

PHIL 200.FY1 INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES EUP, FALL 2013
T Th 9:30-10:45, Hendricks 201 Instructor: Stephen J. Sullivan, Ph.D
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Centennial 331 (Dept. of Philosophy, EUP, Edinboro, PA 16444)
Office Hours: MW 1:15-3:15 p.m., T Th 11:00-11:45 a.m. (Centennial 334), and by appoint-
ment at the Edinboro and Erie/Porreco campuses

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The “subtitle” of this course is Morality, Faith, and the Meaning of Life. The course has been approved for General Education credit in Core 6. The only prerequisite is a willingness to think hard about the content and reasonableness of your own views on the course topics and to take alternative views seriously.

We will begin, in Unit I, with an examination of the question whether morality depends on religion. This unit includes an overview of various important theories of morality and a discussion of the question “Why be moral?”. In Unit II we will consider some questions about the rationality and morality of faith, including the issue of salvation for believers vs. non-believers. Finally, in Unit III we will explore the issue of whether the meaning of life depends on religion.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Like virtually all philosophy courses, this is a critical thinking course designed to promote clear thinking and reliable, thoughtful reasoning. In particular, in accordance with the “prerequisite”, the course is primarily intended to help you to enhance your understanding of your own views on the course topics and your ability to express those views in informed, intelligent ways. (The mini-essay, debates, reaction response, and final-exam essay and will reflect that understanding and ability.) To this end my goal is also to acquaint you both with a variety of important philosophical ideas. (Your mastery of these theories and issues will especially be assessed in the tests you take.)

The course is in no way designed to convert students to my own views; indeed I will try to stay neutral on all the controversial issues that we we examine. But this neutrality will not preclude occasional critical comments in my lectures on specific arguments. If you think I am being unfair to some position we consider, please let me know.

REQUIRED READINGS:

This syllabus!

Assigned selections from James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 7th edition --note that earlier editions, though less expensive online, will not be adequate due to differences in content; but you might try online booksellers like Amazon for a decent price. I will also put a copy on reserve at the front desk of Baron-Forness Library.

Additional articles—both required and optional--available online in Baron-Forness Library electronic reserve: www.edinboro.edu; click on or search for library homepage; click on Additional Library Reserves near bottom of page; click on E-Reserves under Quick Links on

rights side of page; use password (ssullivan) to access it; click on Additional Articles folder (Baier, Camus, Clifford, Kavka, Levine, Nagel, Tolstoy, and Wikipedia excerpts on Judaism and Christianity are required; the rest are optional: Christina, Monaghan, Nozick, Plato, Pojman, Zaretsky, Zuckerman)

Required handouts (the study-guide outlines are most important) available in e-reserve; there are also optional handouts in these reserves on topics from each of the three units.

Word to the wise: If you fall behind on the readings you do so at your own peril. The assigned readings are generally not lengthy, but often they are challenging; and I will sometimes call on students in class to ask them about main ideas in the readings. If you really hate to read or write, you may struggle in this course; but these are skills you need to improve in college anyway. And don't be afraid to ask questions in or out of class—you can be sure there are classmates who are as puzzled as you are!

REQUIRED WORK:

Opening mini-essay (2 pp., typed, double-spaced), due Th 8/29: 10% each—see page 7 below for questions to answer

Debate: 10% --see page 7 for possible debate topics

Reading responses (at least one paragraph each, typed, double-spaced): 20% --see page 8 for more information

Reaction paper (2 pp., typed, double-spaced) on FYE service activity or Common Hour discussion: 10% --see page 8 for details; due one week after the event/activity

Two multiple-choice/short-answer tests, Th 10/3 and Th 11/7: 15% each

Non-cumulative final exam (multiple-choice/short-answer and essay), Th 12/12, 8:00 a.m.: 20%

For the attendance policy, extra-credit possibilities, late penalties, warnings about plagiarism and cheating, etc. see pages 5-7

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE:

Unit I: Morality and Religion

Week 1: T 8/27 – Th 8/29

T: Introduction to the course/unit/normative ethics; debate planning

Rdg.: “Some Options in Normative Ethical Theory” handout (optional is EMP Ch. 1)

Th: Ross’s common-sense deontology and the Golden Rule

Rdgs.: “Ross’s Commonsense Deontology”, “Golden Rule”, and “Carl Sagan’s List of Proposed Rules...” handouts (optional are “Metaethical Prologue” and “Carr on Business Bluffing”)

MINI-ESSAY DUE

Week 2: T 9/3 – Th 9/5

T: Culture-based relativism

Rdgs.: EMP Ch. 2*, “Culture-Based Relativism”, “No Offense”, “Is Terrorism Wrong?” handouts (optional are “Chinese Voices”, “The Plight of Indian Widows”)

Th: Kantian ethics, especially respect for persons

Rdgs.: EMP Chs. 9-10* (esp. Sec. 10.1), “Kantian Ethics”, “Family Circus”, “Human Factor”, and “Animal Abuse” handouts

Week 3: T 9/10 – Th 9/12

T: Utilitarianism

Rdgs.: EMP Chs. 7-8*, “Utilitarianism”, “Father’s Choice”, and “...Would You Kill One Person to Save Five?” handouts

Th: Virtue ethics

Rdgs.: EMP Ch. 12*, “Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics” handout (optional is “The Right Kind of Happy”)

Week 4: T 9/17 – Th 9/19

T: The divine-command theory

Rdgs.: EMP Ch. 4* (Sec. 4.3 is optional), “Divine-Command Theory”, “Trends in Religious Belief” handouts (optional are “Biblical Passages...Relevant to Divine-Command Theory”, “Religious Affiliations for U.S. Adults”, “Muslims Observe Feast, Pilgrimage”, “Abortion, the Bible, and the Will of God”)

Th: More on D-C theory, especially. in connection with atheism

Rdgs.: “Christian Jihad”*, “Moral Implausibility Problems for Deuteronomy”, “‘Nones’ on the Rise”, “Being Good For Goodness’ Sake?” handouts (optional are “Abraham’s Curse”, “Judeo-Christian Scripture on Atheism and Morality?”, “Growth of the Non-Religious”)

Week 5: T 9/24 – Th 9/26

T: Why be moral?

Rdgs.: “Why Be Moral?” handout, Kavka article* (optional are Plato article, “Social Scientists Build Case for ‘Survival of the Kindest’”, “Why Do People Behave Badly?”, “Volunteering to Help Others...” handouts)

Th: Religion and reasons for being moral

Rdgs.: “Does Religion Make People Nicer?”*, “Is Atheist Morality Superior to Christian Morality?”, “In the Pew Instead of Prison”, “Atheists in Prison”, “Russell’s Teapot” handouts (optional are Zuckerman and Pojman articles and also “State Constitutions That Discriminate Against Atheists”, “Different Views of God May Influence Academic Cheating”, “People Who Donate to Religions...”, “Religious People Less Driven by Compassion...”, and “Morality Research Sheds Light on the Origins of Religion” handouts)

Unit II: The Rationality and Morality of Faith

Week 6: T 10/1 – Th 10/3

T: 1ST DEBATE; test review

Th: 1ST TEST; introduction to Unit II

Week 7: T 10/8 – Th 10/10

T: Three important distinctions; optional religion “quizzes”

Rdgs.: “The Rationality and Morality of Faith” and “Keep Your Fingers Crossed” handouts; “Religious Knowledge Quiz”/“Test Your Savvy On Religion” handout (distributed in class)

Th: Religious diversity: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Rdgs.: “Global Religious Landscape” handout (distributed in class), Wikipedia excerpts on Judaism* and Christianity* (Additional Articles folder), “Brief Outline of Islam”, “My God is Your God” handouts (optional are “Better Understanding of Muslims Would Enhance America’s Image”, “Shiite vs. Sunni”, Monaghan article)

Week 8: T 10/15 – Th 10/17

T: READING DAY—no class

Th: Religious diversity: Hinduism and Buddhism

Rdgs.: “Brief Outline of Hinduism”, “Many Paths to the Same Summit”*, “Basic Buddhist Doctrines” handouts (optional are “We’re All Hindus Now”, “Buddhists: Theravada, Sinteayana, Mahayana”)

Week 9: T 10/22 – Th 10/24

T: Pascal’s Wager: nonbelief as a foolishly bad bet

Rdgs.: “The Wager”*, “Faith Through Fright”, “Rousseau’s Answer to Pascal?” handouts (optional is “Don’t Play Odds...”)

Th: The ethics of heaven and hell: exclusivism vs. inclusivism about salvation

Rdgs.: “There’s a One-Way Road to Heaven”*, “Diversity in Religion”, “Many Americans Say...”, “Vatican II--Lumen Gentium” handouts (optional are “Vatican Says All Religions Are Not Equal”, “Learning to Live With Other Religions”, “Faith, Works, and Salvation in the Bible”, “Jesus Reconsidered”, “The Education/Religion Connection”)

Week 10: T 10/29 – Th 10/31

T: Milder defenses of faith: faith and nonbelief as equally rational (individual happiness and if time permits, tu quoque)

Rdgs.: Levine article*, “World Survey Links Religion and Happiness...”, “Losing Your Religion May Be Unhealthy” (optional are “Taking Science on Faith”, “‘Secret Ingredient’ in Religion...”, “Religious Beliefs Impact Levels of Worry” and Monaghan article)

Th: HALLOWEEN-COSTUME/BAD TIE CONTESTS(?); Clifford’s critique of faith

Rdgs.: Clifford article*, “Without a Doubt” and “How Reasonable Is It to Deceive Yourself?” handouts (optional are Christina article [recommended] and “Richard Dawkins Against ... Faith in God?”, “Trust Makes You Delusional...” handouts)

Unit III: Religion and the Meaning of Life

Week 11: T 11/5 – Th 11/7

T: 2ND DEBATE; test review

Th: 2ND TEST; introduction to Unit III

Rdgs.: “Introduction to the Question(s) of the Meaning of Life”, “Life ‘Meaningless’ for

One in 10 Young Adults” handouts (optional is “Article Shows We’re Drop in the Bucket” handout)

Week 12: T 11/12 – Th 11/14

T: Nozick’s experience machine and related matters

Rdgs.: “Intrinsic Value: What Matters to You For Its Own Sake?” and “The Experience Machine”* handouts (optional is “True Servant”)

Th: Tolstoy on cosmic purpose and worthwhileness

Rdgs.: Tolstoy article* and “Leo Tolstoy on the Meaning of Life” handout (optional are “Santayana’s Implicit Reply to Tolstoy”, “...Tylenol May Do the Trick”, “Psychological Common Ground...”, “Belief in Science’ Increases in Stressful Situations” handouts; also relevant is the Pojman article from Unit I)

Week 13: T 11/19

T: Baier’s secular humanism

Rdgs.: Baier article* and “Kurt Baier’s Critique of Christian Theism” handout (optional is “The Kate I Knew”)

Th: Camus on absurdity

Rdgs.: Camus article* and “Albert Camus on the Meaning of Life” handout (optional are “Important Camus Quotations...” handout and Zaretsky article)

Week 14: T 11/26 – Th 11/28

T: Nagel on absurdity and irony

Rdgs.: Nagel article*, “Thomas Nagel on the Meaning of Life” and “Feinberg on Nagel on Irony” handouts (optional are “What Irony Is, and What It Ain’t” handout and Nozick article)

THANKSGIVING BREAK!

Week 15: T 12/3 – Th 12/5

T: 3rd DEBATE; course evaluations

Th: Exam review, music by which to discuss the meaning of life (CDs and ipods)

FINAL EXAM: Th 12/12 8:00-10:00 a.m.

GRADING POLICIES AND OTHER RULES:

Daily attendance will be taken. If you leave early without advance permission you may be marked absent (in whole or in part); to count as present you must in class for at least half the class. If you miss four full classes (the equivalent of two weeks) without a legitimate, documentable excuse, then your course grade will be lowered by *one full letter grade*; after that the penalty is one full letter grade for every two classes. An absence is excused only if it is a documentable case of illness, family emergency, legal necessity, school service, military obligation, etc.; but everyone also gets one free “flat tire” excuse, no questions asked (don’t waste it on trivial reasons for missing class!).

Arriving late is often disruptive and therefore rude if avoidable; repeated tardiness will result in the lowering of your final-exam grade by one-third of a letter grade or more. *Anyone caught texting, emailing, facebooking, etc. in class will have their electronic device temporarily con-*

fiscated or will be asked to leave; sleepers will be awakened the first time, asked to leave the next (unless medical reasons are provided in advance). *Cell phones must be turned off or put on vibrate mode once class begins*; your instructor reserves the right to answer your phone for you should it go off in class! Laptops may not be used in class except with prior approval, and users must sit in the front row.

The lateness penalty for writing assignments is one-third of a letter grade per day, including weekends and holidays. Tests and the final exam must be taken on the scheduled dates, except, again, in documentable cases of illness, etc. If you must take a test late then it may be a somewhat different one from the one(s) your class-mates took.

Plagiarism on any writing assignment will result in a grade penalty that is proportionate to the severity of the offense; pervasive plagiarism will result in an F/zero for the assignment and possible university sanctions. Plagiarism on any extra-credit writing will disqualify the student from receiving any extra credit at all for the course.

Extra credit may be earned in any of the following ways (once per way) and is applied to the lower of two test scores:

- (a) If you attend a movie, play, public lecture, sermon, etc. that is relevant to the course and is *not* the FYE Common Hour event to which you are writing a reaction response, and you summarize *and evaluate* its content in two (typed, double-spaced) pages, then your lowest test grade will be raised five points (more for unusually thoughtful papers, less for short or superficial ones). Check with me if you're unsure whether a movie, play, lecture, etc. is relevant. Note that you can do this paper on an FYE Common Hour event *other* than the one to which you write your reaction response, in which case you are in effect writing a second reaction response. If you do such a paper then be sure to check the reaction-response instructions below.
- (b) If you write a letter to the editor of the E.U.P. *Spectator* (edinboro.spectator@gmail.com), a community paper such as the Erie *Times-News* (letters@timesnews.com), or a magazine, in which you take a public stand on any course-related issue, then your lowest test grade will be raised four points (more for an especially thoughtful letter). The letter should be sent by email (with a cc--preferably a blind cc—to ssullivan@edinboro.edu), and should include your full name, address, and phone number, so that its authenticity can be verified by the paper. (Only your name and city of residence would appear in a published version.) But it need not be published—something beyond your control—in order to count for extra credit.
- (c) Similarly for a private letter to a political official or other public figure on a relevant issue. The two letters may not overlap.
- (d) If you take part in an optional debate, then your lowest test score will be raised three points (five if your side wins, four if it ties).

- (e) If the class votes that your side in a debate won, then your lowest test grade will be raised an *additional* four percentage points (three in the case of a tie).
- (f) If you serve as a moderator in a class debate, your lowest test grade will be raised three percentage points (more if you do an excellent job, fewer if you do a lousy one).
- (g) If you take part in the Halloween costume contest you earn at least two percentage points--eight points for first prize, six for second, and four for third. (If you have religious scruples about Halloween that forbid your participation, see me about an alternative way to earn extra credit.)

All extra-credit written work must be turned in by noon F 12/6; if it is sent by email attachment, it should be a Microsoft Word file (.doc or .docx) or a text file (.txt) or in rich text format (.rtf). (If your computer has Word-Perfect, you can convert a document to Word by going File, Save As, then adding .doc to the document name.) Your lowest test grade cannot be raised above the 100% level; any additional extra-credit points will carry over to your other test.

OPENING MINI-ESSAY ASSIGNMENT (2 pp. typed, double-spaced):

Answer the following questions:

- (a) What are your moral values? (Ask yourself what moral rules or principles you accept and would want to pass on to any children you do or might have; and/or what qualities you think a morally good or virtuous person possesses.) Can someone be a good person, in your view, if they don't believe in any God(s)?
- (b) Can a belief—including belief in God(s)-- be reasonable even if it is not based on good evidence? Why or why not? Would a perfect God automatically exclude from salvation everyone who did not worship that God? Why or why not?
- (c) What makes your life worth living? Must there be a God and an afterlife for your life to be worth living? Why or why not?

DEBATE TOPICS:

Unit I:

- (a) Is it possible to know right from wrong, good from bad, without direct or indirect assistance from divine revelation?
- (b) Do we always have good reason to do what is right even if there is no god or afterlife?

Unit II:

- (a) Is it ever both reasonable and morally acceptable to believe something on faith?
- (b) Would a perfect God be morally justified in excluding from salvation everyone who did not worship him, and/or in including everyone who had faith in him?

Unit III:

- (a) Can life still be just as much worth living if there is no God or afterlife?
- (b) Is there any sense in which human life, or some human lives, are absurd?

READING RESPONSES (at least one typed, double-spaced paragraph each):

Each response is to consist of at least thoughtful paragraph on some point in the starred assigned reading for the relevant class that you find especially interesting, significant, debatable, or puzzling; explain the point as best you can and indicate why you react to it as you do. Note that the response is *due by classtime* (hard copy or email), and that *no extensions* are given: responses that are late for any reason will receive at best half-credit. Note too that you get no credit for a pseudo-effort (e.g., just a few sentences), and half credit for a minimal effort (e.g., you don't explain your reaction). Moreover, you must *give page references whenever you quote* an author's words; failure to do so may prevent you from receiving full credit.

There are nineteen assigned responses, the top sixteen of which count. This means of course that you can omit three without penalty; but since there are no extensions, it would be unwise to omit any response without special reason. If you complete 14 to 16 for full credit, you get an A for this portion of your course grade (16/A+, 15/A, 14/A-); 11 to 13, B (B+/13, B/12, B-/11); 8 to 10, C (C+/10, C/9, C-/8); 5 to 7, D (D+/7, D/6, D-/5); 0 to 4, F.

REACTION PAPER ON FYE COMMON HOUR EVENT (2 pp.):

Take part in any one of the university-wide Common Hour events given in the separate Reaction Paper handout. Then write a two-page "reaction" in which you describe what went on in the event, indicate its relevance to the course, and explain whether and why you think it was worthwhile.

Note: Your reaction response grade will go up one-third of a letter grade for very good attendance, and down one-third for poor attendance, at FYE-required Common Hour sessions consisting in department and university-wide events. The grade will stay the same for middling attendance.

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES:

If you have a disability requiring special accommodation, please let me know as soon as written documentation is available from the Office for Students With Disabilities. I will work you and the OSD to see to it that you have a fair opportunity to succeed in this course.

