COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a partial overview of approaches to moral philosophy by concentrating on three books: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (circa 334-323 BCE), a contemporary approach to ethics in a “globalized” world, Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), and a book-long study of whether and how much assistance we ought to give to strangers, Peter Singer’s *The Life You Can Save* (2010). Much other integrative material for reflection on both normative ethics—answering the question, what ought one do?—and meta-ethics—what is the nature of morals?—will be introduced during the proceedings.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Provide incitement to moral reflection.
- Provide guidance to presenting one’s thoughts in a persuasive manner, both orally and in written form, including
- Refining skills of critical analysis and discernment, encouraging the approach to issues from all sides.
- Provide guidance on how to consider moral questions, as they affect oneself and others.

TEACHING METHOD

Sessions consist of some lecturing followed, preceded, or accompanied clarifying, questioning, rebuttals, and discussion of the cases or arguments under examination. Students are expected to have read the relevant texts in advance.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students are expected to:
● Have developed their critical faculties, perhaps even abandoned merely emotional reactions in favour of logically grounded argumentation
● Refined their skills in moral deliberation and in assessing matters of value
● Improved their argumentative skills

GRADING AND OTHER POLICIES

The final grade takes into account the following requirements:

Attendance

Attendance is taken at the beginning of class from the first day of the semester. The student entering class after attendance is taken has to contact the professor at the end and announce his/her presence. However, this does not mean that coming late is accepted. Two late arrivals may be excused, three turn automatically into an absence and will affect the attendance and participation part of the final grade.

Students can miss one week’s work, irrespective of the course formula (three sessions, two sessions, one session). It is their responsibility to make up for the missed work. If they miss a quiz or a report they are not allowed to have it at another time, unless the absence is for certified medical reasons and the professor and Dean agree.

More than one week’s work missed is going to be penalized as follows:

1. One extra absence: lowers the attendance and participation grade by half a letter grade
2. Two extra absences lower the final grade by a whole letter grade
3. Three extra absences lower the final grade to an F.

Deportment

Learning and reflection are collaborative efforts. So student participation, particularly in the form of constructive or critical analysis, is warmly invited. It is not required, however, as you are now deemed to have matured enough as scholars to judge for yourselves the merits contributing your opinions, questions, or arguments. Because mutual respect is essential to good collaboration, Traxler reserves the right to make grade subtractions for disruptive behaviour as well as for behaviour disrespectful to other students. For, while disrespecting faculty may be unwise gradewise, disrespecting fellow students is downright base, or morally contemptible and could result in grade subtractions. For this same reason, while what you are viewing on computers or smart-phones during this class is your business alone, remember that it could lead to grade subtractions if it distracts others or disrupts class.

Attendance, participation

Assuming we are all adults now, no grades are awarded for attendance or participation.

Writing--50% of course grade

You are required to write an essay, preferably on a topic chosen from among those listed. You may submit a draft until noon of Friday 30 October.

● Essays are due by midnight of Wed. 25 November.
The essay consists in the articulated and well-argued treatment of a topic chosen, preferably, from the topic list for this course supplied on the first day of class. For a topic to be added to this list following a student’s suggestion, it must be presented in a clearly-stated form and be approved by your instructor whereupon it will be added to the list and thereby become available for others to write about, too. For this reason all topic proposals must be submitted by week 4. All essays, meanwhile, must be submitted to zagethics@gmail.com in one of the following formats: word, odt, RTF. No other format will be accepted.

Essays submitted late will receive a grade penalty as follows: 1 day—1 letter grade (e.g., A- to B-), 2 days—2 letter grades (e.g., A- to C-), more than 2 days—grade of 0 / F on the assignment.

Evaluation will follow the standards set out in Traxler’s writing advice, requirements, and grading criteria which include the following criteria:

- argumentative completeness and lucidity
- good organization
- good use of sources, properly cited.
- good or notable expression

Oral presentations—15%, possibly

Any of those writing on a particular topic have the option of participating in a joint presentation of your views on this topic to the class through week 9. If the grade of this presentation helps, your grade on the presentation will count for 15% of the course grade, the paper for the remaining 35%.

Exams—50% of course grade

Mid-term exami 25%—on Thu. 4 November, at the usual class time
- Contents: 1 or 2 short essay questions, perhaps some multiple-choice questions & passage identification questions (e.g., identify the source of “Why Gramma, what big teeth you have!”).

Final exam—25%—on Mon. 14 December, at the usual class time
- Contents: 1 or 2 short essay questions, perhaps some multiple-choice, and passage identification questions.

Academic honesty

Academic honesty is essential to education. As students expect professional deontology from their professor, so does the professor expect honesty and genuine intellectual engagement from the student. Academic dishonesty is any action by which a student seeks to claim credit for the intellectual of another person or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic exercise. It includes unauthorized assistance in tests and examinations; internationally impeding or damaging the academic work of others; submitting another person’s work as your own, or providing work for this purpose; submitting
work of your own that has been substantially edited and revised by another person, or providing an editing service for others; submitting material from a source (books, articles, internet sites) without proper citation and bibliographic reference; paraphrasing material from a source without appropriate reference and citation; submitting substantially the same piece of work in more than one course without the explicit consent of all the instructors concerned; assisting other students in any of the above acts.

Students who are academically dishonest will receive a zero on the work in question or a failing grade for the course as a whole, depending on the importance of the work to the overall course grade and the judgment of the instructor. The instructor reserves the right to submit copies of student written work to a plagiarism detection site such as TurnItIn.com.

**Special Accommodation**
Requests for special accommodations due to specific, preferably documented institutionally recognized reasons, are to be made on the first day of class.

**Bibliography:**

Ancillary readings, suggested or required, will all be shared with you from a drive associated with this e-mail address: zagethics@gmail.com.

**Internet resources recommended:**
- [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](http://plato.stanford.edu/) (probably your best starting point)
- Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- JSTOR

**COURSE OUTLINE & SCHEDULE**

Note: the dates at which particular readings will be discussed are indicative.

Class 1 Thursday, 17 September
- Introduction to the course

**PART 1—SO, BRIEFLY, WHAT’S ARISTOTLE GOT TO SAY ABOUT ETHICS?**

**Week 1:** Aristotle on (happiness and) pleasure

Class 2 Mon. 21 September
- Happiness as the end of human action *N.E.* i.1-5 & 7-9

Class 3 Tue. 22 Sep.
- Pleasure *N.E.* x.1-5, vii.11-14,

Class 4 Thu. 23 Sep.
- Aristotle vs. utilitarian pleasure (Jeremy Bentham) or happiness (J.S. Mill)

**Week 2:** Aristotle—happiness is what we are really after
Class 5 Mon. 28 Sep.
- N.E. i.10 a puzzle about Solon’s view of happiness
  - anecdote from Herodotus, *Histories* (shared reading)

Class 6 Tue. 29 Sep.
- N.E. i.11-13 happiness & the virtues
- N.E. ii.1-9 virtues of character

Class 7 Thu. 1 October
- N.E. iii.5-iv.9 on several virtues
  - *The Situationist Challenge to virtue ethics: K.A. Appiah “The Case Against Character”* (shared reading)

**Week 3: Aristotle on justice, incontinence, & friendship**

Class 8 Mon. 5 Oct.
- N.E. v (Justice)

Class 9 Tue. 6 Oct.
- N.E. vi.5 & 8 (prudence <9please note vi.8.5<9)
- N.E. vii.1-10 (incontinence = weakness of will)

Class 10 Thu. 8 Oct.
- N.E. viii (friendship, 3 types, true f. only among equals), ix.9 & 12

**PART 2—MORALS IN A WORLD OF CONFLICTING VALUES**

**Week 4: Reflections on (cultural) moral relativism**

Class 11 Mon. 12 Oct.
- *Cosmopolitanism* ch. 1

Class 12 Tue. 13 Oct.
- *Cosmopolitanism* ch. 2
  - Hume on the fact/value distinction (shared reading)

Class 13 Thu. 15 Oct.
- *Cosmopolitanism* ch. 3

**Week 5: Cosmopolitanism**

Class 14 Mon. 19 Oct.
- *Cosmopolitanism* ch. 4 *Moral Disagreement*

Class 15 Tue. 20 Oct.
- *Interlude: Relativism,* ÓB. Williams (shared reading)

Class 16 Thu. 22 Oct.
- *Cosmopolitanism* ch. 5 & 6 (living with moral disagreements).

**Week 6: Cosmopolitanism & human rights**

Class 17 Mon. 26 Oct.
- *Cosmopolitanism* ch. 8, on the return of cultural heritage

Class 18 Tue. 27 Oct.
- UN Declaration of Human Rights
- AAA Statement on Human Rights, 1947

Class 19 Thu. 29 Oct. Wither moral reform?

Friday, October 30 @ noon: deadline for drafts.
Week 7: a distraction with a purpose: prisoners’ dilemmas, commons & climate change

Class 20
- Monday 2 November
  - MT, iPDs & Commons

Class 21
- Tuesday 3 November

Class 22
- Thursday 4 November
  - Midterm exam

Midterm exam

Week 8: moral non-cognitivism & contractualist justification

Class 23
- Monday 9 November
  - Jonathan Haidt, The Intuitive Dog and Its Rational Tail, pp.27-51 (shared reading)

Class 24
- Tuesday 10 November
  - Plato, Crito (shared reading)

Class 25
- Thursday 12 November
  - J. Rachels, Social Contract Theory (shared reading)
  - S. Blackburn, Contracts and Discourse (shared reading)

PART 3—HOW, IF AT ALL, ARE WE MORALLY OBLIGATED TO HELP STRANGERS?

Week 9: Singer’s The Life, parts 1 and 2

Class 26
- Monday 16 November
  - Singer, ch. 1 & 2

Class 27
- Tuesday 17 November
  - Singer, ch. 3

Class 28
- Thursday 19 November
  - Singer, ch. 4 & 5

Week 10: Singer’s The Life ... parts 3 & 4

Class 29
- Monday 23 November
  - Singer ch.s 6 & 7

Class 30
- Tuesday 24 November
  - Singer, ch.s 8 & 9

Week 11: Immigration

Class 31
- Monday 30 November
  - Singer, ch. 10

Class 32
- Tuesday 1 December
  - Arguments for closing borders
  - Joe Sacco, The Unwanted, part 1 (shared reading)

Class 33
- Thursday 3 December
  - Arguments against closing borders
  - Joe Sacco, The Unwanted, part 2 (shared reading)

Week 12: Collecting your thoughts

Class 34
- Monday 7 December

Wed. 25 November @ midnight: Paper due

Week 12: Collecting your thoughts

8 December Immaculate Conception
Class 35 on Thu. 10 Dec.
  • Review

Week 13: final exams

Class 37 on Monday, 14 Dec.
  • Final Exam