PHILOSOPHY 2400: Ethics

Meeting: TTh 10:30–11:45am; Eccles Business Building (EBB) 216

Instructor: Professor Mike Ashfield | mike.ashfield@usu.edu or contact through Canvas

Office/Student Drop-in Hours: Wednesdays 10am-12pm over Zoom and by appointment

Course Description
The goal of this course is to work on and improve the ability of students to think about complex, difficult pieces of writing and respond to them on their own terms and in novel situations.

The medium through which we will develop ourselves as thinkers will be ethics, specifically ethical theory. This course will cover some of the most important moral philosophers and theories in the Western philosophical tradition. We will cover Utilitarianism (Mill), Deontology (Kant), and Virtue Ethics (Aristotle). We will cover how each ethical theory would determine what is of moral significance and the ethical value of particular actions. To this end, we will discuss the readings in class. Students will also write papers that will require them to understand the arguments that the authors in the texts that we cover. By the end of this course, you will hopefully be able to explain why these authors accept the ethical theories that they do, where their ethical principles come from, and how those general principles might apply in specific ethical cases.

The skills in this course, however, will be applicable in any field or discipline that you go into. No matter where you go or what you do, you will need to read, understand, and respond to what other people have said. This course will be an opportunity for you to engage with novel information and practices that you probably are not familiar with, which is exactly the kind of “fish out of water” experience you will need to learn this specific skill.

Required Texts
Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill
Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, Immanuel Kant
Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle

I have assigned reasonably priced editions/translation of each of these texts. However, they are all free online. If you have other editions of them, you are welcome to use them, but you will be responsible for figuring out how the reading assignments on the syllabus correlate to your text. The additional readings will be posted to Blackboard. You will also need to bring the texts with you to class, so keep that in mind as well if you use an alternative method for obtaining the texts.

Any additional readings on the syllabus will be posted to Canvas.
ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Questions: 20%

The academy is about the intellect. It is about the mind’s ability to grasp and comprehend truth, goodness, and rightness (among many other important and valuable things). To this end, the three questions of academia are as follows:

“Huh?”
“Really?”
“So what?”

“Huh?” is about what someone has said. It is the ability or process of understanding what another person has tried to communicate. This is an act of interpretation. Whenever someone says something, it is always a separate process for the listener(s) to determine what the person said. This may seem trivial, but it is not (especially in a field like philosophy). Interpreting what other people have said is often ambiguous, difficult, or contested. This does not mean there are not right answers, or that some answers are not better or more plausible than others. However, it does mean that a simple question like “huh” is actually an exercise or activity of the intellect, not a matter of vain or rote repetition or regurgitation.

“Really?” is about justification or reasons. That is, it is about determining why someone believes or defends something that they have said. It is the process of both understanding why another person holds the position that they do and evaluating for yourself whether or not those reasons or arguments are satisfactory. This is also an exercise of the intellect. Rationality is about the search for reasons. Why do we believe as we do? Why should we act or behave in a certain way?

“So what?” is about why something matters. It is determining the value or importance of information, concepts, ideas, or arguments within a human life. Why does something matter to us? Should we care about something? How does it make us wiser, more thoughtful, or better? For every day that we assigned readings in class, you will need to send to me your answers to these questions in regards to the readings for the day. You will take no more than three sentences (for each question) to explain about each reading the “Huh,” the “Really,” and the “So What.” In other words, you will briefly explain what the author said, why the author said it, and why it matters or potentially matters for their larger project, ethics, or human life generally. Your answers to these questions will be due thirty minutes before the beginning of class. I will use them (as should you) to facilitate class discussion. It will prepare you to engage in a rigorous examination and consideration of the text in conjunction with myself and your classmates.

Based on the Spring 2021 Phil 2400 syllabus and course design of Dr. Michael Otteson
This is a lot of work. However, it is work that is essential for developing critical thinking skills that you will use everywhere. As Aristotle and the other virtue ethicists know, any skill requires practices to master. There is no way around improving other than doing it over and over again with an eye towards improvement. However, I will not grade these responses on content. If you have made a good faith effort to do them, then you will get your points for the day. Furthermore, I will give you seven days during the semester where you don’t have to turn in questions. Therefore, if you respond to the questions for all but seven of the days where we have assigned readings (20 of 27), you will get full credit for the semester.

**Exegetical Papers: 60%**
The goal of this course is to examine complex and difficult texts about a weighty topic (ethics) and correctly explain key concepts from them. This process of interpretation is sometimes called “exegesis.” These assignments are a way to practice this skill. For each ethical theory that we cover, I will give out a prompt. It will ask you to explain a key concept or idea from each ethical theory in less than four pages. You will need to find key passages from the text where each author discusses the relevant topic, quote that author, and explain what they mean in your own words. Because I want you to improve over time, I will give special consideration to papers later in the semester if you show a lot of improvement. Your reading question responses should help you immensely when writing these papers.

**Final Exam: 20%**
There will be a final cumulative exam that covers material from all aspects of the course. Preparing for this exam will help you review and understand the material from this course. It will include material that is not directly covered by the papers. Your reading questions should help you prepare for this exam.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1**
- 8/31 Introduction
- 9/2 Plato, *Republic* I

**Week 2**
- 9/7 Plato, *Republic* II (to 367e); Mandatory Reading Questions
- 9/9 Mill (*Utilitarianism*) Chapter I; Class Seating Chart Finalized in Canvas

**Week 3**
- 9/14 Mill Chapter II
- 9/16 Mill Chapter III

Based on the Spring 2021 Phil 2400 syllabus and course design of Dr. Michael Otteson | 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>9/21</th>
<th>Mill Chapter IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9/23</td>
<td>Mill Chapter V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>9/28</th>
<th><strong>Utilitarianism Paper Due:</strong> Peter Singer: “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Unspeakable conversations or how I spent one day as a token cripple at Princeton University”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>10/5</th>
<th>Kant (<em>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</em>), Preface, First Edition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>Kant, First Section</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>10/12</th>
<th>Kant, Second Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/14</td>
<td>Kant, Second Section</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fall Break: October 15–19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>10/19</th>
<th>No Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/21</td>
<td>Korsgaard: “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>10/26</th>
<th>Korsgaard: “Kant’s Formula of Humanity”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/28</td>
<td>Kant, Third Section</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>11/2</th>
<th>Korsgaard – Right to Lie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/4</td>
<td><strong>Kant Paper Due:</strong> Aristotle (<em>Nicomachean Ethics</em>) I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>11/9</th>
<th>Aristotle II.1–4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>Aristotle II.5–9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>11/16</th>
<th>Aristotle III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/18</td>
<td>Aristotle IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>11/23</th>
<th>Aristotle V &amp; VI.1–8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/25</td>
<td>No Class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thanksgiving Holiday: November 24–26**

Based on the Spring 2021 Phil 2400 syllabus and course design of Dr. Michael Otteson | 4
Week 14
11/30 Aristotle VI.9–13
12/2 Aristotle VII & X.7–8

Week 15
12/7 Aristotle Paper Due; Julia Annas: “Applying the Virtues to Ethics”
12/9 Julia Annas: “Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism”; Mandatory Reading Questions

Week 16 Finals Week
Cumulative Exam (20%)

COURSE POLICIES

Classroom Civility
Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read Student Code Article V Section V-3 for more information.

COVID-19 Classroom Protocols
See Canvas for updates.

Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibilities
Academic freedom is the right to teach, study, discuss, investigate, discover, create, and publish freely. Academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members in teaching and of students in learning. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in teaching, research, and creative activities, subject to the limitations imposed by professional responsibility. Faculty Code Policy #403 further defines academic freedom and professional responsibilities.

Academic Integrity – “The Honor System”
Each student has the right and duty to pursue his or her academic experience free of dishonesty. To enhance the learning environment at Utah State University and to develop student academic integrity, each student agrees to the following Honor Pledge: “I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity.”
A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor Pledge:

- Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community;
- Understands that each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is awarded by this institution; and
- Is a welcomed and valued member of Utah State University.

**Academic Dishonesty**

The instructor of this course will take appropriate actions in response to Academic Dishonesty, as defined the University’s Student Code. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- Cheating: using, attempting to use, or providing others with any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, examinations, or in any other academic exercise or activity. Unauthorized assistance includes:
  - Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done “individually;”
  - Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
  - Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
  - Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
  - Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
  - Submitting substantially the same work for credit in more than one class, except with prior approval of the instructor; or engaging in any form of research fraud.
- Falsification: altering or fabricating any information or citation in an academic exercise or activity.
- Plagiarism: representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.

For additional information go to: [ARTICLE VI. University Regulations Regarding Academic Integrity](#)
Sexual Harassment/Title IX
Utah State University is committed to creating and maintaining an environment free from acts of sexual misconduct and discrimination and to fostering respect and dignity for all members of the USU community. Title IX and USU Policy 339 address sexual harassment in the workplace and academic setting.

The university responds promptly upon learning of any form of possible discrimination or sexual misconduct. Any individual may contact USU’s Office of Equity for available options and resources or clarification. The university has established a complaint procedure to handle all types of discrimination complaints, including sexual harassment (USU Policy 305), and has designated the Office of Equity Director/Title IX Coordinator as the official responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of sexual harassment.

Withdrawal Policy and ‘I’ Grade Policy
Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term ‘extenuating’ circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Students with Disabilities
USU welcomes students with disabilities. If you have, or suspect you may have, a physical, mental health, or learning disability that may require accommodations in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) (Links to an external site.) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, drc@usu.edu). All disability related accommodations must be approved by the DRC. Once approved, the DRC will coordinate with faculty to provide accommodations.

Students who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or who contract COVID-19 may also be eligible for accommodations.
**Diversity Statement**
Regardless of intent, careless or ill-informed remarks can be offensive and hurtful to others and detract from the learning climate. If you feel uncomfortable in a classroom due to offensive language or actions by an instructor or student(s) regarding ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, contact:

- Division of Student Affairs: [https://studentaffairs.usu.edu](https://studentaffairs.usu.edu), (435) 797-1712, studentservices@usu.edu, TSC 220
- Student Legal Services: [https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/studentadvocacy/legal-services](https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/studentadvocacy/legal-services), (435) 797-2912, TSC 326,
- Access and Diversity: [http://accesscenter.usu.edu](http://accesscenter.usu.edu), (435) 797-1728, access@usu.edu; TSC 315
- Multicultural Programs: [http://accesscenter.usu.edu/multiculture](http://accesscenter.usu.edu/multiculture), (435) 797-1728, TSC 315
- LGBTQA Programs: [http://accesscenter.usu.edu/lgbtqa](http://accesscenter.usu.edu/lgbtqa), (435) 797-1728, TSC 3145
- Provost's Office Diversity Resources: [https://www.usu.edu/provost/diversity](https://www.usu.edu/provost/diversity), (435) 797-8176

You can learn about your student rights by visiting: The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University: [https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode](https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode)

**Grievance Process**
Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Student Code: Article VII. Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures can be found at:

- [Student Conduct](#)
- [Student Code](#)
- [Academic Integrity](#)
- [USU Selected Academic Policies and Procedures](#)
- [USU Academic Policies and Procedures](#)
- [Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy](#)

**Emergency Procedures**
In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building by the sound of the fire/emergency alarm system or by a building representative. In the event of a disaster that may interfere with either notification, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., in an earthquake when shaking ceases or immediately when a fire is discovered). Turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs.
Mental Health

Mental health is critically important for the success of USU students. As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University provides free services for students to assist them with addressing these and other concerns. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS).

Students are also encouraged to download the “SafeUT App” to their smartphones. The SafeUT application is a 24/7 statewide crisis text and tip service that provides real-time crisis intervention to students through texting and a confidential tip program that can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide related issues.