: Dr. David Kovacs**  
**Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 3 PM – 5 PM**

### **Course Description**

Our inquiry in this course will focus on two broad sets of questions. First, we'll consider the contributions religious and theological beliefs might make to moral life and theory. We'll discuss some of the most influential forms of religiously-based ethical theories and evaluate their viability. Second, we'll consider how theological insights can lead to moral decision making, especially as it concerns social justice. To investigate these issues, we'll read influential texts from throughout the history of philosophy and theology.

### **Course Texts**

All readings will be read and discussed in class. The readings for the class will be posted online in pdf format or handed out in class. Please either bring a printed copy of the readings on the day they will be discussed in class or a laptop or tablet that can display them.

### **Course Policies**

#### Attendance

Absences will be considered excused only for the following reasons:

- You have suffered an illness or medical emergency that prevented attendance
- The death or illness of an immediate family member requires you to be elsewhere during class time
- You are celebrating a religious holiday and have received my approval for this before missing class
- You are representing the University in an official capacity recognized by the dean and have made me aware of your responsibilities before missing class

If you miss class due to illness or family emergency, please go to your dean (either beforehand or soon after you return) to have the absence officially excused. He/she will notify me, as well as the professors of any other missed classes, that the absence is excused. Each unexcused absence will negatively affect your participation grade. Further, per university policy, **more than four unexcused absences (=one week) will result in failure of the course.**

#### Distractions

Please be sure that all cell phones and other devices that spontaneously make noise are silenced or turned off during class. These devices must be out of sight (i.e., in your pocket, backpack, or purse) during class.

#### Submitting Assignments

Papers are to be emailed to me as a .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .odt file (I cannot open Apple's .pages format) **before the start of class** on the due date. If your paper is not submitted in the proper format, I reserve the right to count it as late until the proper format is submitted.

#### Academic Integrity

Any paper or other assignment suspected of plagiarism will be dealt with according to Fordham University policies as described in the student handbook (see url below). This means that **an assignment containing plagiarized material will receive a zero, will be noted in your student record, and may result in automatic failure of the course.** If you are unsure whether a part of an assignment is considered plagiarism, or if you have questions about proper citation, please see me before handing it in.

The university academic integrity policy is available on-line at:

[http://www.fordham.edu/student\\_affairs/deans\\_of\\_students\\_an/student\\_handbooks/rose\\_hill\\_student\\_h\\_a/university\\_regulatio/the\\_fordham\\_universi\\_70871.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/student_affairs/deans_of_students_an/student_handbooks/rose_hill_student_h_a/university_regulatio/the_fordham_universi_70871.asp)

### Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, you need to register with the Office of Disability Services for Students (ODS) in order to request academic accommodations for your courses. Please contact the main ODS office at Rose Hill at 718-817-0655 to arrange services. Staff at ODS can walk you through the process and arrange appointments depending on which campus you take courses at. Accommodations are not retroactive, so you need to register with ODS prior to receiving your accommodations. Please see me after class or during office hours if you have questions or would like to submit your academic accommodation letter to me.

### **Requirements and Grading**

#### Final Grade Breakdown

Participation	20%
Papers	50% (25% each)
Presentation	10%
Final exam	20%

### Participation

Conversation is an essential component of philosophy. As such, you are expected not only to be in class, but to participate. This participation includes being present and on time for class, listening attentively to lectures and the comments of your peers, and contributing thoughtful, relevant, and respectful comments to class discussions.

### Papers

You will write two papers for this course. Prompts and expectations for the papers will be announced in class and sent via email.

### Symposium

Near the end of the term, we will hold a symposium in which you will present your research from your second paper to me and your classmates. Each student will have 30 minutes to present her/his argument and field questions from the audience.

### Final Exam

The Final Exam will consist of a single, one-page essay question.

### **Course Schedule (Order of Topics)**

1. **God and Morality:** Readings from Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Eleonore Stump, and others will explore whether there can be objective morality if there is no God, and, if not, what the relationship between morality and God is.
2. **The problem of hypocrisy:** Throughout history, religion has been invoked or tied up with gross immorality. Examples include Islamic Terrorist Groups and the Priest-Sex scandals in the Catholic Church. In this portion of the class we will discuss alternative interpretations of these phenomena.

3. **Zen Meditation, Buddhist Morality:** Popular Buddhist teachers like Thich Nhat Hanh emphasize the connection between mindful breathing, meditation, and morality. He says these practices can change the fate of the world even when it comes to nuclear war and global warming. Are these claims plausible?

4. **Christianity and Civil Disobedience:** Here we will read Christian thinkers who have advocated for civil disobedience as a part of Christian morality. We will read Martin Luther King Jr., Fr. Dan Berrigan (who was Fordham's Jesuit Poet Laureate and arrested over 100 times, at one time wanted by the FBI), as well as recent nuns who have been arrested advocating for immigrants.

5. **Religion and Economics:** People are becoming increasingly aware of economics as a properly moral issue. Some have argued that to be a Christian, Muslim, or Jew, one must be a Capitalist. We will consider such claims, and compare and contrast them with statements issued by Popes Leo XIII, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. We will also read an article by Dominican theologian Fr. Herbert McCabe, OP, who argued that Christians should participate in a Communist Revolution.