

Huron University College

Department of Philosophy

Introduction to Ethics and Value Theory: “The meaning and value of life” Philosophy 201F

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, from 1:00pm to 2:30pm (Huron A303), until Dec. 5

Course Description

“Short then is the time which each of us lives, and small the nook of the earth where we live; 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 those 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 “absurd.” But what does it mean to ask about the “meaning of life”? There is a long tradition of attempts to formulate both the questions about life’s meaning and possible responses to them. This course surveys and explores that tradition, taking into account a variety of sources, from ancient times to the present. In the course of doing so, we students will become familiar with some of the leading perspectives in moral philosophy, including consequentialism, Kantian deontology, and virtue ethics.

Required Readings

1. **Course Pack for Philosophy 201F (D’Arcy)**
Available at **InPrint** (downstairs in the UCC; not in the Bookstore)
2. ***Selections from the Buddha’s Discourses***, translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (version 1.6). <<http://sdarcy.edublogs.org/selections>>
3. ***Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation***, chs. 1-5 (Jeremy Bentham).
Follow appropriate link from <<http://sdarcy.edublogs.org/201f>>

Grade Components

1. **Mid-Term Test**
Worth 20% of final grade.
Written in class on October 1, 2007
2. **Major Essay**
Worth 40% of final grade (1,600-2,000 words in length)
Due no later than the beginning of class, 19 November, 2007
3. **Final Examination**
Worth 40% of final grade
Written as scheduled by the Registrar during the December exam period

Prerequisites

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites (if any). If you do not have the prerequisites for this course, and you do not have written special permission from your Dean to enroll in this course, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Academic Counseling

Philosophy students requiring counseling about their program of study or related matters (e.g. appeals, letters of permission, special permission) should contact Dr. David Conter <dconter@uwo.ca>, Chair of the Department of Philosophy, in Room V131.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an academic offence and will be treated as such. Students who are in doubt as to the nature of this offence should consult their instructor, Department Chair, or the Dean's Office, as well as the Huron University College Statement on Plagiarism, available at the reference desk in the Huron College Library and at: <<http://www.huronuc.on.ca/pdf/FASSonPlagiarism.pdf>>.

In addition, students may seek guidance from a variety of current style manuals available at the Reference Desk in the Huron University College Library. Information about these resources can be found at: <http://www.huronuc.ca/library/research_guides_and_handouts/>

Plagiarism detection software will be used in this course. Students will be required to submit their written work in electronic form.

Statement on Technology

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited, to laptops, PDAs, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Course-related Resources

The following web site directs students to resources related to this course:

<http://sdarcy.edublogs.org>

This site makes available an electronic version of this syllabus, information about this course, links to philosophy web sites, a link to a guide to documenting sources in philosophy papers, and other potentially useful sites.

Tentative Schedule of Readings:

This schedule is a guide to what we can expect to cover and when, but it is subject to change, depending on our needs as the course proceeds.

September 7: Introduction to themes, figures.

PART ONE: What Do We Mean by “the Meaning of Life”?

September 10: Why do people sometimes say that human life is absurd?

- *Reading:* Thomas Nagel, “The Absurd” (course pack)

September 12: Nagel’s account of absurdity

- *Reading:* Thomas Nagel, “The Absurd” (course pack)

September 14: First-order and second-order desires

- *Reading:* Charles Taylor, “Responsibility for Self” (course pack)

September 17: Strong evaluation

- *Reading:* Charles Taylor, “Responsibility for Self” (course pack)

September 19: Radical choice?

- *Reading:* Charles Taylor, “Responsibility for Self” (course pack)

September 21: Two models of ethical value: challenge v. impact

- *Reading:* Ronald Dworkin, “Equality and the Good Life” (course pack)

September 24: Transcendent v. indexed

- *Reading:* Ronald Dworkin, “Equality and the Good Life” (course pack)

September 26: limitations v. parameters

- *Reading:* Ronald Dworkin, “Equality and the Good Life” (course pack)

PART TWO: What Makes a Life Worthwhile?

Pleasure:

September 28: Consequentialism

- *Reading:* Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislations*, Chapters 1-5 <<http://utilitarianism.com/jeremy-bentham/index.html#one>>

October 1: MID-TERM TEST – written in class

October 3: Hedonism

- *Reading:* Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislations*, Chapters 1-5 <<http://utilitarianism.com/jeremy-bentham/index.html#one>>

October 5: Utilitarianism

- *Reading:* Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislations*, Chapters 1-5 <<http://utilitarianism.com/jeremy-bentham/index.html#one>>

*** **Note:** No class on October 8 ***

October 10: Mill’s “quantitative” approach to hedonism

- *Reading:* John Stuart Mill, “What Utilitarianism Is” (course pack)

October 12: Is Mill’s view genuinely hedonistic?

- *Reading:* John Stuart Mill, “What Utilitarianism Is” (course pack)

Rational Autonomy:

October 15: Deontology

- *Reading:* Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (course pack)

October 17: Rousseau and Kant on autonomy

- *Reading:* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bk. I <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_01.htm>

October 19: “Good without qualification”; the motive of duty

- *Reading:* Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, First Section (course pack)

October 22: The priority of the right over the good

- *Reading:* Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*,

First Section (course pack)

October 24: Categorical imperative, part I – universal law

- *Reading:* Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, First Section (course pack)

October 26: Categorical imperative, part II – humanity as end in itself; kingdom of ends

- *Reading:* Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, First Section (course pack)

Self-Perfection:

October 29: The life of the Buddha: between self-indulgence and self-mortification

- *Reading:* Thanissaro, trans., *Selections*, Part One: The Buddha's Life" (online)
- *FILM:* *Walking with [the] Buddha*

October 31: Suffering

- *Reading:* Thanissaro, trans., *Selections*, Part Two: "The Problem of Suffering..." (online)

November 2: The cause of suffering: attachment, avoidance, delusion

- *Reading:* Thanissaro, trans., *Selections*, Part Two: "The Problem of Suffering..." (online)

November 5: The Nibbāna ideal

- *Reading:* Thanissaro, trans., *Selections*, Part Three: The Eightfold Path" (online)

November 7: The Buddha's path to "liberation"

- *Reading:* Thanissaro, trans., *Selections*, Part Three: The Eightfold Path" (online)

November 9: The 'limitless heart' of the Arahant

- *Reading:* Thanissaro, trans., *Selections*, Part Four: Further Ethical Teachings" (online)

Self-Invention:

November 12: The death of God

- *Reading:* Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nietzsche Selections" (course pack)

November 14: The will to power

- *Reading:* Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nietzsche Selections" (course pack)

November 16: Interpretation and the genealogy of morals

- *Reading:* Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nietzsche Selections" (course pack)

November 19: Master and slave moralities

- *Reading:* Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nietzsche Selections" (course pack)

November 21: French existentialism – "existence precedes essence"

- *Reading:* Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" to *The Second Sex* (course pack)

November 23: The secondary sex

- *Reading:* Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" to *The Second Sex* (course pack)

November 26: 'Tendencies toward complicity'

Reading: Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" to *The Second Sex* (course pack)

Self-Realization:

November 28: Virtue ethics

- *Reading:* Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics* (course pack)

November 30: Eudaimonia

- *Reading:* Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics* (course pack)

December 3: Virtue and the golden mean

- *Reading:* Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics* (course pack)

December 5: Exam Q&A