

ETHICS

Spring 2017

Time: Monday 2:30-5:30pm

Location: HSS SEM RM6

Email: andrewforcehimes@gmail.com (I try to answer student e-mails within 24-hours. If I do not get back to you within 24-hours, I probably overlooked it. Email me again. I will *not* think this rude.)

Office: HSS 06-14

Office Hour: Tuesday 11am-12pm (please let me know you are coming over email beforehand, so that I will be sure to be in my office when you arrive.)

1. Course Description

1.1 *What* are we required to do? *Who* are we required to be? And *why* are we required to do these things or be these types of people? Ethical theories attempt to systematically answer these questions. In this course, we will examine the most promising such theories, evaluating each for their strengths and weaknesses.

2. A Non-Exhaustive List of Basic Policies

2.1 Use of laptops and cell phones in class is not permitted. Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) to see why.

2.1.1 Using laptops is bad for you.

2.1.2 Using laptops is bad for those around you.

2.2 Understand and conform to the NTU Honor Code. Click [here](#) for its content.

3. Grading

3.1 Under the default scheme, your grade is determined by your performance on two papers and a homework assignment, which have the corresponding weights:

Internally Motivated Scheme

Essay #1:	40%
Essay #2:	50%
Chart	10%

3.1.1 You should be internally motivated. However, if I get the sense that students are failing to read the assigned material or not showing up to class, reading quizzes will be added. The new scheme will then look like this:

Externally Motivated Scheme

Essay #1	40%
Essay #2	40%
Reading Quizzes	10%
Chart	10%

Very important: *I reserve the right to switch schemes without prior notice.* For example, suppose it is the third week of class and I get the sense that students are not reading or are failing to show up to class. Then, when you

walk in on the fourth week of class, I could simultaneously announce that we have switched to the Externally Motivated Scheme and give you a quiz.

3.2 Essay

3.2.1 Your paper, if late, will not be accepted. For this reason I suggest that you aim to finish your paper a full day before it is due. If you plan ahead in this way, you will be able to address any unexpected problems you encounter and still submit your paper on time. I also suggest that you periodically save your work by sending it to yourself via email, printing it, or otherwise securing a copy in case your computer crashes, is stolen, catches fire, etc.

3.2.2 In the interest of impartiality, the only excuses for a late paper that will be accepted are sent to me directly from the Dean or are due to serious [illness](#).

3.2.3 Your paper will be turned in electronically on Blackboard. The file name should be: YOUR_FULL_NAME_PAPER_1. This will check your paper for plagiarism. All instances of plagiarism, even if accidental, will result in a zero for the paper.

3.2.4 Philosophical writing is different from much other writing you are familiar with. It is critical that you appreciate the particular expectations of writing in this discipline. Click [here](#) for guidance about writing a philosophy paper.

3.3 Chart

3.3.1 Charting conceptual space is a very helpful way of understanding an area of philosophy. In this class you will construct a chart that visually displays the various theories and the objections each theory faces.

3.3.2 To map out conceptual space, you will need to identify a few *basic* concepts. You will then combine these concepts in various ways – like building blocks – to construct a number of different theories. You may find that the various configurations – the way these blocks can be combined – leads to many more theories than we’ve had time to look at in this class. That’s the point. Taxonomy, though unexciting, needs to be done. Until we have a clearer view of the alternatives, we cannot hope to decide which view is true, or is the best view. Often, once you also see the objections that standard theories face, you may find one of these more exotic theories rather attractive.

3.4 Possible Reading Quizzes

3.4.1 Quizzes will cover the assigned reading for that day. They will be designed to test one thing: Have you read.

3.4.2 If you have an unexcused absence, then you receive a zero for the quiz. If your absence is excused then the quiz will simply be dropped from your overall grade. So, for example, if we take three quizzes over the course of the semester but you had an excuse for missing the second, then your quiz grade will simply be the average of the first and third.

4. Handouts

4.1 I often provide handouts to supplement the readings. They are designed to (i) serve as a handy reference for technical jargon and defined terms, (ii) provide a reliable guide to the text, and (iii) free up class time for discussion.

4.2 Handouts are *not* lecture notes. Don’t be surprised if I deviate from what is on the handout during lecture.

4.3 Handouts are not substitutes for the assigned reading. In many cases, I provide a potentially controversial interpretation of the text. You can’t assume that my interpretation is correct. One of the most important lessons you should learn from this course is that in philosophy there are no experts. Of course the professionals have read more

than you have, and they've spent more time thinking about the issues. But for all that, when you are discussing a philosophical question, 'Plato says, X' is not an argument for X. And the same goes for me.

4.4 Past versions of my handouts can be found [here](#). These are *not* final versions. I will bring hardcopy handouts to class. These hardcopies are what you should use to study.

5. Assignments

5.1 Readings are to be completed before class. E.g., if the class schedule states "16th Kagan, Well-Being" you are to read Kagan, Well-Being *prior* to the start of class on the 16th.

5.2 The textbook for the class is Cahn & Forcehimes, [Principles of Moral Philosophy](#) (Oxford, 2016). You may purchase copies of this text from Booklink @ NTU Pte Ltd Blk S4, Level B5. A single copy of the textbook is also available from the Library

5.2.1 I don't actually care if you buy the book. It is expensive, and you can find most of the essays we will be reading online. The problem however, is that the essays will not be edited down (as they are in the book). So, one alternative is to split the cost of the book with a couple people and then simply apply the editing in the book to what you find online. Another alternative is to scan the essays from the library copy of the book. In short, I don't care how you get the readings for the class so long as you get versions that match those in the textbook.

5.3 Tentative Schedule:

CLASS SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION

9: Syllabus; Forcehimes, [The Anatomy of Normative Ethics](#)

CONSEQUENTIALISM

16: Mill, Utilitarianism (201-211; 215-216); Kagan, Well-being
(Recommended: Driver, Objective v. Subjective Consequentialism)

23: Sidgwick, The Meaning and Proof of Utilitarianism (233-245); Sinnott-Armstrong, How Strong Is This Obligation?

30: NO CLASS - CNY

6: Singer, Famine, Affluence, and Morality; Williams, A Critique of Utilitarianism
(Recommended: Timmerman, A Reply to Singer)

KANTIANISM

13: Kant, Groundwork (90-96); Herman, On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty

20: Kant, Groundwork (96-104) Kagan, Kantianism

5th Essay Due (2,000 words *maximum*)

6: Kant, Groundwork (104-115)

13: Korsgaard, Kant's Formula of Humanity; Wolf, [Moral Saints](#)

CONTRACTUALISM

20: Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other (324-333)

- 27: Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other (333-340); Pettit, Can Contract Theory Ground Morality?

VIRTUE ETHICS

- 3: Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics
(Recommended: Annas, Virtue Ethics)
- 10: Hursthouse, Normative Virtue Ethics; Johnson, Virtue and Right

14th Chart Due

16th: Final Essay Due (2,000 words *maximum*)

6. Should You Take This Class *From Me*?

6.1 Some students at NTU enjoy my teaching. Others don't. Some learn a lot. Others don't. I wish I had a way of providing you with an acid test to determine which you will be. Since I don't have such a test, perhaps the following will help you make a decision.

6.1.1 Past NTU teacher evaluations. Click [here](#) for some past evaluations. After reading these, perhaps you'll have a better sense if this is a class you'd like to take from me.

6.1.2 Intellectual respect. The best account of what I take respect to be is captured by Ryle's description of G.E. Moore: "He gave us courage not by making concessions, but by making no concessions to our youth or our shyness. He treated us as corrigible and therefore as responsible thinkers. He would explode at our mistakes and muddles with just that genial ferocity with which he would explode at the mistakes and muddles of philosophical high-ups, and with just the genial ferocity with which he would explode at mistakes and muddles of his own."

6.1.2.1 In this class, I will treat you as a philosophical peer. If you cannot psychologically handle this, if you need to be told your ideas and questions are all great – that you are a unique and beautiful snowflake – I strongly suggest you take this class from someone else.

6.1.3 Philosophy is to be done systematically. Everything must hang together. Many of the biggest mistakes (especially in ethics) come, I believe, from trying to work on some area of inquiry in isolation. Since everything bears on everything else, there is no such thing as a tangent. Many students (especially those who care primarily about grades) find this unbearable.

6.1.3.1 Wittgenstein once wrote, "In teaching you philosophy I'm like a guide showing you how to find your way round London. I have to take you through the city from north to south, from east to west, from Euston to the embankment and from Piccadilly to the Marble Arch. After I have taken you many journeys through the city, in all sorts of directions, we shall have passed through any given street a number of times – each time traversing the street as part of a different journey. At the end of this you will know London; you will be able to find your way about like a born Londoner. Of course, a good guide will take you through the more important streets more often than he takes you down side streets; a bad guide will do the opposite."

6.1.3.2 I try to be a good guide. Sadly, many days I finish class thinking I'm a rather bad one.