

Phil 210: Ethical Systems

Spring 2024

Asynchronous Online

Instructor: Nathaniel Greely Email: nathaniel.greely@woodbury.edu

Office Hours: 4-5pm Tuesday on Zoom

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to ethical theory. We will examine the most prominent accounts of what makes something morally right or wrong. These accounts include Utilitarianism, Deontology, Social Contract Theory, Divine Command Theory, Cultural Relativism, Ethical Egoism, Care Ethics, and Virtue Ethics. We will also cover prominent accounts of justice by Nozick, Rawls, and Nussbaum. Our approach will be analytic, meaning that arguments for and against each theory will be constructed and then evaluated for internal consistency and consistency with empirical data. No previous knowledge of philosophy, logic, or ethics is required or assumed, though contributions from students with previous training in various disciplines are welcome.

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding of ethical theory by engaging in discussions, completing written exams, and writing and revising an original essay that argues for a specific thesis related to ethical theory.

Textbook:

The text for this course is *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* by James Rachels, 9th or 10th Edition. The text is available in the bookstore and is widely available in other venues. Earlier editions are acceptable (and cheaper), but you must obtain some version of the text. Additional readings will be posted to Blackboard.

Lecture:

Lectures will be in video form, accessible by a link posted to Moodle. I will post the relevant lectures by 10am MW.

Assessments:

The assessments in this course are largely designed to keep you engaged with the lectures, readings, discussions, and other students in the course. Your grades for discussion, quizzes, essay proposal, and peer review total 55% of your grade. It should be easy to do well on these components if you stay engaged. The midterm, final exam, and final essay will be graded on quality, and to get top marks on these components you will be required to demonstrate understanding of the material (for the midterm and final exam) and some original philosophical insight (for the final essay). Your grade in the course will be composed of the following:

Discussion Participation – 15%

Each week students will post twice to a discussion board on Moodle. One post will be an original question, objection, or extension of the course material. The other post will be a response to someone else's post (criticism or questions about others' posts is encouraged so long as it is done respectfully). The goal of the discussion is not merely to report on what you have read and seen in lecture. The goal is

to demonstrate some original thought that goes further. The discussion board is a low-stakes arena for sparking ideas that might develop into a term paper.

Quizzes – 15%

At the end of each two-week unit, a short quiz on that unit will be posted to Moodle. The goal of the quizzes is to assess whether students are keeping up with reading and lectures. They are designed to be quite easy for students who do so.

Midterm – 15%

The midterm will be due 2/25. It will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 1-3. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be provided 2/21.

Research Proposal – 10%

Students will record a video of themselves giving a short presentation in which they explain the thesis they plan to argue for in their essay and outline the argumentative strategy they will employ. Students will comment on each other's proposals, providing constructive feedback. Your thesis and arguments may change over the course of composing the draft and revising it into a final paper. This assignment is designed to get you thinking about your essay early-on and receive feedback on how it may be improved. Students are free to choose any topic that interests them. Specific prompts will also be provided as models for the appropriate scope of the essay, and students may choose to write on those prompts if they wish. Prompts will be provided 2/25 after the midterm. Research proposals will be due 3/18, 3/20, 3/25, and 3/27. A signup sheet will be posted where students can choose the date for their proposal.

Essay draft – 15%

One of the most important parts of writing an essay is revision. Students will be required to turn in a rough draft of their essay, due 4/13. The essay should present and develop an original thesis on one of the topics of the course. Prompts will be provided, but students are welcome to develop their own essay topics. The essay should be narrowly focused on a very specific claim, likely a single premise in an argument presented in a lecture or reading. Provide an original argument for your view about that claim and consider objections to your argument. The essay should be 5 pages (1250 words), give or take a page. It should be easy to get full points for your draft so long as it reflects an honest effort to make a cogent argument. I will provide comments on how the draft might be improved.

Final Essay – 15%

Students will revise their essay, taking into account the comments they receive. You are almost certainly expected to make significant changes to your essay in order to get top marks. The final draft will be graded on quality, not merely on effort. The final essay will be due 4/31.

Final Exam – 15%

The final exam will be similar in format to the midterm exam. It will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 4-6. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be posted 4/28. The final exam will be due 5/6.

Course Schedule

Unit 1 – Objective Morality

1/15 – Course Introduction
1/17 – Rachels Ch. 1
1/18 – Discussion Posts Due
1/22 – Rachels Ch. 2
1/24 – Rachels Ch. 3; Hume
1/25 – Discussion Posts Due; Quiz 1 Posted
1/28 – Quiz 1 Due

Unit 2 – Religion, Egoism, Social Contract

1/29 – Rachels Ch. 4; Plato
1/31 – Rachels Ch. 5; Rand
2/1 – Discussion Posts Due
2/5 – Rachels Ch. 6
2/7 – Hobbes
2/8 – Discussion Posts Due; Quiz 2 Posted
2/11 – Quiz 2 Due

Unit 3 – Utilitarianism

2/12 – Rachels Ch. 7
2/14 – Rachels Ch. 8
2/15 – Discussion Posts Due
2/19 – Mill; Singer
2/21 – LeGuin; Midterm Prompts Posted
2/22 – Discussion Posts Due; Quiz Posted
2/25 – Quiz Due; Midterm Due; Essay Prompts Posted

Unit 4 – Deontology

2/26 – Rachels Ch. 9
2/28 – Rachels Ch. 10
2/29 – Discussion Posts Due
3/4 – Kant; Korsgaard
3/6 – Review and Quiz
3/7 – Discussion Posts Due; Quiz Posted
3/10 – Quiz Due

3/11 – 3/15 Spring Break

3/18 – Essay Proposals Group 1 Due; Comment on Proposals
3/20 – Essay Proposals Group 2 Due; Comment on Proposals
3/25 – Essay Proposals Group 3 Due; Comment on Proposals
3/27 – Essay Proposals Group 4 Due; Comment on Proposals

Unit 5 – Virtue Ethics, Care Ethics, Conclusions

4/1 – Rachels Ch. 11
4/3 – Aristotle
4/4 – Discussion Posts Due
4/8 – Rachels Ch. 12; Gilligan
4/10 – Rachels Ch. 13
4/11 – Discussion Posts Due; Quiz Posted
4/13 – Quiz Due; Essay Draft Due

Unit 6 – Theories of Justice

4/15 – Nozick
4/17 – Rawls
4/18 – Discussion Posts Due
4/22 – Nussbaum
4/24 – Review for Final Exam
4/25 – Discussion Posts Due; Quiz Posted
4/28 – Quiz Due; Final Exam Prompts Posted
4/31 – Final Essay Due
5/6 – Final Exam Due

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Woodbury University is committed to building a university that values student, staff and faculty engagement in addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusiveness because this is an essential part of an experience-centered education. We create an inclusive climate because we know that the richness of different experiences and perspectives is intrinsically valuable and vital to advancing innovation, critical thinking, solving complex problems, and creating a vibrant academic community. We seek to create a campus culture with this wide range of perspectives and experiences by recruiting and encouraging diverse candidates to apply as students, staff and faculty, including people of any race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion or military status.

OSD Accommodation:

Woodbury University is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. Students desiring accommodations due to a physical, learning or psychological disability must first complete an Accommodations Request Form, which can be downloaded from <http://go.woodbury.edu>, and found under “Academic Resources.” Accommodations cannot be granted prior to the instructor’s receipt of a Notification of Special Needs Release Form from the Disabilities Coordinator. Accommodations are never provided retroactively. (For more information, contact Dr. Teresa Young, Disabilities Coordinator in the Whitten Center (818) 394-3345.)

Religious Accommodation:

If you require any accommodation on religious grounds, please alert me in writing as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:

All instances of academic offences including plagiarism, cheating on exams, and multiple submission of work, will be handled in accordance with official Woodbury University policy, which can be found in the Student Handbook on the University website Please read the policy and ensure that you understand it.