ETH 2050—012: ETHICAL TRADITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY LIFE

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Ethics Program, Spring 2005

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Office hours: Monday/Wednesday—10:00 am–12:00 pm

You can contact me by e-mail or phone to set an appointment time. I would prefer to handle substantive matters in person rather then by e-mail or on the phone, including questions or concerns about the readings, written assignments, and classroom discussions. This gives me a better opportunity to get to know you as individuals. I will, however, respond to short and simple requests via e-mail or phone.

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 for Purchase


Course Requirements

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. Participation alone will constitute 10% of your final grade. Unexcused absences and chronic tardiness will also adversely affect your final grade. More than 4 unexcused absences may result in a reduction for your final grade. 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. I anticipate learning a great deal from all of you, and I hope that you will learn from one another and from me as the semester progresses.
b) You must write 3 papers. Two of these will be short, focused papers of ~4 pages on an assigned topic (double spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman). The third will be a research paper of ~10 pages on a topic of your choosing (double spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman). There will be 4 opportunities to write your short papers; you must choose 2 of the 4 options, and you must write on one of the first 2 options so that I will have some material for your midterm grade. The due dates for each paper option are provided on the syllabus. The first short paper will constitute 10% of your final grade. Your second short paper will constitute 15% of your final grade. The grade for your research paper will constitute 25% of your final grade. As noted, short papers will be based on assigned topics, which will be distributed in class. Because this is a writing-enriched course, one of your papers must go through a draft process, which means that you need to receive feedback from me or the Writing Center, make appropriate revisions, and then submit your paper for a final grade. I will be happy to meet with you individually as my schedule allows. I would prefer to review an entire draft prior to meeting with you. You can e-mail me a copy of your draft and then request an appointment with me. I also recommend the use of the Writing Center (Old Falvey Hall, Dalton Room 2002, ext. 94694; 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. There are no extensions for any of the papers except in cases of exceptional need (if you’re not sure, then it’s not exceptional). Late papers will receive a grade-unit deduction for each day beyond the deadline (i.e., one day late would change an “A” paper into an “A-” paper, and so on).

There are 2 readily available sources of information to help you with your papers. The first can be found on the CD-ROM that came with your Boss book (see “Writing a Paper in Moral Philosophy”). The second is a collection of resources on our class Web site on WebCT under “Help with Writing.” I will also be happy to discuss the writing assignments during my office hours and in the classroom.

c) Every student must participate in 1 of the 5 scheduled class debates. I will determine the participants for each debate. The debates will include 6 students (3 pro and 3 con) who will be responsible for engaging the topic based on the course materials. The debaters will also be responsible for fielding questions from students in the class and from me. Each team will have to meet prior to the debate in order to organize themselves and determine each member’s responsibility. Your effectiveness in these debates will constitute 15% of your final grade. Your grade on this assignment will include a team (25%) and individual (75%) component. I will clarify the organization of these debates as well as my expectations as we get closer to the first debate.

c) A final exam will constitute 25% of your final grade. The exam will be given according to the university schedule. The exam will consist of 2 short essays (~3 pages each) that will draw from both the theoretical and applied sections of the reading list. I will provide you with a study guide prior to the final exam, and we will have 1 class set aside in order to review for the exam. The exam will be open book and open notes, and you will be free to take the exam anywhere you like (i.e., you don’t have to stay in the classroom once you pick up the exam).
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. 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. Readings are identified by the text number (see above) and page range. Reading assignments are for the day indicated, meaning that you need to have the material read for that day’s class.

Class and Assignment Schedule (parenthetical number identifies the source)

JANUARY
Week 1
Tuesday 1/18  Intro to course: objectives, requirements, and expectations (discussion of academic integrity); establish participants for scheduled class debates

Please begin to familiarize yourself with the materials on the CD-ROM included with the Boss book; in addition to helping you to understand how to read and analyze moral arguments, this should provide some guidance regarding my expectations for our class discussions and debates

Thursday 1/20  (1) “Introduction,” pp. 1–25
1st paper option available on WebCT

Week 2
Tuesday 1/25  (1) John Rawls’s A Theory of Justice, pp. 450–76

Thursday 1/27  (2) “Punishment and the Death Penalty,” pp. 234–60
FEBRUARY

Week 3
Tuesday 2/1  (2) “Punishment and the Death Penalty,” pp. 260–89

Thursday 2/3  Class debate no. 1 on punishment and the death penalty
              2nd paper option available on WebCT
              (2) “Moral Theory,” pp. 1–17
              (2) “Moral Theory,” pp. 36–41 (“Virtue Ethics”)

Week 4
Tuesday 2/8  (1) Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 106–36

Thursday 2/10  (2) “Drug and Alcohol Use,” pp. 297–325

Week 5
Tuesday 2/15  (2) “Drug and Alcohol Use,” pp. 326–41
              1st paper option due at the beginning of class

Thursday 2/17  Class debate no. 2 on drug and alcohol use
              (1) “Prologue: Ethics and Religion,” pp. 26–39

Week 6
Tuesday 2/22  (1) Augustine’s *City of God*, pp. 148–78
              Catholic virtue theory (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15472a.htm)

Thursday 2/24  No class because of conference; work on readings for Tuesday
              3rd paper option available on WebCT

MARCH

Week 7
Tuesday 3/1  Aquinas’s “Treatise on Law,” qq. 90–95
              (http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/FS.html#TOC09)
              Catholic natural law (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09076a.htm)
              2nd paper option due at the beginning of class

Thursday 3/3  (2) “Sexual Intimacy and Marriage,” pp. 349–85

Week 8
Monday 3/7–Friday 3/11  No classes—Spring break

Week 9
Tuesday 3/15  (2) “Sexual Intimacy and Marriage,” pp. 385–419
Thursday 3/17  

**Class debate no. 3 on sexual intimacy and marriage**

(2) “Moral Theory,” pp. 20–24 (“Utilitarianism”)

**Week 10**

Tuesday 3/22  

(1) John Stuart Mill’s *Utilitarianism*, pp. 315–39

4th paper option available on WebCT

Thursday 3/24  

No class—Easter Recess

**Week 11**

Tuesday 3/29  

(1) John Stuart Mill’s *Utilitarianism*, pp. 339–57

3rd paper option due at the beginning of class

Thursday 3/31  


**APRIL**

**Week 12**

Tuesday 4/5  

(2) “Nonhuman Animals and the Environment,” pp. 740–71

Thursday 4/7  

**Class debate no. 4 on nonhuman animals and the environment**


**Week 13**

Tuesday 4/12  

(1) Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 259–81

Thursday 4/14  

(1) Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 281–314

4th paper option due at beginning of class

**Week 14**

Tuesday 4/19  

(2) “Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide,” pp. 181–207

Final exam study guide available on WebCT

Thursday 4/21  

(2) “Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide,” pp. 208–27

**Week 15**

Tuesday 4/26  

**Class debate no. 5 on euthanasia and assisted suicide**

Thursday 4/28  

Review for final exam

Course evaluation forms

**MAY**

**Week 16**

Tuesday 5/3  

No class—Friday class schedule

Thursday 5/5  

Plato’s *Crito*, pp. 68–80

Final research paper due at the beginning of class