Course Description and Objectives:

This course is an introduction to the philosophical study of ethics. Students will be introduced to the primary philosophical approaches to ethical questions and moral discourse, including Virtue Ethics, Deontology, Utilitarianism, and Natural Law Ethics. The focus of the course will be a close, critical study of great texts from the western philosophical tradition, including works from Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Mill, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Aquinas. Although the student will concentrate on understanding these philosophers in their historical context and on their own terms, various contemporary philosophers and scholars will also be read and discussed as a means for deepening the philosophical conversation and discerning the relevance of various philosophical approaches for contemporary ethical issues. This course partially fulfills the systematic philosophy area requirement for the Philosophy or Concurrent M.A. program. Its also satisfies the philosophical ethics requirement of the Western Dominican Province’s Ratio Studiorum.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to explain the distinctive characteristics of the main philosophical approaches to ethics, and assess their relative strengths and weaknesses, particularly in their ability to provide satisfactory answers to contemporary moral debates. More specifically, students should also be able to:

- Briefly describe moral relativism, its popular appeal, and its philosophical difficulties.
- Clearly explain Aristotle’s account of eudaimonia and the nature of the good, his distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts, his definition of choice, and the role of the moral and intellectual virtues in Aristotle’s ethics.
- List and explain the three formulations of Kant’s Categorical Imperative.
• Explain Mill’s Principle of Utility.
• Summarize Nietzsche’s critique of traditional morality, and describe the role that genealogy, resentment, and bad conscience play in his account.
• Identify the main features of Natural Law Ethics, and describe the structure of human acts according to Aquinas.

Course Requirements:

Each class session will consist of both lecture and discussion. Students will be expected to carefully prepare assigned readings in order to actively participate in the conversation and raise questions in class. Students are expected to be present for class sessions, following the policies set forth in the DSPT student handbook. Absences will affect the student’s final grade. Students should plan, in particular, to be present for the final exam on December 11, since a make-up exam will be given only in the event of a serious illness (with a doctor’s note) or an equally grave reason. Students with disabilities or whose first language is not English are encouraged to speak with the instructor about any special needs they might have.

Students will be evaluated according to the quality of their class participation and their understanding of class material as demonstrated by two short (6-8 page) analytic papers and a final exam. These assignments are designed to help students develop their own critical thinking on moral issues and articulate their understanding of ethics both orally and in writing. Topics for the two short papers will be made available to students several weeks ahead of time. While these papers are not research papers, all sources should be cited using proper “Turabian” format. (see Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Eighth Edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.) Students are asked to consult and follow the DSPT’s policies regarding academic honesty and plagiarism. The papers are due October 30 (Paper #1) and December 4 (Paper #2).

Grading: Class Participation: 20%
       Papers (2): 20% each
       Final Exam: 40%
Assigned Texts:


Weekly reading assignments will be taken from these assigned texts and from readings posted on Moodle ([http://moodle.gtu.edu](http://moodle.gtu.edu)). The *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas can be found online (including, for example, at [http://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/FP.html](http://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/FP.html)).

Course Schedule:

9/4: Course Introduction

Cicero, selections from *De Officiis*, Book III (Class Handout)

9/8: Relativism

Philippa Foot, “Moral Relativism”

Alasdair MacIntyre, “Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification”

9/11: Aristotle on Happiness

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1

Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapter 8
9/15: Aristotle on Virtue and Vice
   Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapters 2-3

9/18: Aristotle: on the Moral Virtues
   Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 3.6—4
   Alasdair MacIntyre, selections from *After Virtue*

9/22: Aristotle on Justice and the Intellectual Virtues
   Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 5 & 6
   Ronald Polansky, selections from “Giving Justice Its Due”

9/25: Aristotle on Pleasure and Contemplation
   Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 7 & 10
   Verity Harte, “The *Nicomachean Ethics* on Pleasure”

9/29: Social Contract Theory
   Hobbes, Selections from *De Cive*
   Rousseau, Selections from *Discourse on Inequality*

10/2: Hume’s Moral Psychology
   David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature* Book III, Section 1

10/6: Hume and the Naturalistic Fallacy
   Alastair MacIntyre, “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’”
   Searle: “How to Derive ‘Ought’ from ‘Is’”

10/9: Kant and the Ethics of Duty
   Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* I
   Christine Korsgaard, “Kant’s Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of *Groundwork* I”

10/13: The Categorical Imperative I
   Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* II
10/16: The Categorical Imperative II
   Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* III
   Thomas W. Pogge, “The Categorical Imperative”

10/20 & 10/23: Reading Week (No Class)

10/27: Utilitarianism I
   John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* Chapters I-III
   Henry R. West, “Mill and Utilitarianism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century”

10/30: Utilitarianism II
   John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* Chapters IV-V
   *First Paper Due*

11/3: Contemporary Consequentialism
   Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” and
   “What’s Wrong with Killing?”
   Robert Spaemann, selections from *Benevolence and Happiness*

11/6: Nietzsche’s Subversion of Morality I
   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay
   Philippa Foot, “Nietzsche’s Immoralism”

11/10: Nietzsche’s Subversion of Morality II
   Maudemarie Clark, “Nietzsche’s Immoralism and the Concept of Morality”

11/13: Emotivism and Non-Cognitivist Approaches to Ethics
   Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”
   MacIntyre, selections from *After Virtue*

11/17: Existentialist Ethics
   Sartre, “Existentialism as a Humanism”
11/20: Aquinas: Natural Law I
   Flannery O’Connor, “The Enduring Chill”
   Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
   Jean Porter, selections from The Recovery of Virtue

11/24: Aquinas: Natural Law II
   St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, qq. 90-97
   Yves Simon, selections from The Tradition of Natural Law

11/27: Thanksgiving (No Class)

12/1: Aquinas on the Structure of the Human Act
   St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, qq. 6-9, 18
   Ralph McInerny, Ethica Thomistica, Chapter 4

12/4: Aquinas on the Virtues
   St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, qq. 55-56, 59, 61, 63-64
   Josef Pieper, selections from The Cardinal Virtues
   Second Paper Due

12/11: Final Exam

N.B.: The instructor reserves the right to revise the course syllabus as the need arises.

Additional Resources

The following is list of supplemental and suggested readings. They are by no means required reading for the course, but may be of some interest to students wishing to do additional research in the area of philosophical ethics.


----. *The Disputed Questions on the Virtues (Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus In Communi and Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus).* Translated by Ralph McInerny. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999.


