

PHIL 2400-04  
Contemporary Moral Issues  
Fall 2018  
M/W/F, 9:00-9:50 PM, C-131 (Bizzini Hall)

**Instructor:** Dr. Tristan J. Rogers

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**Office:** S-248 (Science 1)

**Office Hours:** M/W, 10:00-11:00 AM, and 1:00-2:00 PM (and by appointment)

**Course website:** <http://www.blackboard.csustan.edu>

**Course description:** We live in a society increasingly divided on questions of morality, politics, and religion. This course is about developing a deeper understanding of that society and our place in it. When does human life begin? Who is a citizen? Is discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, or race ever justified? What (if any) are the limits of free speech? And is there a right to bear arms? While it is human nature to disagree about these topics, human societies depend on some measure of agreement. As President Lincoln said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

The course is itself divided into three parts. First, we will examine the philosophical aspect of moral issues in the ethical theories of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. Second, we will explore the psychology of why we disagree about morality, and whether anything constructive can be done about this. Finally, with our newly gained philosophical and psychological insights, we will discuss the issues of abortion, immigration, racism, sexism, free speech, and gun control. Even if we cannot live in perfect harmony under one roof, my hope is that students learn something about what it might take to keep the house standing.

**Required Texts (available in the bookstore or online):**

Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Ethical Life* (Oxford University Press, 2016, 4<sup>th</sup> edition)

ISBN: 978-0190631314

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (Vintage Books, 2012)

ISBN: 978-0307455772

Please get the correct edition of the first text. The second text is widely available in paperback.

**General Education Goals (course specific goals in bold):**

Goal 1: Develop the intellectual skills and competencies necessary to participate effectively in society and the world.

Students attaining the first learning goal will be able to:

- **Demonstrate effective oral communication.**
- **Demonstrate effective written communication.**
- **Demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively.**
- Apply quantitative reasoning concepts and skills to solve problems.
- Find, understand, examine critically, and use information from various sources.
- Comprehend and use appropriate technological resources effectively.

Goal 2: Develop broad knowledge of biological and physical sciences, humanities and creative arts, and social sciences.

Students attaining the second learning goal will be able to:

- Explain and apply basic scientific methods
- Demonstrate an understanding of the living and non-living physical world
- Recognize the structures and institutions that frame human interactions
- Express appreciation of cultural, intellectual, and artistic ideas and works
- Demonstrate effective creative expression and understanding through artistic means
- **Identify life-skills and behaviors needed to flourish as a mature person**

Goal 3: Develop abilities to integrate knowledge, make informed ethical decisions, and accept civic responsibility.

Students attaining the third learning goal will be able to:

- Integrate and combine knowledge and abilities developed in several fields to analyze and critically evaluate specific problems, issues, or topics
- **Illustrate the ability to self-reflect and assess relevant ethical values**
- Identify and analyze problems within local, regional, national, and/or global contexts
- Demonstrate enhanced awareness of multicultural, community, and/or technological perspectives

#### **Assessment:**

10% – Course Engagement

You cannot learn if you do not participate and take ownership of your own learning. Because of this, I expect students to miss class rarely and only for good reason. Similarly, I expect you to engage in class discussion, either voluntarily or when called on. I will do what I can to make this not stressful, and I expect you will all earn 10%.

20% – Two short papers

There will be two short expository papers (two pages double-spaced), one on Aristotle or Aquinas, and one on Kant or Mill.

20% – Midterm Exam (take-home)

The midterm will be on the central ideas of *The Righteous Mind*. Since we are not reading the whole book, you are only responsible for what we discuss in class. It will be a take-home exam. I will say more about its format later.

20% – Discussion Day Written Reflections

Once we get to Part Three of the course, there will be five “discussion days.” Each student will prepare a short piece (one page double-spaced) reflecting on some aspect(s) of the moral issue for that week (e.g. gun control). They will be due on the discussion day and we will use them as a basis for our conversation in class.

30% – Final Paper

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a final argumentative paper (three to five pages double-spaced) defending a position on a moral issue of your choice.

## Grading Schema:

A = 95-100%, A- = 90-94%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 84-86%, B- = 80-83%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 74-76%, C- = 70-73%, D+ = 67-69%, D = 60-66 %, F = 0-59%

I will, as a matter of policy, round up grades to the next letter grade if you are within 1% (e.g. 79.1 to 80%, but *not* 78.9 to 80%)

**Late work policy:** As a rule, work will not be accepted late except in cases of documented emergency or illness. You may make a written petition for an exception if you feel you have a compelling reason, but these requests must be made in advance and certainly not near the end of the semester in conjunction with a grade appeal.

**Course conduct:** You are expected to be respectful toward your fellow students and myself. This course covers some controversial and emotionally charged issues. If you are not comfortable rationally discussing them in a thoughtful and respectful way, you should not take the course. Additionally, please refrain from using your phones (e.g. texting, email, YouTube videos, listening to music, etc.), and otherwise acting in an inappropriate or distracting way (e.g. chronic lateness, talking, sleeping, playing games, etc.). Responsible use of laptops/tablets is permitted provided it does not degenerate into any of the above. Failure to abide by the above will result in forfeiting the participation portion of the grade and you may be asked to leave class.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a violation of University policy and seriously undermines your integrity as a student. If you are suspected of plagiarizing or cheating, and proven to have done so, you will receive an F in the course and be required to go through standard University policy, which will be unpleasant for both of us. It is your responsibility to understand the University's plagiarism policy. When in doubt, ask me. See: <https://www.csustan.edu/english/policy-plagiarism>

**Reasonable Accommodation:** Should any student need accommodation because of a disability, please let me know to discuss options. For more information, please visit: <https://www.csustan.edu/hr/ada-accommodations-employees-students>

**Subject to change proviso:** Information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade, late work and course conduct policy, may be subject to change with advanced notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

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## Course Schedule

See below for a comprehensive overview of readings, assignments, and due dates for the semester. Please note that readings (excepting the first day) are to be completed *before* the class for which they are listed.

*Note on reading:* Texts in philosophy can be difficult to read. I have tried to limit the number of pages in the reading assignments to account for this. However, you will still likely need to reread texts (perhaps after the lecture) to understand the material well.

## PRELUDE

### **Week One – Introduction to the Course**

August 22 (Wed): Syllabus Overview and Introduction to Ethics, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 1-8

August 24 (Fri): “The Euthyphro Dilemma”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 75-83

## PART ONE – Ethical Theory

### **Week Two – Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics**

August 27 (Mon): Introduction to Aristotle

August 29 (Wed): “Excerpts from Nicomachean Ethics”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 143-8

August 31 (Fri): cont., pp. 148-154

### **Week Three – Aquinas’ Natural Law Ethics**

September 3 (Mon): LABOR DAY, NO CLASS

September 5 (Wed): “Natural Law”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 84-89

September 7 (Fri): cont., pp. 89-96

### **Week Four – John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarian Ethics**

September 10 (Mon): Introduction to Mill

September 12 (Wed): “Utilitarianism”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 97-99

First Paper Due

September 14 (Fri): Objections to Utilitarianism, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 99-106

### **Week Five – Immanuel Kant’s Ethics of Duty**

September 17 (Mon): “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative,” pp. 107-112

September 19 (Wed): cont., pp. 112-119

September 21 (Fri): NO CLASS

## PART TWO – The Psychology of Moral Disagreement

### **Week Six – Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part I***

September 24 (Mon): “Introduction”, pp. xvii-xxiv

Second Short Paper Due

September 26 (Wed): Ch. 1, “Where Does Morality Come From?”, pp. 3-16

September 28 (Fri): cont., pp. 16-31

### **Week Seven – Cont.**

October 1 (Mon): Ch. 2, “The Intuitive Dog and Its Rational Tail”, pp. 32-41

October 3 (Wed): cont., pp. 41-52

October 5 (Fri): cont., pp. 52-60

### **Week Eight – Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part II***

October 8 (Mon): Ch. 5, “Beyond WEIRD Morality”, pp. 111-130

October 10 (Wed): INSTRUCTIONAL DAY, NO CLASS

October 12 (Fri): Ch. 6, “Taste Buds of the Righteous Mind”, pp. 131-149

Take the Moral Foundations Questionnaire: <https://www.yourmorals.org/register.php>

**Week Nine – Cont.**

October 15 (Mon): Ch. 7, “The Moral Foundations of Politics”, pp. 150-161

October 17 (Wed): cont., pp. 161-169

October 19 (Fri): cont., pp. 170-179

**Week Ten – Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part III***

October 22 (Mon): Ch. 12, “Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively?”, pp. 319-330

October 24 (Wed): cont., pp. 330-343

October 26 (Fri): cont. 343-366

Take Home Midterm Due

**PART THREE – Contemporary Moral Issues**

**Week Eleven – Abortion**

October 29 (Mon): Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 333-345

October 31 (Wed): Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” (distributed via Blackboard)

November 2 (Fri): Discussion Day, Written Reflections Due

**Week Twelve – Immigration**

November 5 (Mon): Kukathas, “The Case for Open Borders” (distributed via Blackboard)

November 7 (Wed): Miller, “Immigration: The Case for Limits” (distributed via Blackboard)

November 9 (Fri): Discussion Day, Written Reflections Due

**Week Thirteen – Racism**

November 12 (Mon): VETERANS DAY, NO CLASS

November 14 (Wed): Lebron, “Time for a New Black Radicalism”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 411-416

November 16 (Fri): Anderson, “The Future of Racial Integration”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 446-465

**Week Fourteen – Sexism**

November 19 (Mon): Paglia, “The Modern Battle of the Sexes” (distributed via Blackboard)

November 21 (Wed): Discussion Day

November 23 (Fri): THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS

**Week Fifteen – Freedom of Speech**

November 26 (Mon): Excerpts from J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty* (distributed via Blackboard)

November 28 (Wed): Altman, “Liberalism and Campus Hate Speech” (distributed via Blackboard)

November 30 (Fri): Discussion Day

**Week Sixteen – Gun Control**

December 3 (Mon): Huemer, “Is There a Right to Own a Gun?”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 396-410

December 5 (Wed): McMahan, “Why Gun ‘Control’ is Not Enough”, *The Ethical Life*, pp. 390-5

December 7 (Fri): Discussion Day

**Last Day of Class/Final Paper**

December 10 (Mon): Concluding Remarks/Paper Writing Workshop

December 14 (Fri): Final Paper DUE