Is Goodness really so far away? If I simply desire Goodness, I will find that it is already here.¹

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.²

What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; “why” finds no answer.³

In order for humans to coexist, it is necessary for us to adhere to certain rules, models, or norms. Ethics is the study of these rules, models, and norms. Ethicists ask: Which actions should we deem to be right or wrong, good or bad? Whose lives should we seek to emulate? And what are the criteria for even deciding upon these judgments? Is the ethical life the same as the happy life, or do we need to sacrifice our happiness in order to be ethical?

There are competing answers to these questions, and in this course we will consider some of the major philosophical frameworks for answering them – virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, and immoralism – by reading some selections of major primary sources from the ancient world to the present. We will apply these frameworks to consider some major contemporary moral problems, potentially including abortion, enviromentalism, civil disobedience, and others.

Course Objectives

One of the primary goals of this course is to become acquainted with some of the defining philosophical ideas of the present era, and to uncover some of the roots of these ideas, as well as alternatives to them, in ancient and early modern philosophy. No one period of the history of thought—neither the old nor the new—is guaranteed to be correct. Philosophy takes nothing for granted, and always reconsiders old questions anew. It is also important to know how thinkers have reacted to one another if one is to understand the issues at stake in our own time.

The point of reading a philosophical text is not necessarily to agree with the author, but rather to deepen one’s own thinking in relation to them. Even if an author turns out to be wrong, it is useful to be able to know and explain why they’re wrong, and why a different position is better. So the another main goal of this course is to develop the analytical, critical, and speculative skills to philosophize on one’s own, that is, to develop one’s own answers to some of the fundamental philosophical questions.

Learning Outcomes

By examining a selection of philosophical writings, you will be able to:

- Read a text philosophically and critically by:
  - analyzing its arguments
  - identifying the presuppositions of those arguments
  - considering the implications thereof
  - contemplating other possible views about the same topic

- Think deeply about fundamental philosophical questions and make progress towards answering them in your own way.

- Provide considered and alternative answers to these questions verbally and in writing.

- Argue coherently for your own solutions and analyze opposing arguments, synthesizing the best elements of each.

- Demonstrate versatility in applying philosophical insights to familiar examples and to the existing problems of our times.

Course Text

The following text is required for the course and are available for purchase at the university bookstore:


All other course texts will be made available on Blackboard. Please don’t delay buying the textbook: you will need it in the very first week of the course.
Assignments and Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes and Minor Assignments</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</tbody>
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Not everyone uses the same scale for converting percentages to letter grades. Here’s mine:

- **A** = 95-100%
- **A-** = 90-95%
- **B+** = 87-89.9%
- **B** = 83-86.9%
- **B-** = 80-82.9%
- **C+** = 77-79.9%
- **C** = 73-76.9%
- **C-** = 70-72.9%
- **D+** = 67-69.9%
- **D** = 63-66.9%
- **D-** = 60-62.9%
- **F** = 0-59.9%

*It is not possible to receive an A+, C-, D+, or D- as a final grade at Duquesne (see the University’s OPA Guide). At the end of the course the weighted average of the various assignments will be rounded to the nearest possible final grade.*

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend class and regularly participate in class discussion. Students may miss up to two classes without penalty. Beginning with the third absence, I will impose a 20% penalty to your Participation grade for each absence. If you know in advance that you must miss a class (e.g. for an athletic event, etc.), please let me know as early as possible. If a serious medical or personal crisis occurs, I would encourage you to contact Student Health Services or the Office of Student Life. Then please contact me so we can work out a satisfactory solution to ensure your success in the course (absent documentation from a medical professional, I reserve the right to judge whether a crisis is genuinely serious).

Participation

Philosophy is a discipline that requires discussion – perhaps more so than any other discipline. In a philosophical discussion, one has to express one’s own ideas, to seek to justify those ideas, to test them against others, to seek to persuade others, and to be open to persuasion by others. This isn’t something incidental to philosophy; it is its essence. For this reason, student participation in this class is essential to the success of the course.

‘Participation’ is broadly understood to include, among other things, contributing to class discussions with comments and questions, or coming to discuss philosophical topics during
office hours. If you’re the kind of person who doesn’t like talking in class, you can also earn participation points by discussing the class topics with me one-on-one via email or during my office hours.

In this course, we will at times be reading and discussing controversial material about which it is likely that members of our class will have a range of opinions and political beliefs. No one will be graded (favorably or unfavorably) on the basis of their particular beliefs, political or otherwise. What counts is the quality of your arguments.

**Written Assignments**

Philosophical writing differs from other kinds of writing in that it generally aims to persuade the reader about something – either about your own viewpoint, or perhaps about the correct interpretation of someone else’s viewpoint. So philosophical writing is generally organized around a **thesis**, i.e. something that you want to argue for or against. The main purpose of a philosophical essay is not simply to report information or to summarize a text, but rather to use analysis, examples, facts, and other techniques in order to support or defend this thesis. When grading your essays, the main question that I will be asking myself is: **how persuasively have you argued for your thesis?**

Late assignments will be penalized immediately by 5% and an additional 5% every 48 hours after the due date. But I’m usually happy to give students extensions if requested in advance.

Since most of the assignments for the class will be in a written format, students need to have a reasonable level of composition skills. Students who are concerned that their writing may not be at the level they would like it to be should contact the Writing Center.

**Office Hours**

I’ll be available for meetings with students on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10:00-10:50am – no appointment necessary. If you want to meet outside those times, I’m happy to meet in person at other times on Tuesdays and Thursdays when I’ll be on campus; just send me an email or talk to me before or after class so we can agree upon a time. If you want to meet on other days of the week, I’m happy to set up a meeting via Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Students sometimes have the impression that it’s bothersome or intrusive to ask their instructors for help in a course. It’s not! It’s part of the job. I’m happy to offer help and guidance in any way that I can, and I will gladly meet with you to talk through the course material, help out with your assignments, or just discuss whatever philosophical issues might be on your mind.
Cheating & Plagiarism

Duquesne University’s Academic Integrity Policy describes plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism in papers or other written, electronic, or oral work (including essays, research papers, theses, dissertations, presentations, class projects, or work for publication) may include, but is not limited to, student use—whether by summary, paraphrase, copying, direct quotation, or a combination—of the published or unpublished work or specific ideas of another person or source without full and clear acknowledgement (including the use of quotation marks to indicate the source’s specific language). Plagiarism may include the submission of material from sources accessed through the Internet or by other means, or from other individuals, without proper attribution. Also, plagiarism may include the submission of a paper prepared in whole or in part by another person or agency engaged in providing or selling term papers or other academic materials.

Essays, assignments, or exams which are found to be plagiarized or which exhibit other forms of academic dishonesty will receive an F and may not be rewritten. Any student who is found to have plagiarized their work prior to the withdrawal deadline will not be permitted to withdraw to avoid a course grade sanction. All course essays will be checked for plagiarism with SafeAssign and by other means.

Students must be cognizant of proper citation styles. Anything that you quote or paraphrase from someone other than yourself (including PowerPoints and other media for this course) needs to be properly cited and the source must be included in your bibliography or works cited page.

Accommodations

Duquesne University is committed to providing all students with equal access to learning. In order to receive reasonable accommodations in their courses, students who have a disability of any kind must register with the Office of Freshman Development and Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6658). Once a disability is officially documented, the office of Special Student Services will meet with you to determine what accommodations are necessary. With your permission, your instructors will receive letters outlining the reasonable accommodations they are required to make. Once I have received this letter, you and I will meet to coordinate the way these accommodations will be implemented in this course. For more information, go to http://www.duq.edu/life-at-duquesne/student-services/disability-services

Electronic Device Policy

Electronic devices like laptops and tablets can be useful tools in a university classroom for note-taking, reading pdfs & e-books, looking up references, etc. In a HyFlex classroom, they are also a necessity for those attending online. However, electronic devices can also be a major
source of distraction, both for yourself and for your peers. Even without distraction, some psychological research indicates that students who take notes by hand perform better on some metrics than those who use computers. If you use electronic devices in class, it is therefore critical to use them responsibly and avoid the distractions of email, social media, and the internet generally. The use of cellphones (including texting and other forms of messaging) is not permitted. Students observed misusing electronic devices may lose Participation points.

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Duquesne University is committed to providing all students with equal access to learning. In order to receive reasonable accommodations in their courses, students who have a disability of any kind must register with the Office of Freshman Development and Special Student Services in 309 Duquesne Union (412-396-6658). Once a disability is officially documented, the office of Special Student Services will meet with you to determine what accommodations are necessary. With your permission, your instructors will receive letters outlining the reasonable accommodations they are required to make. Once I have received this letter, you and I will meet to coordinate the way these accommodations will be implemented in this course. For more information, go to the Disability Services Webpage.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
Your mental health and wellbeing matter. The Center for Student Wellbeing provides health services, recreation opportunities, and counseling. Counseling services can provide cost-free and confidential support. They offer many options, including workshops, groups, and individual care. You do not need to be in a crisis to reach out to them. They are ready and willing to help! You can access these services at 412.396.6204 or on their webpage.

Counseling Services
636 Fisher Hall
412.396.6204
Tues., Thurs. and Fri. 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. / Mon. and Wed. 8:30 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
For after hours emergencies, please call Re: Solve Crisis Network at 1.888.796.8226

Health Services
2nd floor, Union
Call 412.396.1650 for an appointment, except emergencies
Emergency Care/After Hours Care: Call Public Safety 412.396.2677
Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741 for free 24/7 support
Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introductory Material
- Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Introduction & Chapter 1 (Blackboard)
- Alisdair MacIntyre, “Introduction” (Cahn & Markie pp. 1-3)

Week 2: Virtue Ethics I
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I [all except Section 6], Book II [all], Book X [just Sections 6-8] (Cahn & Markie, pp. 124-140, 172-175)

Week 3: Virtue Ethics II
- Confucius, *Analects* (selections) (Blackboard)

Week 4: Deontological Ethics I

Week 5: Deontological Ethics II
- Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints” (Cahn & Markie, pp. 685-697)

Week 6: Utilitarian Ethics
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Cahn & Markie, pp. 369-403)
- Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (Cahn & Markie, pp. 847-854)

Week 7: The Trolley Problem
- Judith Jarvis Thompson, “The Trolley Problem”
- TV Screening: *The Good Place*

Week 8: Existentialism I
- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Cahn & Markie, pp. 443-467)

Week 9: Existentialism II
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Cahn & Markie, pp. 698-704)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex* (Blackboard)

Week 10: Modern Moral Philosophy
- Elizabeth Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (Cahn & Markie pp. 705-717)
Week 11: Ethics and Politics
- Alisdair MacIntyre, “Justice as Virtue: Changing Conceptions” (Blackboard).

Week 12: Contemporary Moral Problems: Abortion
- *Thinking Critically About Moral Problems*, Chapter 6: Abortion (Blackboard)
- Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion” (Cahn & Markie, pp. 815-825)
- Don Marquis, “An Argument that Abortion is Wrong” (Cahn & Markie, pp. 826-836)

Week 13: Contemporary Moral Problems: Physician Assisted Suicide
- James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (Cahn & Markie, pp. 837-841)
- Philippa Foot, “Killing and Letting Die” (Cahn & Markie, pp. 842-846)

Week 14: Moral Progress
- Kwame Appiah, *The Honor Code* (Blackboard)

Week 15:
- Summary & wrap-up