PHL 315: ETHICS – THEORIES OF GOOD AND EVIL
Univ. of Alabama at Birmingham | Fall 2014

1. BASIC COURSE INFO

Prof. Information:
Prof: Dr. Joshua May
Office: Humanities Bldg, Rm 425
Email: joshmay@uab.edu
Website: www.joshdmay.com
Office Hours: TR 3:30-4:30pm (& by appt.)

Lecture Info:
Time: TR 12:00 pm - 3:15 pm (sect. 2E)
Location: Education Bldg. 147
Course Website: Canvas

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course covers some central debates in ethical theory, which ultimately seeks a general explanation of what makes something morally right or wrong. A major focus is on opponents and proponents of consequentialist theories, such as utilitarianism, which judge the morality of an act solely in terms of its consequences (think: “the ends justify the means”). Alternative theories insist on including other elements as well, such as the nature of the act itself, human rights, rationality, and the character of the actor. Another key theme of the course is metaethics, which tries to answer questions such as: Are there moral facts? If so, are they in some sense objective? Is moral judgment grounded primarily in reasoning or in emotion? What motivates us to do what we believe is right?

Prerequisite: One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
(1) Understand some of major moral theories and concepts.
(2) Explain and critically assess moral arguments.
(3) Evaluate and justify one’s moral beliefs.

REQUIRED TEXTS
(2) A few additional readings will be available on the Canvas course page (as PDFs).

ASSESSMENT
1. Participation (in class) 5% of grade (Due: N/A) [weekly]
2. Quizzes (x5) (in class) 10% of grade (see Schedule) [~every other week]
3. Mid-Term (in class) 20% of grade (Date: 9/30) [6th week]
4. Essay (5-7 pgs.) 30% of grade (Due: 10/28) [10th week]
5. Final Exam (in class) 35% of grade (Date: 12/9) [15th week]

Note: These due dates are pretty firm, but they are subject to minor changes.
UPDATES
Electronic announcements and updates will be made occasionally on the course website. So do check the site frequently.

MATERIAL COVERED
We will be discussing material primarily from the text. However, we may not cover everything in the assigned reading, and sometimes material will be brought up in lecture that is not in the readings. So it’s crucial that you come to class. Likewise, there may be some material in the readings you’ll be accountable for that we don’t discuss in great detail in lecture.

HANDOUTS/SLIDES
There will be some handouts or slides from time to time, and they will be available on the course website. These are to help students catch up who miss class for legitimate reasons. I’m also doing this so students don’t have to take such copious notes during class. Keep in mind, though, the handouts will be rather barebones. You will likely want to supplement them with your own notes from class.

BUDDY SYSTEM
Early in the semester, I’ll set aside time for you to exchange contact information with some fellow classmates. When needed (e.g. if you have to miss class), get in touch with them to share notes or discuss the course material.

NO LAPTOPS, PHONES, ETC.
During class, turn off and put away all computers, phones, and other electronic devices. Texting, instant messaging, web surfing, message checking, e-mailing, are all distractions to you and your fellow classmates. It’s becoming so rampant that the best option at this point seems to ban it all during lecture. Think of the class meetings as a “philosophy retreat” where you focus on only philosophy. That’s not too much to ask. (If you have a special need for some such device, talk with me and of course we can make exceptions as needed.)

A rationale I endorse:

Penalties: If I catch you during class, I’ll ask you to put the device away and you won’t be marked as present for that lecture. If the problem persists, you will need to leave.

2. ASSIGNMENTS

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE
Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to do so on time. I will do roll call and track attendance (this isn’t just part of your grade; it’s also for me to learn names). More than about 5 minutes late for class will be counted “absent,” although that shouldn’t discourage you from coming that day.

Your Participation grade will primarily be determined by absences. We’ll have about 28 class meetings and your grade will largely be determined by the proportion of lectures you attend. For example, if you attend 75% of lectures, then you will likely receive around a C grade. However, I will reward those who consistently participate in class and penalize those who consistently cause problems. Ultimately, acquiring a few unexcused absences isn’t very detrimental, provided you aren’t disruptive in class. But do note that missing a number of classes
would likely make it difficult for you to do well in the course overall, simply because you will miss important material.

**Excused absences:** These require proper documentation for either jury duty (note from the court), military service (note from military superior), or required university-sponsored activities (documentation from UAB official or supervisor). Remember, students with excused absences are still required to complete work and readings by the required due dates.

*Participate in class discussion:* I’m very interested in what you think of our readings and any light you may have to shed on them. For example, ask questions (even if just about clarification) and make comments (such as criticizing one of the authors we’re discussing).

**Quizzes/In-Class Writing**
These will be either *multiple choice, short answer, or short essay* (or some combination), depending on the week. I’ll mix it up so there are a number of different testing methods used. So these may involve *some essay writing*. The quizzes occur about every other week. In the end, I’ll drop your lowest quiz score. Thus, you can miss one quiz without any penalty. *No quizzes can be made up without very special circumstances.*

**Exams**
Both the midterm and final exams will involve *short-answer questions* (e.g. multiple-choice, fill in the blank, define terms) and *short essays*. In advance of each of the exams, you will be given a handout on the exam format and sample questions. The exams won’t have trick questions or obscure identifications.

**Essay**
(Later in the term I’ll provide detailed information on how to write a philosophical essay. But note now that you will be required to write at the college-level. Poor writing skills will hinder one’s performance in this course.)

**Late & Make-Up Assignments**
In-class assignments (e.g. exams): You can make up such assignments only if you have very extenuating circumstances (e.g. medical, military, jury duty) that you can document. Make sure you let me know as soon as such special circumstances arise; otherwise I might not be able to work something out with you. Moreover, make-ups are conditional on our being able to schedule a mutually convenient time for it and a time that is either soon before or after the original assignment occurred. For example, don’t expect to be able to take an exam two weeks after (or before) the rest of the class takes it.

**Cheating (Including Plagiarism)**
Don’t cheat. I warn against this at the beginning of every semester, and still nearly every time at least one person gets caught! *I take this extremely seriously.* I will give all cheaters a failing grade and report the incidents to the university.

Note that if you cut something from a Web document and paste it into your paper, you are plagiarizing (even if you mix up the wording a bit). The papers you will be asked to write are *not research papers* in that there is no need to look to outside sources (including anything on the Internet); you just need to read the material required for class, attend the lectures, and take your time thinking it all through. But if you do poke around the Web, you must of course diligently cite and quote all consulted sources.
Furthermore, it’s your responsibility to make sure that your work doesn’t violate university policies about plagiarism and other academic cheating. (Compare: Ignorance of the law does not excuse.) If you need any help in understanding these standards or are in any doubt about whether your work for this course violates them, check with me. For your convenience, here is the link to UAB’s page on academic integrity:

https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code

All UAB students are expected to be familiar with the UAB Academic Honor Code, as well as any honor codes that are specific to their schools or disciplines. The code represents a commitment to integrity in the academic community and a respect for an individual’s educational endeavors:

I have read and, by choosing to become a member of the UAB academic community, accept the UAB Academic Honor Code. I understand that violation of this code will result in penalties as severe as expulsion from the university. I promise and confirm that I will not, at any time and under any circumstances, involve myself with abetting, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or misrepresentation while enrolled as a student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

**CALCULATING YOUR GRADE**

All scores will be out of 100 (in other words, a percentage). To calculate your grade, multiply the percentage weight for each assignment by your score (out of 100) for that assignment, then add up the results for each assignment. Finally, convert that total score for the course into a letter grade using standard conversions (e.g. 92% = A-, 87% = B+, etc.). The following chart is an example to help illustrate how to do the calculation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment 1</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Multiplier</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>12.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>.25</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>19.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>30.45</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>80 (B)</strong></td>
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Note: For final grades, UAB only uses A, B, C, D, F (no +/-).

**3. STUDENT SUPPORT**

**OFFICE HOURS**

I encourage you all to talk with me outside of class (e.g. in office hours). If you are unable to see me during my regular slot or talk to me before or after class, I’m happy to schedule a mutually convenient time. Talking to me about the material, especially in preparation for an upcoming assignment, is not just for those who fear failing the course; it’s also for those who want to secure an “A” (or whatever your goal is).

**EMAILING ME**

I’m available to contact by email. I can even answer relatively short and specific questions that way. If you have a more detailed and lengthy question, talk to me in person.
**WEBSITE**
The website for this class has some links that may prove useful in the course.
(Note: My personal website also has some information and links to several resources for philosophy. But what is particularly useful for this course will be provided on the web page for this course, not my personal website.)


**WRITING SUPPORT**
I will be expecting you to write college-level papers for this course, so I will be expecting few errors in the areas of spelling, grammar, professional academic style, and so on. Furthermore, writing in philosophy is often very different from writing in other disciplines. Since philosophy requires the clear communication of often difficult and subtle ideas, weak writing renders high level performance impossible. So I encourage you to talk to me about your paper (and exams) before the due date if you have any questions. (More details on requirements for papers will be provided later on in the course.)

In general, I am happy to discuss with you drafts of your papers before they are turned in. However, I will *not* accept emailed or dropped off drafts. Instead, you are welcome and encouraged to bring your drafts into office hours (or make an appointment) to discuss them.

**IF YOU FACE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES**
If for any reason you are struggling—due to medical issues or otherwise—get in touch with me as soon as possible. I’m happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully. But you must get in touch as soon as you know there is a problem. Waiting until the last minute, for example, might mean we can’t work anything out.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**
If you are registered with Disability Support Services (DSS), please make an appointment as soon as possible to discuss accommodations that may be necessary for this course. If you have a disability but have not yet contacted DSS, please contact them as soon as possible (934-4205) or visit them (at 516 Hill University Center). Remember that special accommodations for students with disabilities are not retroactive. Students must obtain an accommodation letter from DSS at the *beginning* of each semester, get that letter to the instructor, and contact the instructor several days before the accommodation is required. Please see DSS FAQ’s at:

[https://www.uab.edu/students/services/disability-support-services](https://www.uab.edu/students/services/disability-support-services)

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**4. READINGS**

**WHEN TO READ**
Students are expected to *do the assigned reading*. You should aim for doing the reading the day it’s covered in class—or at least around that time. The point of this is: *don’t give up on the reading*. If you didn’t get to it before we covered it in class, make sure you do it after. This is especially important because philosophy involves close examination of often fairly dense arguments. However, you aren’t expected to have figured it all out before you walk in the door. That’s what we’re going to try to do in class. (Notice also that I’ve provided the page numbers of each reading so you can see the length and plan ahead.)
Some Advice: Don’t underestimate the power of mental fatigue. When reading, if you find that you can’t process it, try reading it again. If you still feel rather lost, it might be that you’re getting mentally exhausted. Try putting the book down and coming back to it later, even perhaps the next day. It’s quite likely that you’ll find it much easier after a break.

READING LIST
The list of readings below is subject to change. All readings are in the course text (), unless marked “PDF” (in which case I’ll make them available to you online). We’ll try to go through these articles following this exact schedule, but it is not set in stone. You’ll need to come to class to know where we are exactly.

1. Intro: Ethical Theorizing

2. Egoism: An Initial Challenge for Morality

3. Moral Realism: Judgment & Objectivity

4. Moral Motivation: A Problem for Realism?
   1. Hume, David (1739). “Of the Influencing Motives of the Will.” Ethical Theory, ch. 1, pp. 7-9 [only read first section].

5. Sentimentalism: Reason vs. Passion
6. Consequentialism: Classical Utilitarianism

7. Consequentialism: Contemporary Variations

8. Rationalism: Deontological Foundations

9. Deontology: Kantianism & Contractualism

10. Knowing Right from Wrong & Morality’s Scope

11. Virtue Ethics: A Third Way?

**SCHEDULE**
(Note: Subject to minor revision. Keep coming to class to know where we are.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings*</th>
<th>Key Events</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/26</td>
<td>1. Intro: Ethical Theorizing</td>
<td>Syllabus, Plato, May</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8/28</td>
<td>1. Intro: The Trolley Problem</td>
<td>Foot</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>2. Egoism: Issues and Motivations</td>
<td>May</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9/4</td>
<td>2. Egoism: Arguments Against</td>
<td>Feinberg</td>
<td>Quiz 1</td>
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<td>9/11</td>
<td>3. Realism: vs. Relativism</td>
<td>Gensler</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>9/16</td>
<td>4. Motivation: Humean Challenge</td>
<td>Hume, Foot</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>4. Motivation: A Realist Reply</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Quiz 2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>9/23</td>
<td>5. Sentiment: Hume against Reason</td>
<td>Hume</td>
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<td>9/25</td>
<td>5. Sentiment: Scientific Update</td>
<td>Prinz</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>Midterm in Class</td>
<td>Midterm</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>6. Consequentialism: Objections</td>
<td>Nozick, Pettit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10/9</td>
<td>How to Write in Philosophy</td>
<td>Handout</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10/14</td>
<td>7. Consequentialism: Act vs. Rule</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Quiz 3</td>
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<td>10/16</td>
<td>7. Consequentialism: Alienation</td>
<td>Railton</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10/21</td>
<td>8. Rationalism: Kant</td>
<td>Kant, Korsgaard</td>
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<td>10/23</td>
<td>8. Rationalism: Objections</td>
<td>Arpaly</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>10/28</td>
<td>No Lecture – Finalize Essay</td>
<td>Essay Due</td>
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<td>10/30</td>
<td>9. Deontology: Kantianism</td>
<td>Shafer-Landau, Kant (x2)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/4</td>
<td>9. Deontology: Contractualism</td>
<td>Scanlon</td>
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<td>11/6</td>
<td>Catch-up Day</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Quiz 4</td>
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<td>11/13</td>
<td>10. Moral Knowledge: Neuroethics</td>
<td>Singer</td>
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<td>11/18</td>
<td>10. Morality’s Scope: Narrow?</td>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>Quiz 5</td>
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<td>12/2</td>
<td>11. Virtue: Situationist Critique</td>
<td>Doris</td>
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<td>12/4</td>
<td>In-Class Review for Final</td>
<td>Handout</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>12/8-12</td>
<td>Final Exam: Tues. Dec. 9, 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm</td>
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* Read the listed pieces for the corresponding lecture. Match authors' last names with the Reading List.