



Huron University College | Department of Philosophy Introduction to Ethics & Value Theory | PHIL 2700F

Professor: Dr. Steve D'Arcy

Time/Location: Mondays 12:30-2:30, Wednesdays 1:30-2:30 (HUC W112)

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30pm-5:30pm (HUC 303)

Course Description

"Short then is the time which every man lives, and small the nook of the earth where he lives; and short too the longest posthumous fame, and even this only continued by a succession of poor human beings, who will very soon die, and who know not even themselves, much less him who died long ago" (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Bk III).

Considerations of this kind have led many people to suggest that human life is in some sense "meaningless," or that it has no "value." But what does it mean to ask about the "meaning" or the "value" of life? What does it mean for something to be "important" or "worth wanting"? This course surveys and explores some approaches to answering these questions, taking into account a variety of sources, from ancient times to the present. In the course of doing so, it offers a survey of several very influential theories of value and obligation.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to understand and explain the distinction between theories of value and theories of obligation; to understand and explain the difference between intrinsic and instrumental value; to understand and explain the conceptions

of value and the good advanced by leading figures in the history human thought, including Aristotle, the Buddha, Nietzsche, Beauvoir, and JS Mill, among others, and to propose and rationally defend their own ideas on key questions raised in the course, both in class discussions and in writing.

Description of Teaching and Learning Methods

The course is a broad survey course in ethics, focusing mainly on the theme of “the good life.” Classes consist of lectures and class discussion. Students should come to each class having read the assigned texts and ready to ask questions and/or participate in class discussions. Each student will write an in-class test, a major essay, and a final examination.

Required Readings

Course readings consist entirely of primary texts written by a series of philosophers, ancient and modern. The required reading materials are all available online, free of charge, at the course Owl site.

Grade Components

1. Mid-Term Test

One in-class test, with two long-answer questions, worth **20%** of the final grade. Test to be written on 3 October.

2. Major Essay

One major essay, on a topic to be announced, worth **40%** of the final grade for the course. Due on 29 November 2018. Details to be announced.

3. Final Examination

A two-hour Final Examination, as scheduled during the December exam period, worth **40%** of final grade. Ten short-answer questions on material from the whole course and three long-answer questions on material covered subsequently to the mid-term test.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

(Note: All of these readings, unless otherwise indicated, may be access online, at the course Owl site.)

10 September: What is Value Theory?

Reading: Course Outline

Part One: Conceptual resources for thinking about the ‘good life’

12 September: On Moral Progress

Reading: Martha Nussbaum, “On Moral Progress”

17 September: Weighing Importance

Reading: Martha Nussbaum, “On Moral Progress”

19 September: First-order and Second-order Desires

Reading: Charles Taylor, ‘Responsibility for Self’

24 September: Strong Evaluation

Reading: Charles Taylor, 'Responsibility for Self'

26 September: The Impact Model and the Challenge Model of Value

Reading: Ronald Dworkin, 'Equality and the Good Life'

1 October: Transcendent v. Indexed; Limitations v. Parameters

Reading: Ronald Dworkin, 'Equality and the Good Life'

3 October: *Mid-Term Test*****

8-12 October: Fall Reading Week

Part Two: What makes a life worthwhile?

15 October: Quantitative Hedonism

Reading: Bentham,

17 October: Hedonism and Utility – Some Initial Objections

Reading: John Stuart Mill, 'What Utility Is'

22 October: Qualitative Hedonism, Competent Judges

Reading: John Stuart Mill, 'What Utility Is'

24 October: The Motive of Duty

Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Sections 1

29 October: Ends in Themselves

Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Sections 1 and 2

31 October: Universal Law

Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Sections 1 and 2

5 November: The Life of the Buddha as Allegory

Reading: The Buddha (*The Noble Quest*)

7 November: The Four Noble Truths (and Eightfold Path)

Reading: The Buddha (*The Noble Quest*)

12 November: Conditioned Arising and Indiscriminate Benevolence (Mettā)

Reading: The Buddha (*The Noble Quest*)

14 November: The Death of God

Reading: Nietzsche, 'Selections'

19 November: The Will to Power

Reading: Nietzsche, 'Selections'

21 November: Master and Slave Moralities

Reading: Nietzsche, 'Selections'

26 November: Woman as 'Other'

Readings: Simone de Beauvoir, 'Introduction' to *The Second Sex*

28 November: Existence Precedes Essence

Reading: Simone de Beauvoir, 'Introduction' to *The Second Sex*

3 December: Virtue as 'the Mean' between Excess and Deficiency

Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II

5 December: The Form versus the Content of Virtue Judgments

Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II



The Appendix to Course Outlines is posted on the OWL course site.