

PH 350: HISTORY OF ETHICS

Instructor: Dr. Tanner Hammond
Contact: tannerh@bu.edu
Office Hours: By email appointment

Course Dates: T-TH, 9:30
Classroom: CGS 515
Office Hours Location: Zoom Link on Website



COURSE TOPIC:

What, exactly, is “morality”? And what is the relationship between morality, rationality, and emotion? What are we doing when we make moral judgements? Are there “moral truths”— that is, truths about what is “good” and “bad” or what we “ought” to do? If so, how do we discover them and how do they relate to the empirically observable universe? If there are no moral truths, how do we explain the ubiquity of moral judgments in our everyday lives? And what challenges and possibilities are there for living without moral truth?

The aim of this course is to engage in an historical dialogue on these questions with key figures from the history of philosophical ethics, with special attention to modern European thought. Our goal will be to balance close reading and historical sensitivity with a topical focus on issues that remain at the forefront of contemporary debate.

COURSE MATERIALS AND WEBSITE:

This class has a course website: tannerhammond.com/350. The class will be administered entirely through this website. Please note: There is no blackboard for this class. All materials for the course will be distributed on the course website. Sign up for an account on the course website to access the Digital Forum, where you will share your weekly assignment.

COURSE TEXTS:

All Readings for this course will be distributed digitally on the course E-Reader. You can access the E-Reader through the course website.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

1. Participation_____ 10%
2. Annotations (Ungraded; Credit/No Credit)_____ 5%
3. Weekly Blog Papers (Ungraded; Credit/No Credit)_____ 10%
4. Midterm Benchmark Project (Two Short Papers or One Longer Paper)_____ 35%
5. Stages of Philosophical Writing Series (Proposal and Abstract)_____ (Ungraded)
6. Final Paper_____ 40%

GRADED AND UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS

WEEKLY UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS

I. Hive Reading - aka “Annotations” (Ungraded)

DUE: Complete annotations before the end of the day each Tuesday, on one or more of the readings assigned for that week. Your first blog paper is due Tuesday, January 25th.

Philosophy is difficult and takes time, but we’re all in it together. This class has a social E-Reader app, “Perusall,” where everyone can engage with the material in a collective forum. This gives you all the opportunity to share comments and questions and respond directly to one another. To make sure we’re keeping up with the reading, each week you will:

1. **ANNOTATE:** Leave at least 2 quality annotative questions, comments, or objections on at least one of the required readings that week. To keep it interesting: No duplicate questions! Early bird gets the worm. That being said, you can always take the same passage in a different direction. **Note:** You may leave 1-2 quality responses to your classmates’ annotations in fulfillment of your contribution.
2. **UPVOTE/CO-SIGN:** In addition to the above, upvote and/or co-sign any comments/questions that you find helpful or illuminating.

2. Short Weekly “Blog Papers” (Ungraded)

DUE: Post your weekly blog paper to the Digital Forum before the end of the day each Thursday. Your first blog paper is due Thursday, January 27th.

Every week each student will write and post a short “blog paper” to the *Digital Forum* on the course website, to be completed in response to one or more of the readings for that week. Note: You may write your blog papers on either required OR optional readings. The blog paper should be no more than 500 words.

The blog paper may either: (a) Articulate and develop objection(s), worries(s), or question(s) about the ideas or arguments exhibited in the reading, and/or (b) Defend or amend the author’s view in response to anticipated criticisms.

NOTE: The blog paper should be something that you look forward to doing, and not a source of panic or stress. To emphasize this, these are ungraded (credit/no credit) assignments. That being said, they will be read and assessed for course participation. They may also be workshopped in class from time to time. The idea is for you to have a piece of writing each week that will give you something to draw upon in class discussions and in office hours with me.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

I. Midterm Benchmark Project (Two Short Papers or One Longer Paper)

The aim of this course not only to teach you *about* philosophy, but to cultivate your ability to *do* philosophy. In my experience, cram-session regurgitative blue book exams do little to prepare one to do meaningful philosophical work. The purpose of the midterm benchmark paper is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of the material while also giving you the opportunity to actually explore some of the basic conventions of philosophical discourse.

The Paper Types: In order to help you accomplish the foregoing, your midterm paper(s) must satisfy **at least one** of the following paper types below:

- i. Critical Engagement:** Engage critically with a philosopher's work by generating original objections or challenges to their position

- ii. Reconstructive Effort:** Try to defend a philosopher's view from some classic objections or problems by reconstructing a fortified or amended version of their position

- iii. Historical Topical Debate:** Show how an issue in contemporary debate is illuminated or problematized by a historical figure. Or show how an historical philosopher's view might be illuminated or problematized by contemporary issue.

- iv. Interpretive Dispute:** Engage in an existing scholarly debate between differing interpretations of a philosopher.

Detailed instructions for the Midterm Benchmark Project will be provided in a separate handout.

2. Final Paper: The Philosophical Essay: Your final paper assignment will give you free agency to pursue any topic of interest engaging with one or more of the figures of this course. With my input, you will have full autonomy in conceiving the purpose of your paper.

Detailed instructions for the Final Paper will be provided in a separate handout.

Stages of Philosophical Writing Sub-Assignment Series (Ungraded) Successful Academic Writing doesn't happen in a vacuum, but involves communicative encounters with other rational inquirers at critical stages in the process. In order to prepare for your final paper, you'll need to practice the conventions of philosophical writing with opportunities for feedback To help you accomplish this, you will complete series of ungraded mini-assignments designed to assist you along the way in composing your final paper.

Detailed instructions for the Stages of Academic Writing Series will be provided in a separate handout.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS (See Schedule on Course Website for Updates)

Note: Readings should typically be completed before the Tuesday of each week we meet.

Module I:	Are there moral truths? A Primer in Metaethics	
Week 1	Introductions	
Week 2	God and Morality: The Euthyphro Problem	FIRST WEEKLY BLOG PAPER AND ANNOTATIONS DUE Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> James Rachels, "Does Morality Depend Upon Religion?" Fundamentals of Ethics, Guide, Ch 5, 19, 20 Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> , (selections)
Week 3	Is it all Relative? Moral Relativism and its Discontents	Plato, <i>Ring of Gyges</i> Mary Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword" James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
Week 4	Slave of the Passions: Humean Sentimentalism	David Hume, <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections) Sabine Döring, "Why Be Emotional?" Annette Baier, "What is an Emotion About?"
Week 5	Hume at "Oxbridge": 20 th Century Metaethics	David Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> (selections) A.J. Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> (selections) J.L. Mackie, <i>Ethics</i> (selections) Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Lecture on Ethics</i>
Module II:	Classical Hedonism and its Discontents	
Week 6	Hedonism and Utilitarianism	Jeremy Bentham, <i>Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , (selections) J.S. Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , (selections) Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
Week 7	Hedonism's Discontents	NO BLOG PAPER; MIDTERM TOPIC DUE THURSDAY J.S. Mill, <i>Autobiography</i> , (selections) Zadie Smith, "Joy" Cornell West, "Nihilism in Black America"
Week 8	Is Death Bad?	NO BLOG PAPER; MIDTERM PAPER DUE THURSDAY Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus Lucretius, <i>De Rerum Natura</i> , (selections) Thomas Nagel, "Death"
Module III:	Kantian Rationalism and the Ethics of Agency	
Week 9	Morality as Rationality: Kantian Ethics	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Ch.1 & 2 Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie" Christine Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie"
Week 10	Respect and Autonomy: The Formula of Humanity	Immanuel Kant, <i>The Critique of Practical Reason</i> (selections) Berit Brogaard, "Sex by Deception"
Week 11	Freedom, Desire, and Determinism	Immanuel Kant, <i>The Critique of Practical Reason</i> (selections) Jennifer Uleman, "Kant's Theory of Motivation" (selections) Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground"
Week 12	What is Evil? Rationality and the Problem of Evil	Hannah Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> , Michelle Kosch, "Kant on Autonomy and Moral Evil"
Module IV:	Ethics Beyond Truth? The Meaning of Suffering and Nietzsche's Challenge	
Week 13	Suffering and the Ethics of Compassion	Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Sufferings of the World" Iris Murdoch, <i>The Sovereignty of Good</i> Selections Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, Journey to Mindfulness
Week 14	The Death of God and Nietzsche's Challenge	NO BLOG PAPER; FINAL PROPOSAL DUE Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Greatest Weight" Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , First Essay Brian Leiter, "Death of God and the Death of Morality"
Week 15	Creating Values: Who is Nietzsche's Free Spirit?	NO BLOG PAPER; FINAL OUTLINE DUE Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> , Second & Third Essay Nadeem Hussain, "Honest Illusion"

IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Late Assignment Policy: Late work will be evaluated at my discretion.

Academic Integrity: Cases of plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the disciplinary procedures described in Boston University's Academic Conduct Code. All students are subject to the CAS code, which can be read online:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

Attendance: Students are expected to attend lectures regularly. Absence in the case of an illness will be excused if a note from a physician substantiates that the absence was required for health reasons. Excessive absences will adversely impact grades.

Office of Disability Services: I assume that all of us learn in different ways. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for accommodations that will satisfy both your learning needs and the requirements of the course. Whether or not you have a documented disability, BU provides many support services that are available to all students. Disability Services is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities. If you have a disability that interferes with your learning (whether visible or invisible, physical or mental), you are encouraged to register with this office. If you have any questions about accommodation, or what constitutes a disability, I invite you to speak with me or to Disability Services.

Chosen Name and Gender Pronouns: This course aims to be an inclusive learning community that supports students of all gender identities (including non-gendered identifying persons). While class rosters are provided to instructors with students' legal names, please let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name than that listed in the StudentLink. You are also invited to tell me early in the semester which set of pronouns best fits your identity (if any).

Absence Due to Religious Observance If you must miss class due to religious observance, you will not be penalized for that absence and you will receive a reasonable opportunity to make up any work or examinations that you may miss. Please notify the instructor of absences for religious observance as soon as possible, ideally before the absence. View the religious observance policy:

www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/

Bereavement In the event of the death of an immediate family member, you should notify your advisor, who will help you coordinate your leave. You will be automatically granted five weekdays of leave, and if necessary, your advisor will help you to petition the Dean for additional leave time. You may also request a leave of absence due to bereavement. Please contact your advisor, who will help you with the process. View the bereavement policy: www.bu.edu/academics/policies/student-bereavement/

Content and Trigger Warning Policy In this class, we will be confronting challenging questions about the full spectrum of human experience. For that reason, it is of the utmost important that there are measures in place so that we may all do so safely.

1. Discussion of potentially problematic discussion in class comes with a standing open door policy so that students may leave the meeting at any time if they feel uncomfortable.
2. There is a standing alternate reading assignment policy for any readings that a student finds to present an obstacle to learning
3. There is an anonymous feedback box to the course website, in which students can keep me apprised of any concerns they might have.