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’m also on Skype, and I’ll happily arrange a skype meeting by appointment.
Also, if schedules permit, I'll happily meet with you in person at the Lincoln Center campus, or somewhere else in midtown Manhattan, by appointment.

Course Description
Catalogue Description: This course involves philosophical reflection on the major normative ethical theories underlying moral decision-making in our everyday lives. The principal focus of the course is a systematic introduction to the main normative ethical theories, i.e., eudaimonism, natural law ethics, deontological ethics, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and feminism. The differences among these approaches are illuminated ……
In this course, we’ll discuss the nature of goodness and justice, and consider some theories that help make better sense of our moral lives. We’ll also explore more 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, your writing acumen, your reading prowess, and your ability to reason abstractly.

Books to Purchase

Some of our readings will come from online sources, but since we’ll be reading multiple pages from these two texts, it’s best to purchase them. These two texts will not serve as ‘gospel’, but as starting points for conversation.

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 even if you are constantly on the road. But this is not an independent study. (It’s very important to remember that.) This is a regular class, with students other than you taking it. As we’ll see, there are many advantages to the online format.

Format
The course will consist of eight lecture/discussion units called modules. Each of the eight modules will be launched about a week to ten days 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 respond adequately on the discussion board.
2) Lecture. Usually, the lecture will consist of narrated power-point slides. Sometimes, there will be a short video to accompany a longer podcast. Whatever the format of the lecture, you will be able to download a transcript, so that you can read along with the audio or 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) Discussion: The discussion board is a place for conversation and reflection. Every module 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) 8 Discussion Forums While you are free to do the readings and go through the lectures on your own schedule, you’ll be required to contribute to the discussion forums by the specific deadlines indicated. Usually, the deadline for contributing to any module will be the day before the launch of the subsequent module. Go to the Reading Schedule tab to see what I mean.

In addition to your own contribution, you should make sure to comment on at least one of your classmates’ contribution, 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) 8 Quizzes: Each module will have a quiz. The quizzes will be graded, and they will cover what was talked about in the readings and lectures. While you will know in general what the quiz will cover beforehand, you will not be able to view the quiz before taking it, and they must be completed in one sitting. The quizzes are not terribly difficult. Rather, they are a way to make our discussion forums more focused.

3) 3 Response Papers: These papers should be at least 1,500 words long, and in response to the particular question (or questions) posed (go to the Writing Assignments link on the left to see the paper topics). Your 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 it is not mandatory to do so.

3) Final Exam: The final exam will consist of multiple choice questions and short essays. It will be a take-home.

Your grade will break down like this:

3 Response Papers: 20% each
8 Quizzes: 15% total
Final Exam: 10%
Discussions/Attendance: 15%
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, and 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, 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!

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**Breakdown of the Semester**

**Module 0: Orientation (Launch Date: TBA)**

This module will answer all of your questions about online study. You'll also see links to various and very helpful technology-related things. You should follow those links, to make sure that your computer is properly updated. After all: you are taking this course from a computer!

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.

**Module 1: Is Morality Something Real? (Launch Date: TBA)**

Reading 1: Sandel Text: Chapter 1

Reading 2: Shafer-Landau: Ch. 1-3, Ch. 7-10, 14 (the chapters are short)

We’ll begin our year by introducing our main area of discussion—philosophical ethics. We’ll discuss this area in general, and introduce some of
the terminology that we’ll be using throughout the semester. Through an analysis of the readings, we’ll then discuss the nature of justice and morality in general. We will discuss the prevalence of moral skepticism, and consider whether this view has anything going for it. We’ll then consider the problem of moral disagreement. As we’ll see, Shafer-Landau is not convinced that entrenched moral disagreement shows the truth of moral relativism.

**Module 2: Egoism (Launch Date: TBA)**

Reading 1: Selection from Plato’s Republic Stop when Adeimantus says: "And thus, Socrates, gods and men are said to unite in making the life of the unjust better than the life of the just."

Reading 2: Selection from Hobbes’ Leviathan: Read chapters 13 and 14

We’ll turn to Plato and Hobbes to analyze the issue of ethical egoism. Are all moral decisions a product of personal fulfillment, or happiness, or preservation? Is it truly possible to act altruistically?

**Module 3: Utilitarianism and Liberty (Launch Date: TBA)**

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.

**Response Paper 1: Due Date:**

Write a 1,500 word paper on the following topics:

Consider the arguments of Sandel and/or Shafer-Landau, and write a paper on one of these questions:

1) Does moral disagreement prove the truth of moral relativism or subjectivism?
2) Can we make sense of our moral claims through either error theory or non-cognitivism?
3) Can we make sense of our disdain for price gouging by unpacking justice by way of liberty or welfare?

**Module 4: Kant (Launch Date: TBA)**
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.

Module 5: Rawls (Launch Date: TBA)
Reading 1: Sandel Text, Ch. 6
Our look at Rawls will make more sense now that we’ve looked at both utilitarianism and Kantianism. As we’ll see, there is much in Rawls that is indebted to thinkers like Kant. There might also be tinges of Hobbes, as we’ll see!

Response Paper 2: Due Date:
Write a 1,500 word paper on one of the following topics:
Consider the relevant arguments from the readings, and respond to one of these questions:
1) Compare utilitarianism and Kantianism. Is Kant right to say that happiness is not part of the moral equation?
2) Can a utilitarian overcome the objections to this theory as offered by Sandel?
3) How should we define liberty, and does it exhaust a true conception of justice?
4) Compare Socrates’ talk of pursuing justice for its own sake with the alternative visions of justice offered by Hobbes, Glaucon, and Thrasymachus. Which vision of justice (and society) is the most persuasive? Sandel’s arguments (from chapter 1) might be helpful to discuss as well.

Module 6 Aristotle, Nature, and Goodness (Launch Date: TBA)
Reading 1: Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Book I
Reading 2: Stanley Hauerwas: “The Church as Disciplined Community.”
Reading 3: Sandel Text, Ch. 8
We’ll now go back in time and look at a theory that, from the perspective of utilitarianism and Kantianism, will look strikingly different in many respects. However, even though Aristotle’s theory is old, there is much in it to admire. 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.

**Module 7: Knowledge and Goodness (Launch Date: TBA)**
**Reading 1: The Meno**
Now that we’ve surveyed normative theory, we should return to the source, and analyze the ways in which Plato considered the nature of the Good, along with how he said we come to know it.

**Module 8: Goodness and Community (Launch Date: TBA)**
**Reading 1: Sandel Text Ch. 9-10**
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.

**Response Paper 3: Due Date:**
Write a 1,500 word paper on one of the following topics:
1) Analyze Rawls’ notion of the Veil of Ignorance. How is such a notion indebted to Kant, and does the though experiment provide us with a good way to measure justice? What would an Aristotelian criticism of Rawlsianism look like?
2) Compare Aristotle with Kant. Which theory gives us a better conception of what it means to be human and moral?
3) Compare the arguments of Plato and Meno on moral knowledge. Are either of them more convincing, or should we look at moral knowledge yet another way?
4) Consider Sandel's 'communitarian' arguments, and his criticisms of classical liberalism. Is Sandel correct in his critique, or is the classical liberal tradition vindicated?

**Final Exam and Final Things**
-The final exam will be a take home. It must be submitted on the last day of the summer session.