PHIL 3000
Philosophical Ethics

Professor Jeanne Proust

Summer 2020

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(Initially 1-4 pm TWTh, but see accommodations below: Tuesdays and Thursdays will be synchronous classes, while Wednesdays’ content will be asynchronous)
Office Hours: by appointment, to better accommodate the students’ respective schedules.
Attribute: PETH.
Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 or PHIL 1003 or HPRH 1002.
3 credit class.

Course Description

« Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor » (Ovid, Metamorphoses, VII, 20-2).

I see the better way and approve it, but I follow the worse way.

What is the right thing to do? We often find ourselves in difficult situations where the most ethical decision is hard to make. This course will provide an introduction to moral philosophy, or ethics. We will begin by examining certain problems that arise when we try to make moral judgments: problems such as cultural relativism (“What seems right here is not necessarily right over there”), or subjectivism (“What seems right for me is not necessarily right for you”). But we mainly will be exploring several fundamental ethical theories: hedonism, eudemonism, natural law ethics, virtue ethics (we will mainly focus here on readings from Aristotle), deontological ethics (mainly readings from Kant), utilitarianism, feminist ethics, and race theory. We will try to measure to what extent they help us better analyze various moral issues, on both personal and collective levels, through case studies about different topics (from the use of new technologies and its moral consequences on our ideas and behaviors, for example, to debates on animal rights or gender studies).

We will seek not so much to form definitive judgments about specific moral issues, but to improve our thinking about the considerations that may count as reasons for and against the moral judgments we are tempted to make in our everyday lives.
Learning outcomes

Engaged and active course participants in this course will:

• Master and evaluate the main normative ethical theories.
• Integrate, respond to, and construct models of engaged, intellectual responses to manifestations of what could be considered moral or immoral.
• Evaluate the usefulness, applicability, and potential dangers of certain moral theories.
• Identify ethical issues and controversies in various contexts.
• Analyze and articulate multiple perspectives on ethical issues.
• Evaluate personal values and ethical standards.
• Describe different theoretical frameworks for resolving ethical dilemmas.
• Be better prepared to recognize, confront, and think critically about difficult questions about contemporary issues that we all encounter in our daily, personal and professional lives.

The students will demonstrate intellectual depth, breadth, integration and application by:

• Employing effective use of philosophical concepts in college level writing.
• Applying college level writing in the analysis of philosophical problems and issues: thinking clearly and critically.
• Demonstrating the ability to articulate a coherent philosophical position in college level writing.

Course Requirements

Participation:
This class requires active participation. You will have to put an honest effort into attempting to understand and discuss the issues we will talk about (disagreeing with each other is more than acceptable; it is energizing for an Ethics class, as long as you remain respectful). In order to do that properly, you will need to prepare for class by reviewing what we did the week before. Your participation grade is calculated based on how often you engage in class discussions, but also on how relevant your questions and remarks are.

I will almost always, during synchronous classes, ask you questions about what we covered during preceding classes/about your reading.

Short Paper (Midterm): 24 hours to submit your work
One short paper of approximately 2 to 3 pages (Times New Roman, 12, 1,5 space between lines) will be due on Wednesday, June 10th.

The paper must defend a substantive philosophical thesis concerning an ethical issue. For
instance, I might ask you a question (possible topics: «Does the end justify the means?» or «Should we tolerate all opinions?»), or give you a short excerpt (50 to 150 words) to comment on, from a work of Aristotle, Kant or Mill.

I will provide methodological materials to guide your writing. (For very helpful advice on writing a philosophy paper, see http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html.)

**Research and public speaking:**

During the course of the semester, each student will work on a presentation (voiceover PowerPoint recommended) of approximately 15 minutes that will (1) contextualize, (2) analyze, and (3) stimulate discussion of an issue either directly related to the required reading’s content, or about a movie, a piece of Art, a book, a piece of news, a part of history you might have read about that deals with moral issues (for examples of topics, see at the end of this syllabus). Dates and topics will be discussed in class, and closely related to the content of the class.

**Final paper: 24 hours to submit your work**

(approximately 3-4 pages) will take place on May 25th (same possible topics as listed for the short paper).

Please note: grammar, clarity, precision are key criteria that will determine a considerable part of your grade on written assignments.

**Grading**

The midterm exam and the presentation will count each for 25% of the final course grade. The final examination will count for 35%. The quality and quantity of contributions to discussion (participation) will count for 10%.

**Grading Scale:** 100-93=A; 92-90=A-; 89-87=B+; 86-83=B; 82-80=B-; 79-77=C+; 76-73=C; 72-70=C-; 69-60=D; 59 and below=F

**Policies**

Attendance for synchronous classes is essential, even if all online classes will be recorded and posted. Please note that students will not be penalized for religious, pregnancy- or childbirth-related absences. Absences for these reasons will not be counted towards the allowed number of absences in this course. If you have to be absent for any reason, you are responsible for recapturing what you missed.

Arrive on time on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. If you are consistently late or regularly moving in and out of class while it is in session, I will stop marking you present.
**Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism is the written use without attribution of either the words or the ideas of another person. Plagiarism in assigned papers and the use of unauthorized materials or assistance during examinations are both contrary to the requirements of academic integrity. Plagiarism or cheating will result in a failing grade for the assignment and a written report to the appropriate College Dean. For the complete Fordham policy on academic integrity, see https://www.fordham.edu/info/25380/undergraduate_academic_integrity_policy

**Disability Disclosure Statement**

Fordham University is an Equal Access/Equal Opportunity campus. It does not discriminate on the basis of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, national origin, nor disability.

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to disabilityservices@fordham.edu as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

**Required readings**

*Required Readings will be placed on Blackboard/ will be available online.*

The excerpts will be taken from:

- Aristotle, excerpts from the *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*
- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality, Beyond Good and Evil*
- Eagleton, *On Evil*
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
- DeBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Charles Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*
- Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy,* Norton, 2018

Some additional excerpts will be posted online for you to read.
Other Suggested materials

Augustine, Confessions
Machiavelli, The Prince
The Bible
Sade, Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue
Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych
Dostoievsky, Notes from Underground
Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis
Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux
Maupassant, The Horla
Wilde, The picture of Dorian Gray
Levi, Survival in Auschwitz
Zola, Thérèse Raquin
Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux
Andre Gide, La Symphonie Pastorale
Seanna Shiffrin, “Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm”

Recommended movies:

Recommended Series:
Game of Thrones
Black Mirror
Top of the Lake
The night of
Course Tentative Schedule

Please note: this syllabus is subject to slightly change at the professor’s discretion. Details on this Class Schedule may be changed - Such changes will be announced online and during class. (Chapter numbers below are all from: Jonathan Wolff, An Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Norton, 2018. This will be the main reference we’ll use.)

May
(MODULE A: Challenges to universal, objective moral values)

26: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm)
General presentation of the course’s aims - Syllabus, Logistics, Opening Discussion. Moral relativism and its dangers.

27: asynchronous
Skepticism, Nihilism and Subjectivism
Reading: Wolff, Chapter 2.

28: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm)
Free Will versus Determinism: Are we responsible for our actions? Self-interest, Egoism; Morality as a social agreement – Social contract theories of Morality
Reading: Wolff, Chapter 3.

June
(MODULE B: What is a good life?)

2: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
What is a good life? Hedonism, Eudemonism, Stoicism; pleasure, happiness and virtue. Introduction to Aristotle in context.
Reading: Wolff, Chapter 4 and 6.

3: asynchronous: watch video posted on Blackboard
Virtue ethics: Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. Practical Wisdom or Phronesis
Reading: Wolff, Chapter 12.

4: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
Virtue ethics: Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. Practical Wisdom or Phronesis
Reading: Aristotle, excerpts from the Nicomachean Ethics
(MODULE C: Aristotle wrap up and intro to Utilitarianism)

9: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
Virtue ethics: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* TBC + Challenges for Virtue Ethics
Reading: Wolff, Chapter 13.

10: asynchronous: watch video posted on Blackboard
*Midterm exam, online, 24 hours to submit a word document (see above for format of the exam’s prompt).*

11: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

(MODULE D: Deontological Ethics versus Consequentialism)

16: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
J.S Mill TBC, Challenges for Utilitarianism.
Reading: Wolff, Chapters 8 and 9.

17: asynchronous: watch video posted on Blackboard
“What ought I do?”: Kant’s notion of Good Will and Categorical Imperative. Introduction to Deontology. Lying: Kant versus Benjamin Constant.
Reading: excerpts from John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*

18: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
Kant’s notion of Good Will and Categorical Imperative TBC; Challenges for Kantian Ethics.
Reading: Wolff, Chapters 10 and 11, (+ excerpts from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*).

(MODULE E: Feminism, Gender and Race)

23: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
the Ethics of Care, Gender studies and Feminist ethics. What is it to be a man/a woman? The Ethics of Gender, TBC. The bird cage (Marilyn Frye) – gender stereotypes: Badinter, Virginie Despentes.
Reading: Wolff, Chapter 14 (+ Excerpts from Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*)
24: synchronous (1pm to 2.30pm) on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra  
Do races exist? Ontology of race. Affirmative action and racial discrimination.

25: FINAL EXAM (online, 24 hours to submit a word document (see above for format of the exam’s prompt).

PRESENTATIONS  
(Broad topics examples – to be narrowed down)

-Aristotle on friendship  
-Aristotle on akrasia: “the weakness of the will”  
-Aristotle on gender and race  
-Kant on Civil Disobedience  
-Kant on Evil: “radical evil”  
-Kant on gender and race 

-the relationships between morality and artistic creation 
-the limits of free speech 
-the nature of friendship over romance 
-the way new technologies affect our behavior (online dating, social media, privacy) 
-Genetic engineering 
-Business Ethics: Money and Morality 
-Prostitution 
-Pornography 
-Organ sale 
-Gun Control 
-Masculinity 
-Divine Command Theory and Natural Law Ethics 
-Euthanasia 
-Abortion
- Animal rights
- Sexual Identities (in Sport for instance)
- Terrorism
- Mass Incarceration
- Historical accounts: Slavery, Feminism, Imperialism, Colonization
- Mafia Ethics?
- Drug legalization/legislation
- Artificial Intelligence
- Immigration legislation
- Affirmative action
- Climate change
- Plastic surgery