Course Description

This course will introduce students to a variety of classic thinkers and texts in the Western tradition of philosophical and theological ethics. These sources will then serve as a resource for thinking critically about a variety of contemporary moral questions and problems. The final objective is to promote a more sophisticated grasp of the moral dimensions of human life and an increased awareness of our continued participation in a complex, living tradition of critical reflection on the good life. Students will be asked to engage one another and the instructor throughout the semester in a civil and critical dialogue as part of a project of mutual education.

Texts


2) Other materials will be available on the Web and through WebCT

Important Web Links

[Dr. Wilmot’s Homepage](http://www.homepage.villanova.edu/brett.wilmot/)
[Library Links for Ethics Research](http://library.villanova.edu/articles/databasesubject/ethics.htm)
[Ethics Program Homepage](http://www.ethics.villanova.edu/)
Course Requirements and Extra Credit Opportunities

a) Attendance and participation will constitute significant components of your final grade. **You are expected to attend class and to be prepared to engage in critical discussion on the thinkers and topics assigned.** This means that you need to read all of the material carefully prior to class. **An inability to respond to my questions or to participate in our classroom conversations will adversely affect your final grade.** Perfect attendance without active participation will get you no better than a “B-” for this portion of your final grade. **Participation alone will constitute 15% of your final grade.** Unexcused absences and chronic tardiness will also adversely affect your final grade. For each unexcused absence above 2, your participation grade will be lowered by a step. More than 6 unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course. Your presence and participation are for your own benefit and for the benefit of your classmates. Learning is a social activity; we learn best when we learn together.

b) You must write 1 critical response paper (~4–6 pages). The topics will be provided through WebCT. There will be 3 opportunities to write your short paper; you can decide when during the semester to complete this requirement based on the due dates on the syllabus. **This short paper will constitute 20% of your final grade.** There are no extensions for any of the short papers. If you miss the due date for one option, then plan to write on one of the remaining assignments. Failure to complete at least one of these options will result in a failing grade for this section of the course.

I will allow you to write on more than one of these assignments, and I will use the best grade when calculating your final grade for the course.

A collection of writing resources will be made available to you on WebCT under the title “Help with Writing.” I will also be happy to discuss the writing assignments during my office hours and in the classroom.

c) You must submit a research paper (~10–12 pages). **This paper will constitute 35% of your final grade.** Your research paper must go through a draft process, which means that you need to receive feedback on a draft, make appropriate revisions, and then submit a final version for grading. The feedback on your draft can come from me or the Writing Center (Old Falvey Hall, Dalton Room 2002, ext. 9-4694). Please request one of the philosophy graduate students for your consultation as they will be in the best position to assist with this subject matter. You will need to make an appointment with the Writing Center well in advance for final papers, and it will become more difficult to get a consultation as the semester progresses. **You should try to have a solid draft complete by Friday, December 1, to allow for revisions.** Late papers will lose a grade step for each day beyond the deadline. No papers will be accepted more than 2 days after the deadline.

You will be thinking and working on these papers throughout the semester. The first step is to consult with me about a topic as soon as you identify an area of interest. The second step will be to produce a list of sources you plan to read as research (it would be a good idea to show me your list early in the process). The third step is writing the draft. The fourth step will be to revise
the draft based on critical feedback. The final step will be to submit the revised paper for grading.

A collection of writing resources will be made available to you on WebCT under the title “Help with Writing.” I will also be happy to discuss this assignment during my office hours and in the classroom.

d) There will be a midterm exam during the week before fall break. **This exam will constitute 15% of your final grade.** The midterm will be taken on WebCT. I will provide more detail about the midterm in class.

e) There will be a final exam during finals week. **This exam will constitute 15% of your final grade.** The final exam will be taken on WebCT. I will provide more detail about the final exam in class.

f) I will try to identify various opportunities for extra credit work. One is already listed on the syllabus for Thursday, September 7 (see below). You may take advantage of 2 of these opportunities. In order to get extra credit, you must write a critical response paper (~3 pages) to a scheduled campus lecture or event that has ethical relevance. In order to count as extra credit, this must represent thoughtful work on your part based on my judgment. Extra credit will work like this. If I accept the work as extra credit, then you will get a 1-step boost to your class participation grade (e.g., a “B+” would become an “A-”). If you have an “A” in class participation, then I will consider applying the extra credit to other assignments at my discretion.

**Numerical Grade Conversion**

The grades on individual components of this course will give as letter grades. At the end of the semester, each grade is converted into its numerical equivalent. The following is the breakdown:

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\begin{align*}
A &= 4.00 & A- &= 3.67 & B+ &= 3.33 & B &= 3.00 \\
B- &= 2.67 & C+ &= 2.33 & C &= 2.00 & C- &= 1.67 \\
D+ &= 1.33 & D &= 1.00 & D- &= 0.67 & F &= 0
\end{align*}
\]

I then multiply each assignment by the percentage of its worth and add up the components of the final grade. This is then reconverted to the equivalent letter grade. I will consider rounding grades that fall between two of the above grades based on my discretion.

**Students with Learning Disabilities**

It is the policy of Villanova University to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and wish to request accommodations to compete your course requirements, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss the request. If you would like information on documentation requirements, contact the Office of Learning Support Services at 610-519-5636. It is the student’s responsibility to request accommodations.
Academic Integrity

You are responsible for knowing and abiding by the Villanova Code of Academic Integrity (available at http://www.academics.villanova.edu/AcademicIntegrity.html). If you have questions regarding aspects of this code, please feel free to discuss them with me. Violation of this code may result in a failing grade for the course depending on the severity of the case; at the very least, violation of the code will result in a failing grade on the assignment and a very significant reduction in your final grade for the course.

Changes to the Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change at my discretion. I will, however, communicate changes clearly to you in class and in writing, and such changes, if any, will hopefully be minor.

Class and Assignment Schedule (readings are for the day indicated)

Introduction to Course

Week 1
AUGUST
Th. 8/24 Introduction to course: objectives, requirements, and expectations (discussion of academic integrity)

Required: “Introduction” to Fides et Ratio (available here)

Aristotle and Augustine: Two Classic Teleological Approaches to Ethics

Suggested reading for this section: “Virtue Ethics” (available here)
Solomon and Martin, “Introduction,” pp. 1–25

See WebCT’s “Assignments” for writing options based on this section

Week 2
Tu. 8/29 Required: “Aristotle’s Ethics,” sections 1–3 (available here)
Required: Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (Solomon and Martin, pp. 106–22)

Th. 8/31 Required: “Aristotle’s Ethics,” sections 1–3 (available here)
Required: Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (Solomon and Martin, pp. 106–22)
SEPTEMBER

Week 3
Tu. 9/5 Required: “Aristotle’s Ethics,” sections 4 and 5 (available here)
Required: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 123–36)

Th. 9/7 No regular class meeting; required attendance at scheduled Academic Symposium—extra-credit opportunity (see WebCT’s “Assignments” for extra-credit information)

**Academic Symposium**
*Veritas in Action: A Symposium on the Responsibilities of the Catholic University in the 21st Century.*
Principal speaker: The Reverend J. Bryan Hehir, Th.D., Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University
This symposium is part of *The Dialogue between Faith and Culture,* a series of conferences and symposia in honor of the inauguration of Rev. Peter M. Donohue, O.S.A., as Villanova University’s thirty second President.
2:30 pm, Villanova Room, Connelly Center

Week 4

Mon. 9/11 Extra-credit paper due on WebCT by 5 pm: Critical response to the academic symposium entitled, “Veritas in Action: A Symposium on the Responsibilities of the Catholic University in the 21st Century”

Tu. 9/12 Required: “Aristotle’s Ethics,” section 9 (available here)
Required: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 136–47)

Th. 9/14 Required: “Catholic Virtue Theory” (available here)

Fri. 9/15 First writing option due on WebCT by 5 pm: Critical response to Aristotle’s account of happiness as the end of the moral life (see WebCT assignment for specifics)

Week 5
Tu. 9/19 Required: Augustine’s *City of God* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 148–63)
Suggested: “Will,” in “St. Augustine” (available here)

Th. 9/21 Required: (1) Augustine’s *City of God,* pp. 164–78
### Applied Topic: Introduction to Sexual Ethics

#### Week 6
**Tu. 9/26**
Required: *Persona Humana* (available through WebCT’s electronic reserves)

**Th. 9/28**
Required: John Finnis, “Law, Morality, and ‘Sexual Orientation’” (available through WebCT’s electronic reserves)

**Fri. 9/29**
Second writing option due on WebCT by 5 pm: Critical response to Augustine’s critique of pagan *eudaimonia* as the *summum bonum* (see WebCT assignment for specifics)

#### OCTOBER

**Week 7**
**Mon. 10/2**
Topic for final paper should be determined, and you should be identifying appropriate sources and beginning your reading.

**Tu. 10/3**
Required: Alan H. Goldman, “Plain Sex” (available through WebCT’s electronic reserves)

**Th. 10/5**

**Th. 10/5–10/6**
Midterm exam

The exam will be available via WebCT starting at 7 pm on Thursday, October 5. You must take and complete the exam by midnight on Friday, October 6. You will have 2 hours for the exam once you begin. Once you access the exam through WebCT, the clock will begin and will continue to run even if you log out. Make sure that you have a quiet location and sufficient time to take the exam once you decide to access it through WebCT. The exam is open book and open note.

**OCTOBER 9–13**
No classes—fall break

### Kant and the Ethics of Duty: A Nonteleological Approach

See WebCT’s “Assignments” for writing option based on this section

#### Week 8
**Tu. 10/17**
Required: “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” section 1 (available [here](#))
Required: Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 259–67)
Th. 10/19  Required: “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” sections 2 and 3 (available here)
Required: Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 267–81)

**Week 9**
Tu. 10/24  Required: “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” sections 4 and 5 (available here)
Required: Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 281–90)

Th. 10/26  Required: “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” sections 6–8 (available here)
Required: Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 290–301)

**Week 10**
Tu. 10/31  Required: “Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” section 10 (available here)
Required: Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Solomon and Martin, pp. 301–12)

**Applied Topic: The Death Penalty**

**NOVEMBER**
Th. 11/2  Required: Ernest van den Haag, “The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense” (available through WebCT’s electronic reserves)

**Week 11**
Tu. 11/7  Required: Ernest van den Haag, “On Deterrence and the Death Penalty” (available through WebCT’s electronic reserves)

Th. 11/9  Required: Jeffrey H. Reiman, “Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty: Answering van den Haag” (available through WebCT’s electronic reserves), pp. 115–34

Fri. 11/10  Third writing option due on WebCT by 5 pm: Critical response to the different role of reason in the moral life according to Aristotle and Kant (see WebCT assignment for specifics)

**Week 12**
Mon. 11/13  Begin drafting your final paper no later than today.

John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism: Weighing Consequences

Th. 11/16  Required: “John Stuart Mill,” section 12 (available here)
Required: John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism (Solomon and Martin, pp. 315–39)

NOVEMBER 20–24 No classes—AAR and Thanksgiving break

Week 13
Mon. 11/27 Begin making appointments now with the Writing Center (or with me) in order to get critical feedback for revisions to draft of your research paper.

Tu. 11/28 Required: John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism (Solomon and Martin, pp. 339–52)

Th. 11/30  Required: “John Stuart Mill,” section 13 (available here)
Required: John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism (Solomon and Martin, pp. 352–59)

DECEMBER
Fri. 12/1 Drafts of research papers should be complete (or nearly so). You should be working on revisions.

Week 14
Tu. 12/5 Required: John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism (Solomon and Martin, pp. 359–71)

Th. 12/7 Review for final exam
CATS

Fri. 12/8 Research paper due on WebCT by midnight (see WebCT assignment for specifics)

Final Exam Schedule:

The final exam will be available via WebCT. It will be open book and open notes. You will have 2 hours for the exam. Once you access the exam through WebCT, the clock will begin. Make sure that you have a quiet location and sufficient time to take the exam once you decide to access it through WebCT. The exam will be available from 6 am on Wednesday, December 13, through 5 pm on Saturday, December 16.