

PHIL 220: Ethics and Values

Morgan State University

Fall 2019

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Office: Holmes Hall 303

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11-12pm, or by Appointment

Course Description

The views we have about good and bad play a decisive role not only in determining our actions, but in determining how we think of ourselves and others, and how others think of us. Such views are of paramount personal and social importance. But how often do we get the opportunity to think explicitly and seriously about our moral beliefs and about what can be said for or against them. This sort of philosophical examination is what we will undertake this semester.

Philosophical investigation calls not just for clearly stating your position on a certain problem, but also for thinking about what support there is for it in the face of possible objections. That is, to think philosophically is to think an issue through so that you can explain to others (as well as to yourself) what strikes you as sensible about having those views as opposed to having other views. After all, anyone can say that morality reduces to maximizing happiness or that a woman has a right to an abortion, so we will be going deeper to discover what support, if any, such claims have.

To achieve this, we will be reading what others have said about these issues, not necessarily for the sake of agreeing with them, but rather for the sake of using the readings to get clear on what some of the questions are within each subject, what is at stake in each subject, and what some examples of carefully considered positions look like. So we will be using these readings as springboards for our discussions. And discussion will be an important component of the course because studying philosophy is the development of a skill and not mere memorization of a body of knowledge. Thus, students will be expected to engage themselves with the reading and the class discussions. To engage oneself is not merely to pay attention to the material, but to be able to discuss, explain, support, or criticize.

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Become familiar with different ethical theories and be able to apply them to different situations.
- 2) Cultivate an ability to critically analyze and evaluate philosophical texts, ideas, problems and questions.
- 3) Construct positions, arguments, and interpretations through textual analysis and evaluation.

Course Text:

Plato. *The Trials of Socrates: Six Classic Texts*. Trans. C.D.C. Reeve. Ed. Peter Meineck. ISBN: 0872205894. (Optional)

Additional readings will be posted to Canvas.

Course Requirements:

The evaluation for the course will consist of six items (totaling 550 points):

1. Discussion Board (20 points each, totaling 120 points)
2. Participation (80 points)
3. Pop Quizzes (50 points)
4. Group Discussions (60 points)
5. Four Homework Assignments (35 points each, totaling 140 points)
6. Final Project (100 points)

Numeric-To-Letter-Grade Scale:

A	100 %	to 94.0%
A-	< 94.0 %	to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 %	to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 %	to 84.0%
B-	< 84.0 %	to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 %	to 77.0%
C	< 77.0 %	to 74.0%
C-	< 74.0 %	to 70.0%
D+	< 70.0 %	to 67.0%
D	< 67.0 %	to 64.0%
D-	< 64.0 %	to 61.0%
F	< 61.0 %	to 0.0%

1) Discussion Board

You will have ten opportunities to complete the Discussion Board Assignment, but only the best six out of ten will count towards your final grade. This means that you are only technically required to complete six of the Discussion Board Assignments. However, you are welcome to complete all ten and I will count the best six towards your final grade.

In order to complete a Discussion Board Assignment, students will upload one Question for Consideration and two Responses to Other Students. Details about each are provided below:

a) Questions for Consideration (QFC):

These posts are due by the beginning of class every time you see “(QFC Due)” on the syllabus.

A “Question For Consideration” may be about any philosophical aspect of the assigned texts we have read for that module, but (1) it must be clearly and directly tied to a text by indicating a sentence or passage quoted from the text, and the page number on which the sentence or passage was found. (2) Not only should a selection and a page number appear, but a philosophical question about the selection or its context should be supplied. (3) Thoughtful and excellently prepared quotes supply a reason the student is asking that question, and further, (4) hazard an educated guess as to the answer. By an educated guess, I mean a guess informed by the text, so the best QFCs will include (5) a quote from another point in the text to support one’s own answer to one’s own question.

Students will sometimes be asked to volunteer to share their QFC with the class. If students do not volunteer, I proceed to start calling on students to read their question aloud. So aim for a question that you are unafraid to share with the rest of the group. We can be very helpful in working out the answers to questions about the text together, so consider the class a collection of allies in the struggle for understanding.

b) Responses to Other Students (ROS):

Your responses are due by the beginning of class every time you see “(ROS Due)” on the syllabus.

Each student must respond to at least two other students’ posts. Comments on others’ posts must be between 100 and 250 words. These responses will be evaluated according to their engagement with other posts and according to the quality of the writing, thinking, and discussion. That means that the response should not just repeat what someone else has written, but should respond and comment on the previous posts or questions, advance and deepen the discussion. You can do this in various ways: mention an observation, claim, or supporting

reason raised in the text that deepens the discussion; restate what another student has said, or restate a claim from the text, and then ask a *question* or suggest a clarification that might lead to a deeper discussion; offer an *example* (perhaps from personal experience) that either supports a claim being discussed or calls it into question; or suggest a different way to think about an issue.

It is crucial that everyone be very respectful of each other in the discussion threads. Take an extra minute before posting in a thread to make sure that your words and tone are appropriate—especially when disagreeing with a fellow student.

2) Participation

Participation is based upon active involvement in discussion and group work, engaged reading and preparing for class, answering questions when called upon, and attendance (see the attendance guidelines below). You must complete the required readings for each session and bring your book to class.

3) Pop Quizzes

Throughout the semester I will give you 5 pop quizzes worth 10 points each. These quizzes will be given randomly at the beginning of select classes. You may only make up a quiz if you contact me *before* the start of the class in which the quiz is initially given. You cannot take the quiz if you are more than five minutes late to class.

4) Group Discussions: “Save the Last Word for Me”

Students will be sorted into groups of 2-3 and will be asked to have a discussion about the readings for the most recent course module in front of the class. You will be graded independently on your contribution to the discussion, but the discussion will depend on you interacting with the other members of your group.

1) Each member of your group will select a brief passage from the module’s readings that you thought was both important and complex. You should prepare a three minute explanation of why you chose the passage. However, do not reveal why you chose the passage at this stage. You will reveal this at the end of the discussion!

You should work independently on this part of the assignment, but check with the members of your group to make sure you have not chosen the same passage. It is good to have a backup!

At least 24 hours prior to the date of your Group Discussion, you must post your passage to the Group Discussion Discussion Board on Canvas. Make sure to include the name of the text the passage comes from, the author’s name, and the page number the quote appears on. This will allow your group members and the rest of the class to prepare for the next day’s discussion. Once the passages have been posted, you should prepare a two minute response to the passage selected by each of your group members. Your responses can address any of the following:

- Why do you think this passage is significant?

- What does it make you think about?
- What questions does it raise for you?

2) On the day of the Group Discussion, a volunteer member of the group will identify the part of the article that s/he found to be most significant and read it out loud to the group. This person says nothing about why s/he chose that particular passage.

3) The other group members then have two minutes each to respond to the passage — saying what it makes them think about, what questions it raises for them, etc.

4) The first participant then has 3 minutes to state why s/he chose that part of the article and to respond to—or build on—what s/he heard from his/her colleagues.

5) The same pattern is followed until all members of the group have had a chance to be the presenter and to have “the last word.”

5) Homework Assignments

You will be asked to complete four homework assignments throughout the semester. The due dates for each homework are clearly marked on the syllabus—each homework assignment is due *by midnight* and is to be submitted on Canvas. You will be able to find the prompt for each homework on Canvas.

6) Final Project

For your final project, you have the option of writing a 4-6 page paper *or* of giving a 10-15 minute presentation on the topic of your choosing.

What: Your final project consists of a position or ‘argument’ paper *or* presentation offering a thesis and reasons for the thesis, centrally supported by documentation of sources for the intellectual content. *You must incorporate at least one of the texts from this course as a primary source for your project.* Empirical claims offered to support your arguments must be documented by reliable, credible, and appropriately unbiased sources (this means locating alternatives to ThinkProgress, Breitbart, and other sources that are not in this category; see Parameters and Criteria below as to why).

Who: All papers/presentations are expected to be of your own authorship. Words and facts not created by you must be attributed to a source. Plagiarism is intolerable and I pursue the available punishments for it.

When: If you choose to write a paper, it is due **Wednesday, December 4th** by midnight. If you choose to give a presentation, you will need to be ready to present it in class during the final week of the semester (we will sign up for presentations in class). Papers or presentations later than the deadline will receive a 10-point grade reduction for every 24 hour period in which they are late.

Where: All papers should be submitted via **Canvas**. Students choosing to do a final presentation must submit a bibliography on **Canvas** by midnight on the day of their presentation. If Canvas is not functioning, then students ought to email the paper to my address (mary.brennan@morgan.edu). Technological obstacles are not a sufficient reason to omit to provide the paper.

Course Policies

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class meetings. Attendance is necessary to maintain your participation grade. Arrive and be prepared by the beginning of the class. Tardiness or leaving early will affect participation for that day. I allow three missed classes (1 week) without penalty (including those for illness). After the third absence, the student's semester grade will be lowered one grade for each unexcused absence (for example, if you have one unexcused absence an A will become an A-, an A- will become a B+, a B + will become a B, and so on). I will be taking attendance each class, but it is your responsibility to keep track of your own absences. If you cannot attend class please send me an email ahead of time and get in touch with another student for notes or discussion in order to be prepared for the next class you attend. If you are an athlete or you have a religious holiday, which will require your absence, please tell me at the beginning of the semester.

Course Website on Canvas: We will use Canvas for our course schedule, discussion board posts, grades, and additional texts and materials.

Late Work: It is important for all of us to be working on the same material at the same time. Late (even *barely* late) work loses the point equivalent of one full grade, and a further grade for each additional twenty-four hours of lateness. If for some reason you cannot complete an assignment it is your responsibility to notify me **in advance** and to provide proper documentation. Technical issues are not acceptable excuses for late work.

Tardiness: The class is only 50 minutes long, if you are more than 5 minutes late you will be counted as absent for the day. If you are coming from across campus and will have a hard time making it to class on time, please let me know and I will take this into consideration.

Cell Phones: TBA

Other Electronics: TBA

Communication Check your Morgan e-mail regularly. Class announcements such as updates, cancellations or assignment changes will be communicated by e-mail and/or Canvas. Although I often check email and the discussion board during the weekend, I cannot guarantee that I will respond to emails sent over the weekend.

Academic Conduct: It is crucial that everyone be very respectful of each other in class and in the discussion threads. Take an extra minute before posting in a thread to make sure that your words and tone are appropriate. Counterarguments are always welcome, and in fact are encouraged; but when we disagree, it is important to do so in a productive manner.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and academic cheating are prohibited by University policy. Your work must be your own, and all sources must be cited according to the Chicago Manual Style (including books, articles, electronic resources on the internet, pictures, or anything else you reference that has not been written or created by you). Anyone caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment or the course. *If you are uncertain about whether completing an assignment in a particular way is cheating or plagiarism please contact me.*

Course Schedule and Readings:

Religion, Morality, and Protest

Week 1:

Monday, 8/19: Welcome and Course Overview
Wednesday, 8/21: Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 3-28
Friday, 8/23: Sophocles, *Antigone*, p. 29-60

Week 2:

Monday, 8/26: Sophocles, *Antigone*, continued
Wednesday, 8/28: Sophocles, *Antigone*, continued (QFC Due)
Friday, 8/30: Discussion (ROS Due)

Divine Command Theory: The Laws of Men versus the Laws of the Gods

Week 3:

Monday, 9/2: Labor Day, No Class
Wednesday, 9/4: Plato, "Euthyphro," in *The Trials of Socrates*
Friday, 9/6: Plato, "Euthyphro," continued Homework #1 Due

Week 4:

Monday, 9/9: Plato, "Crito," in *The Trials of Socrates* and Martin Luther King, "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"
Wednesday, 9/11: Plato, "Crito" continued (QFC Due)
Friday, 9/13: Discussion (ROS Due)

Cultural Relativism

Week 5:

Monday, 9/16: Benedict "A Defense of Ethical Relativism" and "Sexuality in Two Societies"
Wednesday, 9/18: Rachels, "The Challenges of Cultural Relativism" (QFC Due)
Friday, 9/20: Discussion (ROS Due)

Kant

Week 6:

Monday, 9/23: Kant, from *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*
Wednesday, 9/25: Kant, Continued (QFC Due)
Friday, 9/27: Discussion (ROS Due); Homework #2 Due

Utilitarianism

Week 7:

Monday, 9/30: Mill, from *Utilitarianism*
Wednesday, 10/2: O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" and Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones who walk away from Omelas" (QFC Due)
Friday, 10/4: Discussion (ROS Due)

Classical Theories of Liberty, Freedom, and Fairness

Week 8:

Monday, 10/7: Hobbes, from the *Leviathan*

Wednesday, 10/9: John Stuart Mill, from “On Liberty” (QFC Due)

Friday, 10/11: Discussion (ROS Due)

Responses to Classical Theories of Liberty, Freedom, and Fairness

Week 9:

Monday, 10/14: Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*

Wednesday, 10/16: Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression”

Friday, 10/18: *13th*, Ava DuVernay, 100 min; **Homework #3 Due**

Week 10:

Monday, 10/21: *13th*, Ava DuVernay, 100 min

Wednesday, 10/23: *13th*, Ava DuVernay, 100 min (QFC Due)

Friday, 10/25: Discussion (ROS Due)

Feminism and Ethics

Week 11:

Monday, 10/28: Virginia Held, “Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory”

Wednesday, 10/30: Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (QFC Due)

Friday, 11/1: Discussion (ROS Due)

Abortion

Week 12:

Monday, 11/4: Thomson’s “A Defense of Abortion”

Wednesday, 11/6: Marquis’ “An Argument that Abortion is Wrong” (QFC Due)

Friday, 11/8: Discussion (ROS Due)

Animals and the Environment

Week 13:

Monday, 11/11: David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”

Wednesday, 11/13: Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal” (QFC Due)

Friday, 11/15: Discussion (ROS Due); **Homework #4 Due**

Climate Change

Week 14:

Monday, 11/18: Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption”

Wednesday, 11/20: Chasing Coral, Jeff Orlowski, 93 min

Friday, 11/22: Chasing Coral, Jeff Orlowski, 93 min

Week 15:

Monday, 11/25: Discussion
Wednesday, 11/27: Final Presentations
Friday, 11/29: Thanksgiving Break: No Class

Week 16:

Monday, 12/2: Final Presentations
Wednesday, 12/4: Final Presentations *Final Papers Due on Canvas*

CLA Policy on Academic Dishonesty

- Because ours is a community of scholars, the College of Liberal Arts regards academic dishonesty as a serious offense. Academic dishonesty (plagiarism) is an act in which a student claims the work of another (without authorization, attribution, or citation) as his/her own. This includes and is not limited to written, oral, videotape, audiotape, photograph, or website sources. It is, in fact, a form of stealing.
- A student may not use a direct quote, a paraphrase of another's idea, or substantive ideas without providing credit for the source of information. Plagiarism even extends to submitting the same paper or portions of a paper previously written for two different assignments.
- If an instructor suspects a student of plagiarizing, the instructor may discuss his concerns with the student first because often plagiarism results from carelessness. The student is then advised or reminded of strategies that safeguard against plagiarism.
- If the plagiarism is substantial, the instructor may fail the student, or report the case to the Chair of the Department. In consultation with the Chair of the Department, the instructor may elect to refer the incident to the Departmental Student Faculty Adjudication Committee.

Disability Support

Accommodation for disabilities:

If you require an accommodation due to a disability, please contact the Office of Student Disability Support Services (SDSS) to register. More information regarding the intake procedure can be found on the SDSS website: <http://www.morgan.edu/SDSS>. It is your responsibility to request an accommodation from SDSS before or at the beginning of the semester.

The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) provides and coordinates services to students with disabilities. The SSD program is designed to help ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to University programs and to help provide an environment in which they can be successful while enrolled at Morgan.

Morgan State University is committed to providing barrier-free education to individuals with disabilities and actively works to have its facilities and programs in full compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Prospective or currently enrolled students who have learning, mental or physical disabilities should contact the SSD Coordinator before registering for classes. Accommodations, which may include special registration, reader services, specialized equipment, note takers, sign language interpreters, or other arrangements to aid in removing or circumventing architectural, social, or procedural barriers, may be available to assist students with disabilities.