

Syllabus

Introduction to Ethics

PHIL 1020 | Summer 2018
Department of Philosophy
Auburn University

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Office Hours: By appointment

Class Meetings: Section 001 MTWRF, 9:45–11:15 Mell 4550
Section 003 MTWRF, 11:30–1:00 Mell 4550

Required Texts: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Revised Edition, (Cambridge University Press, 2014)
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997)
Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, (Oxford University Press, 2016)
Samuel Beckett, *Endgame & Act Without Words I*, (Grove Press, 1957)

Assignments: Attendance (10% of final grade)
Quizzes (daily, 15% total)
Exams (three, 25% each)

Grading: 100 ≥ A ≥ 90 > B ≥ 80 > C ≥ 70 > D ≥ 60 > F

1 Course Description

The course will begin with a reading of (in the first case, parts of) two of the most important books in the history of ethics: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Our topics will include, in Aristotle: the human good, the nature of virtue, our practices of praising and blaming one another for our actions and omissions, the phenomenon of weakness of will, and the nature of the good life (i.e., happiness); and, in Kant: the ethical significance of the will, the nature of the moral law, and the significance of human freedom. We will then apply what we have learned from Aristotle and Kant through a reading of a much more recent work, Samuel Scheffler's *Death and the Afterlife*. The afterlife of Scheffler's title is not the familiar, spiritual afterlife (e.g., in heaven), but instead, an earthly afterlife: the continued existence of the human race on earth. Scheffler argues that we actually care quite a lot about this earthly afterlife, in the sense that, if we learned that life on earth would end (peacefully, even) shortly after our own deaths, that fact would threaten to deprive our ordinary day-to-day activities—going to school, working, raising children, making music, etc.—of any meaning. Our central questions in reading Scheffler will thus be, first, why we care about this earthly afterlife; and, second, whether we are right so to care—if, indeed, we do. We will conclude the course with a reading of Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame*, which is, arguably, a depiction of human life *without* an afterlife—of any kind. The play will give us a final opportunity to reflect not only on the meaning of life as a whole, but also on the meaning, and the ethical significance, of all of our activities.

2 Student Learning Outcome

This course is designed to contribute to the following Student Learning Outcome:

In order to become lifelong learners and use their education to solve practical problems, by the time of graduation, students will be able to effectively **read and think critically**.

Course assignments have thus been selected to encourage you to read critically and to think critically about what you've read, and about what other members of the class say in class discussions. You will also receive regular feedback on your attempts at critical reading and thinking, both from me and—especially—from each other. For assessment purposes, you will be expected to demonstrate your critical reading and thinking skills in writing (on the three exams). You will have ample opportunity to practice those skills, both in writing (on the daily quizzes) and orally (in both small-group and all-class discussions).

3 Assignments

3.1 Attendance

You are required to attend all classes. However, in accordance with Auburn University policies, you will be excused for missing class for the following reasons:

- (a) Illness of the student or serious illness of a member of the student's immediate family. (The instructor may request appropriate verification.)
- (b) The death of a member of the student's immediate family. (The instructor may request appropriate verification.)
- (c) Trips for members of the student organizations sponsored by an academic unit, trips for university classes, and trips for participation in intercollegiate athletic events. When feasible, the student must notify the instructor prior to such absences, but in no case more than one week after the absence. Instructors may request formal notification from appropriate university personnel to document the students participation in such trips.
- (d) Religious holidays. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays.
- (e) Subpoena for court appearance.
- (f) Any other reason the instructor deems appropriate.

Each unexcused absence will result in the loss of one participation point (= 1% of the final grade).

3.2 Quizzes

Before each class, you will be required to complete an open-book short-essay Canvas quiz. These quizzes serve two purposes. First, they are designed to encourage you to engage thoughtfully with the course material *before* you come to class, and thereby to prepare you for participation in class discussions. Second, they are designed to provide you with practice for the three exams. In general, the harder you work on the quizzes, the better you'll do on the exams.

These quizzes will generally receive one of three grades: if you complete the quiz on time, you will receive 10/10 points; if you complete it late, you will receive 5/10 points; if you don't complete it at all (I'll give you until the end of each weekend to catch up on the week's work, should you fall behind), you will receive 0/10 points. However: I reserve the right to deduct points for quizzes that I deem to be inadequately thoughtful, and (especially) for attempts to game the system (by, for example, submitting blank answers, submitting the same answer for every question, copying from the book, copying from a website, copying a classmate, etc., etc., etc.).

Feedback on your quizzes will be provided primarily *in class*, through both small-group and all-class discussion of the quiz material. In some cases, one of your classmates will read your quiz responses and provide you with feedback on what you've written. In many cases, however, feedback will be indirect: it will be up to you to convey to your group or to the class the ideas you've expressed in your quiz, or to compare your own ideas to those expressed by other members of the class. But if you're actively engaged in class

discussion—which means listening as well as speaking—you will have every opportunity to find at least some ways in which your answers could be improved. You should then try to apply the lessons you learn in these discussions to future quizzes. If you do so, your quizzes should consistently improve throughout the semester—and you should be well-prepared for the exams.

If, however, you would like more feedback, or more direct feedback, than you find you're receiving in class, you're always welcome to make an appointment with me to talk about one or more of your quizzes. Just keep in mind that *it is your responsibility* to make these appointments. If I don't hear from you, I can only assume that you think everything is going well. So, if it's not, tell me!

3.3 Exams

There will be three exams, tentatively on July 3, July 12, and July 25. All three exams will test your critical reading and thinking skills: you will, for each, write a short essay (or a series of even shorter essays) that involves both some interpretation and some criticism of one of our texts.

Note that there will be no final exam during exam week. The third exam, on July 25, will serve as the final exam. This means, happily, that you will be finished with the course after our final meeting on July 27.

3.4 Participation

Participation—which, *at the very least*, means *actively listening* in small-group and all-class discussions and to short lectures, and ideally means making *regular substantive contributions* to discussions—is expected, but will not be graded. Exceptional participation, however, will be taken into account in determining final grades: so, if your participation throughout the semester is exceptional—in terms of both quality and quantity—and your final grade is just below the cutoff for the next higher letter grade, I may round your final grade up. Under no other circumstances, however, will grades be rounded. So while you should participate regularly for the sake of what you'll learn as a result, doing so will also have the beneficial side-effect of providing you with a little bit of grade insurance.

4 Policies

4.1 Academic Honesty

All portions of the Auburn University Student Academic Honesty Code (Title XII) found in the Student Policy eHandbook at http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/student_policies will apply to this class. All academic honesty violations or alleged violations of the Student Government Association Code of Laws will be reported to the office of the Provost, which will then refer the case to the Academic Honesty Committee.

In particular, in order to avoid plagiarism, use proper citation methods. When in doubt, please cite. A violation of the Student Academic Honesty Code will be reported to the Auburn Academic Honesty Committee. Upon recommendation of this committee, the provost may impose sanctions such as a zero grade for a specific assignment, a grade of F for the course, a suspension from Auburn University for a stated period of time, or an expulsion from the University.

4.2 Classroom Behavior

All students are expected to follow the Auburn University Classroom Behavior Policy at all times. Please refer to the Student Policy eHandbook at http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/student_policies for details of the policy.

4.3 Email

During the week, I will generally be able to reply to emails within 24 hours. Emails sent late on Friday and over the weekend, however, may not receive a reply until Monday.

4.4 Technology in Class

All use of cell phones is prohibited. If you are caught using your phone in class, you will be marked absent. This *includes* use of your phone to view material or complete tasks relevant to the course. All relevant course material must thus be available to you either in hard copy or on a laptop or tablet.

Use of laptops and tablets, on the other hand, is permitted. If, however, you are caught using them to view material or complete tasks that are not related to the course, you will be marked absent.

4.5 Accommodations

If you need accommodations, you should submit your approved accommodations through AU Access and make an appointment to meet with me during the first week of classes. If you have not established accommodations through the Office of Accessibility, but need accommodations, you should make an appointment with the Office of Accessibility, 1228 Haley Center, 844-2096 (V/TT).

4.6 Withdrawing from the Course

You may withdraw from the course without penalty until Wednesday, January 17. You may withdraw between January 17 and January 31 without grade penalty, but you will need to pay a course drop fee of \$100. You may withdraw between February 1 and March 30, but you will need to pay a course drop fee of \$100, and a W will appear on your transcript.

4.7 Contingency Plan (in case of emergency)

If normal class activities are disrupted due to illness, emergency, or crisis situation (such as an H1N1 flue outbreak), the syllabus and other course plans and assignments may be modified to allow completion of the course. If this occurs, an addendum to the syllabus will replace the original.

5 Schedule of Readings

This schedule of readings is subject to revisions. Changes from the original schedule (should any need to be made) will be in blue. You are responsible for checking Canvas for changes to the schedule, as well for other announcements pertaining to the course, our schedule, and your assignments.

Each reading is to be completed *before* the class meeting on the date for which it is assigned, as is the corresponding quiz.

Introduction

June 25 NO READING – Discussion: What is philosophy? What is ethics?

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics (NE)

June 26 THE HUMAN GOOD – *NE*, Book I, (pp. 3–22)

June 27 VIRTUE – *NE*, Book II (pp. 23–36)

June 28 PRAISE AND BLAME – *NE*, Book III (pp. 37–58)

June 29 WEAKNESS OF WILL – *NE*, Book VII (pp. 117–140)

July 2 THE GOOD LIFE – *NE*, Book X (pp. 181–201)

First Exam

July 3 NO READING – In-class exam

July 5 NO READING – Discussion of exam, review of Aristotle, introduction to Kant

Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (GMM)

July 6 THE GOOD WILL – *GMM*, Preface and Section I (pp. 1–18)

July 9 THE MORAL LAW – *GMM*, Section II, pp. 19–34

July 10 THE MORAL LAW (CONTINUED) – *GMM*, Section II, pp. 34–51

July 11 FREEDOM – *GMM*, Section III (pp. 52–66)

Second Exam

July 12 NO READING – In-class exam

July 13 NO READING – Discussion of exam, review of Aristotle and Kant, introduction to *Death and the Afterlife*

Scheffler's *Death and the Afterlife* (DA)

July 16 THE AFTERLIFE – DA, Lecture 1, sections 1–4 (pp. 15–32)

July 17 THE AFTERLIFE (CONTINUED) – DA, Lecture 1, sections 5–9 (pp. 32–49)

July 18 THE AFTERLIFE (CONTINUED) – DA, Lecture 2 (pp. 51–81)

July 19 FEAR, DEATH, AND CONFIDENCE – DA, Lecture 3 (pp. 83–110)

July 20 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DOOMSDAY (Susan Wolf) and HOW THE AFTERLIFE MATTERS (Harry Frankfurt) – DA, pp. 113–141

July 23 PRESERVING THE VALUED OR PRESERVING VALUING? (Seana Valentine Shiffrin) and THAT I SHOULD DIE AND OTHERS LIVE (Niko Kolodny) – DA, pp. 143–173

July 24 RESPONSES (Scheffler) – DA, pp. 177–207

Third exam

July 25 NO READING – In-class exam

July 26 NO READING – Discussion of exam, consolidation of course material, preparation for *Endgame*

Beckett's *Endgame*

July 27 LIVING WITHOUT AN AFTERLIFE – Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (the whole thing)