

**PHL/ISC 300 Ethics and Policy in the Digital Age**  
**Philosophy Department**  
**SUNY College at Oswego**  
**Spring 2019 (11:30/Marano 231)**

**Course Description:** In this course, we will examine the works of great thinkers who have offered perspectives on the following questions: How ought I to live? What makes an action right? How should we think about what constitutes a morally valuable experience or life? Are a person's motives important in doing well? What makes a person good? We will study the original ideas of selected great ethical philosophers in the Western tradition and then apply them to selected problems we encounter in the digital age. We will study the utilitarian theory of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill and its application to mass government surveillance and to the varieties of internet censorship. We will study the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his Categorical Imperative and apply it to contemporary problems involving internet privacy. We will ponder the Kantian theory of justice offered by John Rawls and consider its implications for the public policy problem of the digital divide and the question of whether computer-driven automation enhances or disenances human capacities. We will return to ancient Athens and Aristotle's philosophy to discuss how it sheds light on issues of human virtue in the age of robots and to assist in reflecting upon the question of whether technology makes us happier.

There is also a skills component to this course related to critical thinking, good written standard English, and critical reading and writing skills. The first ethics boot camp unit will introduce the subject matter and the method of logical argumentation found in philosophy. Critical thinking skills, such as argument identification, analysis, and construction, will also be learned in structured homework assignments and assessed in the examinations.

**Professor/Office Hours:** Dr. Robert Card, Professor, Department of Philosophy, 212 Marano Campus Center. Scheduled office hours are Mondays and Fridays 3:15-4:45, and I am available by appointment. See me after class or contact me via email for an appointment if you cannot come during regular office hours. If I need to cancel office hours for some reason, I will announce this fact in advance.

**Phone and Email Contact Information:** The most effective way to contact me is via email. My email address is: [robert.card@oswego.edu](mailto:robert.card@oswego.edu) Phone and Voicemail: X2793. If you leave a voicemail include your name, class, and contact information. My website is: <http://www.robertfcard.com> You will find important course information and resources on my website to help you succeed in this course.

**Required Texts:**

\*Xeroxed Packet (XP) containing reading materials (available at The College Bookstore)

\*Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. (HarperCollins Perennial Classics)

ISBN #0060929871. Purchase of these texts is required for all enrolled students.

**Suggestions:**

As you read, you should be considering possible points of agreement and disagreement with the writer. I expect you to attend class well-prepared and to be able to discuss any of the readings assigned up to and including the date of the class. To facilitate these goals, do the readings in advance. Philosophy is difficult and requires disciplined thought. You may have to read the text several times before you have a sufficient grasp of the material. Feel free to ask informed questions during class time. Utilize my office hours to test and further your understanding of the material.

**Course Requirements: 500 total course points**

0. Critical Thinking Homework: 15% of final grade, 75 points

## In-Class Examinations

1. Exam #1: 20% of final grade, 100 points [Scheduled: Fri. Mar. 1]
2. Exam #2: 25% of final grade, 125 points [Scheduled: Weds. Apr. 24]
3. Final Exam: 30% of final grade, 150 points [Scheduled: Weds. May 15, 10:30 am]
4. Class Participation: 10% of final grade, 50 points
  - \*Students are responsible for contributing to the dialogue concerning course material. Class participation will be assessed in several ways. Students may be assigned to participate in group discussions. In addition, students will be assigned to be discussion leader for the reading material on certain dates. The goal of this informal presentation requirement is (1) to keep in focus the main points of the readings for that class and (2) to raise questions and make comments which will stimulate class discussion of the main issues. Students can expect to take part in this several times in the course of the semester. A schedule will be distributed in class. \*Making substantial and relevant contributions to class discussion can positively affect students' final grade.\*

**Readings:**

**Unit I. Introduction to Argumentation and Ethics Boot Camp** Frank. "Why?" (XP-0)

Rachels, "What is Morality?" (XP-A)

Plato, *Euthyphro* (XP-B)

Midgley, *Can't We Make Moral Judgments?* (XP-C)

Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (XP-D); Pojman (XP-E)

Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism" (XP-F)

Feldman, "Egoism: Formulation, Defense, Refutation" (XP-G)

\*Plato, "The Immoralist's Challenge" (XP-H); The Prisoner's Dilemma (XP-I)

**Unit II. Utilitarianism and Kantianism** Bentham (XP-J)

Mill, *Utilitarianism* (XP-K); Dershowitz (handout)

Hladik (XP-1) "Rusbridger's "The Snowden Leaks and the Public" and Mill's *Utilitarianism*"

Mill, *On Liberty* (XP-2)

Bambauer, "Censorship v3.1" (XP-3)  
 Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (XP-4)  
 \*Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie" (XP-5)  
 Pan, "Get to Know Me." (XP-6)  
 Rawls, John. "Justice as Fairness." (XP-7)  
 Benjamin, "Poor Students Face Digital Divide" (XP-8)  
 Loi, "Technological Unemployment and Human Disenhancement." (XP-9)  
 Gruzalski, "Mitigating the Consumption of the US Living Standard." (XP-10)

### Unit III. Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (XP-11)  
 Vallor, "Moral Deskillling and Upskilling in a New Machine Age: Reflections on the Ambiguous Future of Character." (XP-12)  
 Ali, "A New Solution to the Gamer's Dilemma." (XP-13)  
 Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" (web reading\*)

Video Resources: "Is Morality Relative?" / "Does the End Justify the Means?" / Can Rules Define Morality? / "Is Ethics Based on Virtue / "The Riddle of Experience versus Memory" / "How to Buy Happiness" / "The Surprising Science of Happiness"

Additional resources: Griswold v. Connecticut; Texas v. Johnson; background on net neutrality

### **Attendance, Excused Absences**

Regular class attendance is expected. Attendance will be taken daily but no punitive attendance policy *per se* is in effect. Continual tardiness will not be tolerated. One of the goals of this course is for students to understand and evaluate different perspectives on philosophical ethics. Without regular class attendance, meeting this goal is very difficult.

If an exam is going to be taken late, this should be discussed with the instructor as early as possible prior to the exam date. The following reasons will be viewed as beyond the control of the individual and consequently will not cause the grade for an assignment to be lowered:

- a. Death of a family member/or other significant person
- b. Extended hospitalization
- c. University sponsored events
- d. Jury duty/or being subpoenaed for court testimony

Appropriate, credible documentation covering the time period during which class is missed is required for these exemptions. It is your responsibility to arrange any make-up exams as soon as possible, with the option of taking the exam early being the preferred option, if possible.

Regarding religious holidays: It is the responsibility of the student to notify the faculty in writing during the first full week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance if classes are held and if this causes the student to be absent on the day an assignment is due or an examination is given.

### **Late Policy**

Examinations taken late *without* a validated excuse will be subject to a late penalty: Late examinations will be marked down *one* full grade if the instructor is notified in advance that the exam will be taken late

Late examinations will be marked down *two* full grades if the instructor is not given advance notice

Proper advance notification to the instructor that an examination is going to be taken late must be given before the beginning of the class period on the exam date. This notice must either be in the form of a voicemail or an email, if the student does not speak directly with the instructor.

\*No assignments will be accepted (or make-up exams scheduled) after course work has been reviewed in class and/or handed back to the students by the instructor. All course work must be turned in by the final exam date.

### **Essay Format**

All essays should be typed or word processed, double-spaced, with a regular (12 point) font and no more than 1" margins. Please make sure your name, the number and title of the course, my name, and the date you are handing in the paper appear at the top of the first page. Do not use binders, paper clips, or any fastener other than a staple to join the pages. Your last name and page number should appear on all subsequent pages.

### **Submitting Your Essay**

Essays are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Please do not hand in essays in the Philosophy Department office. Essays are not accepted via email, unless there is some special reason for this and prior arrangements are made with the instructor. It is strongly recommended that you keep all graded work until you receive your final course grade.

### **Special Needs**

Please notify me as soon as possible of any special learning needs you may have, so that I can make reasonable accommodations. If you have a special learning need and would like more support in dealing with it, you should probably visit the Disability Services Office and find out what services are available to you. If you wish to take examinations at the Disability Services Office, you must notify me during the first week of classes so that I may make the necessary accommodations.

### **Expectations**

Appropriate behavior in class is expected. Do not distract the instructor or classmates by making noise during class. It is important that an attitude of respect for others' opinions is present at all times during class meetings. Disruptive behavior (such as interrupting others when they are speaking) will not be tolerated. Also, be courteous to the instructor and your classmates by arriving at class on time; if you need to leave class early, inform the instructor in advance. Only registered students for this class may attend; obtain prior permission from the instructor for guests. The instructor reserves the right to hold

questions until the end of the class period to ensure that adequate time is available to review the material assigned for class. Please act appropriately: do not sleep or wear headphones or earbuds during class. Also, ensure that cellular phones or pagers will not disturb the class. **No texting in class. Cellular phones are to be either turned off or set to vibrate and are to be put away in a purse, backpack, etc.** Cellular phones, scientific calculators, laptop computers and other unapproved electronic devices cannot be used during examination periods. Following these commonsense rules will make the course more enjoyable and more rewarding for everyone.

Do not cheat on exams or plagiarize essays, and do not lie about absences, lateness, etc. I make it a point to detect, confront, and PENALIZE academic dishonesty. Acts of plagiarism will be reported to the Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, and if it is determined that a violation of intellectual integrity has occurred, academic penalties may be imposed, including the penalty of receiving a failing grade for the course. When writing essays, resist the temptation to "borrow" material located on the Internet. It is simply understood that intellectual honesty requires that you document all sources that are used to complete your course work, but for the sake of completeness, the College Policy on Cheating/Plagiarism states (in part):

"One particular form of intellectual dishonesty is plagiarism (i.e. the representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own). While it is expected that a student who is engaged in writing will utilize information from sources other than personal experience, appropriate acknowledgment of such sources is required. Plagiarism includes:

- (1) utilizing a direct quotation without citing the source
- (2) paraphrasing the ideas, interpretation, expressions of another without giving credit;
- (3) representing the thought of others as their own by failing to acknowledge or document sources...." (Student Handbook 2005-2006, p. 95; "Intellectual Integrity").

Intellectual Integrity Statement: SUNY Oswego is committed to Intellectual Integrity. Any form of intellectual dishonesty is a serious concern and therefore prohibited. The full policy can be found at: <http://www.oswego.edu/integrity>

Learning Objectives: A. General Education (Humanities Knowledge Foundations): Students will demonstrate knowledge of the *conventions and methods* of philosophy.  
B. Philosophy Major Learning Outcomes: Students will demonstrate familiarity with the *main ideas of* historical philosophers including *Aristotle, Kant, and Mill*, including relevant ideas about ethics.

I have an open-door policy: please feel free to come by my office to discuss any concerns you have regarding this course. I reserve the right to make appropriate changes to the class readings and requirements as the course unfolds.

**Grading Scale:** (500 possible points)

A	90-100%	450-500 points
A-	88-89%	440-449 points
B+	86-87%	430-439 points
B	80-85%	400-429 points
B-	78-79%	390-399 points
C+	76-77%	380-389 points
C	70-75%	350-379 points
C-	68-69%	340-349 points
D+	66-67%	330-339 points
D	60-65%	300-329 points
D-	58-59%	290-299 points
Failing	below 58%	below 290 points

**Citations (MLA) [materials in xerox packet (XP):]**

-Author Named In Parentheses

It is said best in the following: "The prohibition on killing is certainly among the most important moral rules"

(Rachels 4).

or

-Using Signal Phrase:

James Rachels wrote, "The prohibition on killing is certainly among the most important moral rules" (4).

### Works Cited

Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*.  
Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999. Print.

-Refer to front page of XP for bibliographic information-

### Citations (MLA) [to books; *Brave New World*]

-Author Named in Parentheses

It is said best in the following: “For particulars, as everyone knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are necessary evils” (Huxley 4).

or

-Using Signal Phrase

Aldous Huxley wrote, “For particulars, as everyone knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are necessary evils” (4).

### Works Cited

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York:  
HarperCollins, 1998. Print.