

PHIL 226 ETHICAL THEORY
FALL 2016
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
2:00 PM – 3:15 TR NICELY 325

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Office Hours: 3:30 – 4:30, and by appointment.

Course Description (tentative): The course will cover the main topics in what is called “metaethics,” which is the study of the meaning of central ethical concepts, such as *the good, obligation, realism/anti-realism, ethical motivation, moral knowledge*, and more. Thus it does **not** treat of subjects with which you are likely familiar, such as (lying, abortion, capital punishment) nor normative ethics (utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics). Thus it treats of concepts that are often taken for granted in all ethical thinking whatsoever—abstract, yet essential.

Basically, you will be reading one *difficult* article per week. There will be occasional quizzes and/or short responses, plus two or three papers. My overall goal is to turn you into a more effective thinker and writer, and to give you a deeper understanding of issues relevant to human life. This is not an easy course. It emphasizes philosophical thinking, which I take to mean the slow, careful, reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will be discussion-driven and centered on the assigned readings. My goal is not only to introduce you to various issues in ethical theory, but also to develop the habit of reading and thinking philosophically.

The course fulfills a Humanities List I requirement, *but you cannot take this course unless you have had at least one course in philosophy.* Preferably, you will have had a course in Ethics, such as PHIL 210.

Program Learning Outcomes

- The ability to precisely identify the conclusion for which a writer is arguing.
- The ability to accurately represent the argument(s) which someone is using to support his/her conclusion.
- The ability to identify and assess objections to arguments in our readings.
- The ability to develop, explain, and defend your own views.
- The knowledge of fundamental concepts in ethical theory.

Essential: By taking this class, you automatically agree to understand and to comply with this syllabus. By ‘syllabus’ I mean all of the documents found in the **Syllabus Section** on Moodle. Read them carefully. If I make any changes, I will alert you. If you have a question about any policy, I am happy to talk about it. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say that you did not know it.

Required Texts: The Course packet (CP) is available at the AUB Bookstore. See Course Schedule for assigned reading schedule.

Tentative readings:

1. A selection from Plato (the Allegory of the Cave or *Gorgias*)
2. “Of the Influencing Motives of the Will” and “Moral Distinctions Not Derived from Reason,” *David Hume*
3. “A Critique of Ethics,” *A. J. Ayer*
4. “The Subjectivity of Values,” *J. L. Mackie*
5. “The Subject-Matter of Ethics,” *G. E. Moore*
6. “Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Non-naturalism,” *Russ Shafer-Landau*
7. “Moral Knowledge and Ethical Pluralism,” *Robert Audi*
8. “Coherentism and the Justification of Moral Beliefs,” *Geoffrey Sayre-McCord*
9. “The Immoralist’s Challenge” *Plato* (The Ring of Gyges)
10. “Moral Saints,” *Susan Wolf*
11. “A New Divine Command Theory,” *Robert Merrihew Adams*
12. “The Experience Machine,” *Robert Nozick*
13. “What Things are Good?,” *W. D. Ross*

14. "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Galen Strawson*

15. "The Authority of Reflection" Christine Korsgaard

Graded Requirements:

- Quizzes (approx. seven, dispersed throughout the semester): 15% of course grade
- 4 Responses (2.5% each)
- Short Paper 1: 20%
- Short Paper 2: 25%
- Long paper: 30%

Quizzes: These are multiple choice or short answer quizzes given occasionally (according to Course Schedule) designed to keep you up with the readings and to sharpen comprehension. The Quiz will cover the readings assigned for the day of the quiz or the previous day only. Quizzes may *not* be made up. Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped from your total Quizzes score. Here is how they are scored: -1 = 90; -2 = 80; -3 = 70; -4 = 60; -5 = 0. Note that if you cheat on the quiz by looking at someone else's quiz or by giving or obtaining answers from another source, you will receive a zero for the quiz.

Responses: Each response is a 350 - 400 word response to a question (or questions) I will pose to you a week ahead of the due date. The questions will be about the text that is assigned on the day the Response is due. You must upload your response onto Moodle *before* class time. If you don't, you will receive zero points. For submission to Moodle, you must format these Responses according to the "Papers--formatting, saving, submitting" instructions on Moodle (in Syllabus Section). I will give you feedback and return it to you through Moodle. The Grade scale for Responses is: 90, 85, 75, 68, 60, 0, or possibly in between. I expect you to write clearly and to demonstrate at least a sincere attempt to answer the question(s) accurately.

Short papers and Long paper: Short papers run between 800 – 1000 words and will be based on a question about the assigned readings. The word limits will be strictly adhered to. The final paper will run between 1,500 – 2000 words, based on topics I will give you, but you can modify the topic to suit your interests. You will upload your paper onto Moodle. you must format these Responses according to the "Papers--formatting, saving, submitting" instructions on Moodle (in Syllabus Section). I will type comments on your paper, grade it, and return it to you electronically. Be sure to read my comments!

All papers are of the "critical" type, meaning that you will take a position (a thesis) and defend it. The grading criteria for these papers could be as follows: You must be able to clearly state your thesis and its supporting reasons. You must support your thesis with reasons and evidence. You must be able to critically evaluate the readings that you engage in your paper. You must be able to write in clear, grammatically correct, English. Your main ideas must be logically organized, and your thoughts clear and concise. Essays that fulfill all of the above in an excellent manner will receive at least 90 points. Essays that do so in a "good" manner, or fulfill the criteria partially, will receive at least 80 points. Essays that need work in at least two of the above criteria will receive at least 70 points. Essays that do not fulfill several of the criteria, or do so in a weak manner, will receive at least 60 points. Essays that fail to display much knowledge of the readings, *or* are incomprehensible or thoughtless in expression, will receive a 59 or less. The best way to prepare for these essays is to read the assigned readings *carefully* and pay attention to how we discuss them in class. More information on how to write philosophy papers can be found on Moodle. Plagiarism is severely punished. See below.

Final Exam: The final exam will be taken at the time and place announced in the syllabus. It will consist of at least two essay questions. You are expected to have a good understanding of the main arguments of the course texts. You should be prepared to answer a comparative question, or to make an argument, or to explain the meaning and significance of a given passage. Reading the assignments, writing papers, taking notes, and paying attention to class discussions should be sufficient preparation for the final.

Attendance: Your performance on the papers and exams will depend heavily on your ability to understand the assigned readings and to think critically about these issues. Also, quizzes cannot be made up. So, it is in your best interest to attend every class, be attentive, and participate. It is also important to practice forming your thoughts verbally. I will take attendance, but I do not accept excuses for absences. However, if you miss seven classes for whatever reason, you will either be dropped from the course and receive a “W”, or you will receive a failing grade of 50. Six absences yield a reduction of 10 points on your final grade. Four or five absences yield a 5-point reduction. Two late attendances will count as one absence. NOTE: *You cannot attend the section in which you are not enrolled.*

Participation and class conduct: Participation is strongly encouraged. To participate well, you must do the readings *before* class so we can go over them in class. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions as you. Also be sure to give others a chance to speak. *Be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves.*

I do not allow the use of any electronic device in this class, including computers. (Note that empirical evidence supports the claim that taking notes by hand is more effective than taking them by computer.) All devices must be turned off and put away completely out of sight. Also, as a courtesy to me, *please do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over.* If I seem unaware that class time has expired, kindly alert me, thank you.

NOTE: Repeat offenders of the following behaviors will be ejected from class and will have **points removed from their final grade.** (1) Talking while someone else is talking. (2) Using cell phones or other electronic devices (computers) in class. (3) Playing games or reading non-class material during class. (4) Leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; leaving frequently to go to the bathroom; (5) Repeated lateness and early leaving.

Grade Calculation: I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. See “Calculating and Estimating Your Grades” on Moodle.” This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. Here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Grades” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up (Moodle→Administration→Grades).

To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts (see “Calculating and Estimating . . .”).

Note: on the final grade, before entering on AUBsis, I round up the decimal from .60.

NOTE: Never tell me that you “need” a certain course or paper grade, nor ask me to “go easy” on grades or anything else. The request is completely inappropriate and unethical. If made, I will *reduce* your course grade by at least 2 points. I am always happy to talk about the work you need to do to get good grades. I am a hard grader but I try to be fair. But there are no guarantees that you will get the grade you need. Keep in mind I am interested in working with you, not against you. So, feel free to come to office hours or make an appointment.

Plagiarism: is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. It includes, for example, paraphrasing without attribution, replacing a few words here and there using a thesaurus, copying the words from a spoken video, downloading papers from the net, using encyclopedia passages without attribution, copy/pasting from various blogs and anonymous sites, purchasing papers online, getting papers from past students and friends, and having someone write your paper for you. I consider plagiarism equivalent to stealing, lying, and cheating, and no amount of it will be tolerated in my class. Plagiarism is wrong for additional reasons: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, learner, and person. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms, not only you, but all students, professors, the university, and society in general. If you plagiarize, you fail to learn how to write and think. You represent yourself as having skills and knowledge that you in fact do not have. Also, I take your work and my work seriously. If you plagiarize, then my work becomes a pointless waste of time. I hate wasting time, because I wish

to fill my life with meaning and accomplishments. I also hate false relationships. When I read and respond to your work, I consider myself engaged in a mutual relationship of trust, respect, truth, care, and progress. If I am reading your plagiarized work, then I am having a false relationship with you. I despise false relationships because they destroy the substance of life. **If you plagiarize any work in this class, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment and be reported to the Dean. It will go on your record and you could be dismissed from the university. No exceptions. If I so much as suspect that your work has been plagiarized, I will give it a zero and submit it to the Academic Affairs Committee for judgment.** This applies to any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). You must also discourage plagiarism by not giving your paper to someone else to copy. Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. (This also applies to papers written by ghostwriters.) I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment, because the text has an “internet feel,” or because it uses awkward wording in an attempt to disguise the source. I also use Google, Turnitin, and other resources. You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, see “**Documenting Sources: Rules & Mechanics**” posted on Moodle. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, or with your English, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

Turnitin. Unfortunately, due to a few people’s insidious attempts to plagiarize, I must force everyone to submit all assignments to Turnitin.com. Failure to submit your work to Turnitin results in an automatic 0 for the assignment.

Here is how it works: As their website says, “Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals” (http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html). NOTE that Turnitin only submits a “similarity” report, not a plagiarism report. The similarity report shows the percentage of your text that is similar or identical to another text, and therefore helps me determine whether you have plagiarized. Some similarity is fine and to be expected. But identical similarity or paraphrased similarity is plagiarism. NOTE: Writing papers does *not* consist of using a source and changing a few words here and there. Nor does paraphrasing a source consist of changing a few words here and there. It means making a compact summary of the main point of a paragraph, for purposes of clarification for the reader. All paraphrasing must be documented.

To submit your paper to Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on “Upload” for the current assignment.

More information on Plagiarism is posted on Moodle.

The Writing Center: If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb

Moodle: Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and such. Class notices and announcements will be sent to you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, **check your AUB e-mail** regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

E-mail: So that we may better communicate, you must use your AUB e-mail and “authenticate” it so that I can see your name and know who you are.

See Course Schedule, next page--

Course Schedule: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. *If you do not bring the readings to class, I may ask you to leave until you return with them!*

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1 Aug.	30 Introduction to Course	01
2 Sep	06	08
3	13 Al Adha – No Classes	15
4	20	22
5	27	29
6 Oct	04	06
7	11 Ashoura – No classes	13
8	18	20
9	25	27
10 Nov	01	03 Last day for course withdrawal Nov. 4
11	08	10
12	15	17
13	22 Independence Day – No Classes	24
14	29	01
15 Dec.	06 Last day of classes	08 Reading Period
16	13 Final Exam TBA	15
17	20	22 Official end of semester