

Philosophy 104.06 Moral Reasoning
MWF 8:20 – 9:15 Stony Brook Union 226
Fall Semester 2000

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| Instructor: Chris Johns E-Mail: cjohns@ic.sunysb.edu Philosophy Dept. office: 632-7570 | Office: 149A Harriman Hall Office Hours: After class until 10:30, and by appointment. |
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Course Description: In this course we will endeavor to sharpen our sensibilities regarding that which is “good” and that which is “right”. We will do this by examining many philosophical theories about how one should live and about how one might be justified in making certain choices. We will study these theories from an authorial and historical perspective, and then within general theoretical frameworks. We will also discuss several controversial topics such as abortion, gender, sexuality, and affirmative action. We are not so much interested in *discovering* the right way to live; rather, we are interested in developing *good reasons* for our moral thinking and behaving.

To do well in this class you will have to slog through *much* difficult reading, suffer through *mind-numbing* lectures and discussions, survive *torturous* writing assignments and exams, and then rack your brains over *even more* painful thinking. But it will be fun.

Required Texts: Two books are required, both of which may be purchased at Stony Books, across from the train station. The books are not available at the University bookstore.

- Rachels, James. The Elements of Moral Philosophy.
- Newberry, Paul. Ethical Traditions.
- Extra material you will copy from the philosophy office, 213 Harriman.
- Optional, but recommended: Pence, Gregory. A Dictionary of Common Philosophical Terms.

Course Requirements:

Paper One: (3 pages) 15%

Paper Two: (3-4 pages) 20%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 25%

Response Papers 15%

Participation 5%

Extra Requirement—Socratic Dialogue: Since we will miss two days of class this semester, we will make it up by spending two hours outside of class, in a cafe, having a “Socratic style” dialogue. This means we will go through a process of attempting to arrive at a consensual agreement on the definition of an abstract concept such as justice, friendship, love, or the like. It will be fun. Details later.

Papers: I will provide you with paper topics two weeks before the due date. Papers handed in after the due date will be rejected or penalized. Papers must be typed in a normal font, double spaced, and have one-inch margins. Papers must support a clearly defined thesis. I will provide you with details on what I expect, and on how to organize a good paper.

Response Papers: By Friday of each week you must hand in a one-page (typed, double spaced) response paper to the assigned readings. (If you prefer, you may hand in on Monday a response to a reading assigned the previous Friday.) The paper should consist of at least two substantial paragraphs. The first paragraph should be an attempt to explain a certain passage or point made by a specific author. The second paragraph should consist of your reaction to what the author said—agreement, disagreement, confusion, and *why*. Papers will be graded on a five-point scale. At least 50 points gets you an A for 15% of your course grade.

Attendance and Participation: Since classes are short, and since latecomers are distracting, please be on time. Most days I will take attendance. If you do not arrive by the time attendance is taken, you will be marked absent. Attendance will be figured into your participation grade. If you accumulate more than eight unexcused absences during the semester, you will automatically fail the course. Keep in mind that, coming to class will most likely improve your exam and paper grades. Participating in class discussions, asking questions, and so forth, will help all of your grades, especially the Participation grade.

Also, as part of your participation grade, at some point in the semester you must ask one question during class time on the assigned readings. The question must be prepared ahead of time, and must show some thoughtful engagement with the text. I will hand out a sign-up sheet. Of course, you are always encouraged to ask questions at any time.

Exams: Exams will be comprehensive. Exam make-ups will be given only for serious reasons accompanied by written documentation.

Plagiarism: To put it bluntly, plagiarism is lying and stealing, and will not be tolerated. Unfortunately, too many students do it. Do not underestimate my ability to spot it. I have sent many a dismayed student to the Office of Academic Judiciary. These days it is easy to get papers off the Internet, but it is also easy for teachers to find them. Yet the Internet is not the only source of plagiarism.

However, plagiarism is a complex issue. If you are unsure about how to cite sources properly, please talk to me. If you are having trouble with an assignment, it is always best to talk to me before handing in your paper. I would rather see you struggle with a topic and learn something, than fail you for pulling a fast one.

University Services:

- **Writing Center:** If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center's tutorial services. These instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Call 632-7405 for an appointment, or stop by Humanities 198. Check out <<http://ws.cc.sunysb.edu/writrhet/description/writctr.html>> for more information.
- **Disability:** If you have a mental or physical disability and require special assistance, please contact Disabled Student Services (DSS), Humanities 133, 2-6748. All information is strictly confidential.
- **Ombud:** If you are having a conflict with the teacher or other students, and you need to speak confidentially to a neutral party, please consult the Ombudsperson in Humanities 114, 2-9200.

Course Schedule. I reserve the right to make changes. “ET” means Ethical Traditions, the volume of historical selections. Selection author and title are indicated. “Rachels” means Elements of Moral Philosophy, by James Rachels. The chapter titles are indicated. Note that some days do not have a reading listed; but that doesn’t mean nothing is happening. Advice: In ET, before reading the selection, read the “Reading Questions” at the end of the selection.

| Topic | Monday | Wednesday | Friday |
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| 0. Introduction | | 9/6 Intro to course | 9/8 <u>Rachels</u> , “What is morality?” |
| 1. The Law of God and The Law of the State | 9/11 <u>ET</u> : Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> <u>Rachels</u> : “Does Morality depend on Religion?” | 9/13 <u>ET</u> : Socrates, <i>Crito</i> MLK “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” (handout) | 9/15 |
| 2. Relativism and Subjectivism | 9/18 <u>ET</u> : Plato, <i>Republic</i> <u>Rachels</u> : “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism.” | 9/20 <u>Rachels</u> , “Subjectivism in Ethics.” | 9/22 <u>Rachels</u> , “The Ethics of Virtue.” |
| 3. Virtue Ethics What is Happiness? | 9/25 <u>ET</u> : Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> | 9/27 | 9/29 Paper One Due |
| 4. Naturalistic Ethics | 10/2 Aristotle | 10/4 <u>ET</u> : Epicurus and Epictetus | 10/6 (SPEP) No class |
| 5. Sin and Natural Law | 10/9 Yom Kippur, No Class | 10/11 <u>ET</u> : St. Augustine, <i>The City of God</i> | 10/13 <u>ET</u> : Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> (pages TBA) |
| 6. Social Contract | 10/16 <u>Rachels</u> , “Psychological Egoism.” “Ethical Egoism.” | 10/18 <u>Rachels</u> , “The Idea of a Social Contract.” | 10/20 <u>ET</u> : Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> |
| 7. | 10/23 Rousseau (handout) | 10/25 Review | 10/27 Mid-Term |
| 8. Subjectivism | 10/30 <u>ET</u> : Mary Astel, “ <i>A Serious Proposal to the Ladies.</i> ” | 11/1 <u>ET</u> : Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> | 11/3 |
| 9. Kantian Ethics | 11/6 <u>Rachels</u> , “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?” | 11/8 <u>ET</u> : Kant, <i>Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> | 11/10 <u>Rachels</u> , “Kant and Respect for Persons.” |
| 10. Utilitarianism | 11/13 <u>Rachels</u> , “The Utilitarian Approach.” “The Debate over Utilitarianism.” | 11/15 <u>ET</u> : J.S. Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> | 11/17 |
| 11. Psychological and Ethical Egoism | 11/20 <u>ET</u> : Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy; Beyond Good and Evil.</i> | 11/22 Revelations (handout) | 11/24 Thanksgiving Break, No Class |
| 12. Contemporary and Feminist Ethics | 11/27 <u>ET</u> : Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> | 11/29 <u>Rachels</u> , “Feminism and the Ethics of Care.” | 12/1 <u>ET</u> : Held, “ <i>Feminism and Moral Theory.</i> ” |
| 13. Virtue Ethics Revisited: Ethical Character | 12/4 <u>ET</u> : Anscombe, “ <i>Modern Moral Philosophy.</i> ” | 12/6 <u>ET</u> : Wolf, “ <i>Moral Saints</i> ” | 12/8 Paper Two Due |
| 14. The “End.” | 12/11 <u>Rachels</u> , “What Would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?” | 12/13 Wrap up and review | 12/15 Review |
| | 12/18 Final Exam 8-10:30 AM | | |