

SPRING 2014
PHI 102, Section FYS11
ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE JUST SOCIETY

Location: John Jay College of Criminal Justice
524 West 59th St. / Room NB 1.71
New York, NY 10019

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:50 to 12:05

Instructor: Dr. Douglas Ficek

Email: dficek@jjay.cuny.edu

Office: If you would like to schedule an appointment with me, please speak with me before or after class or send me an email with your relevant information (full name and course section).

Description: What should I do? Who should I become? What is the meaning of life – of *this* life, *my* life? How should I treat the others around me? And how should I expect to be treated by them? Questions like these – and there are many others – are about *ethics*.

As human beings, how should we organize ourselves? What is the best kind of society? What is the best kind of government? And what happens when governments become exploitative and oppressive? Questions like these – and there are many others – are about *politics*.

Simply put, this course is about the complex and contested relationship between ethics and the larger sociopolitical world. It is not just about ethics, and it is not just about politics. Rather, it is about them both. It considers them together, and it is informed by a very diverse selection of twenty-three texts – from “The Ethics of Objectivism” by Ayn Rand to *The Community Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, from the *Republic* by Plato to “The Lived Experience of the Black” by Frantz Fanon.

In the first part of this course, we will talk about ethical theory, focusing on eight more-or-less distinctive approaches: the divine command theory, ethical egoism, virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, existentialism, alterity ethics, and care ethics.

In the second part of this course, we will talk about the just society, once again focusing on eight approaches: enlightened aristocracy, the virtuous polity, the social contract, liberal democracy, communism, anarchism, libertarianism, and African communitarianism.

In the third and final part of this course, we will talk about the unjust society, focusing on four approaches: non-ideal theory, feminism, critical race theory, and liberation theory. We will also watch the science fiction film *District 9* to bring everything together.

Requirements: In this introductory course, there are twenty-three readings of varying length. We will cover one reading per class, assuming that we do not fall behind, and it is your responsibility to read the appropriate texts *before class begins*. To this end, you will be assigned ten short papers that must be handed in at the beginning of class – not during or after class. These papers will focus on argumentative structure, and together they will constitute fifty percent of your final grade, so *do not get lazy with them*. Also, some of these short papers will be collaborative.

In addition to the ten short papers, you will be writing an eight-to-ten-page final paper, about which I will have more information later in the semester. For now, take a look at the readings and think about the philosophical issues that interest you the most. This assignment, which is

due on May 15th, will constitute twenty percent of your final grade.

There will not be a midterm exam, but there will be a take-home final exam that I will give you on May 15th. It will be an essay exam, and at least one of the questions on it will be about the film *District 9*, the science-fiction thriller that will conclude our time together. I cannot tell you now when it is due, as the final exam schedule has not yet been posted.

Obviously, attendance is mandatory, and excessive absences (more than three) will negatively affect your final grade. Excessive tardiness will also negatively affect your final grade. Bottom line: *If you cannot fully commit yourself to this course, then you should not take it.*

Outcomes: John Jay College of Criminal Justice now requires that specific learning outcomes be specified on course syllabi. Here are three general learning outcomes for PHI 102: (1) Students will be able to identify and evaluate arguments; (2) students will be able to explicate key philosophical texts on ethics and political philosophy; and (3) students will be able to discuss these texts both in class discussion and in their written work.

Caveats: As an instructor, I am pretty easy-going. I do, however, insist upon a respectful atmosphere in the classroom. What exactly does this mean? It means: no phone calls, no texting, no sleeping, and no ridiculously long bathroom breaks. If your phone does go off during class, you can either sing a song for the class – Johnny Cash would be fantastic – or I can assign an additional writing assignment that *everyone* must do. This is not a joke.

“My flash drive broke” has become the new “My dog ate my homework,” and I will not accept it as an excuse for late or incomplete work. Please use dropbox.com or docs.google.com to ensure the security of your written work. Also, they are *free*.

Finally, I take academic dishonesty *very* seriously and will fail anyone who plagiarizes on any of the written work. Do not test me on this. Please review the official policy:

“Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one's own creation. Using the ideas or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations to the original source.

Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. *Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism.*

It is the student's responsibility to recognize the difference between statements that are common knowledge (which do not require documentation) and restatements of the ideas of others. Paraphrasing, summarizing, and direct quotation are acceptable forms of restatement, as long as the source is cited.

Students who are unsure how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult with their instructors. The Library has free guides designed to help students with problems of documentation.”

Grading: Attendance – 10%
Short Papers – 40%
Final Paper – 25%
Final Exam – 25%

Texts: The required texts for this course are available at douglasficek.com. Download and/or print them out ASAP. *Always bring the appropriate texts to class.*

Schedule:

January 28 – Course Introduction

ETHICAL THEORY

January 30 – Divine Command Theory. Selections from *Euthyphro* by Plato

February 4 – Ethical Egoism. “The Objectivist Ethics” by Ayn Rand

February 6 – Virtue Ethics. Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle

February 11 – Deontology. Selections from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* by Immanuel Kant

February 13 – Utilitarianism. Selections from *Utilitarianism* by John Stuart Mill

February 18 – Existentialism. Selections from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir

February 20 – NO CLASS

February 25 – Alterity Ethics. Selections from *I and Thou* by Martin Buber

February 27 – Care Ethics. “Why Care about Caring?” by Nel Noddings

THE JUST SOCIETY

March 4 – Enlightened Aristocracy. Selections from the *Republic* by Plato

March 6 – The Virtuous Polity. Selections from *Politics* by Aristotle

March 11 – The Social Contract. Selections from *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes

March 13 – Liberal Democracy. Selections from *Two Treatise of Government* by John Locke

March 18 – Communism. Selections from *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

March 20 – Anarchism. “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For” by Emma Goldman

March 25 – Libertarianism. Selections from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* by Robert Nozick

March 27 – African Communitarianism. “*Ubuntu* and Its Socio-moral Significance” by Mluleki Munyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi

THE UNJUST SOCIETY

April 1 – Non-Ideal Theory. “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology” by Charles W. Mills

April 3 – Feminism I. “Oppression” by Marilyn Frye

April 8 – Feminism II. “Contracting In” by Carole Pateman

April 10 – Critical Race Theory I. “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” by W.E.B. Du Bois

April 15 – NO CLASS

April 17 – NO CLASS

April 22 – NO CLASS

April 24 – Critical Race Theory II. “The Fact of Blackness” by Frantz Fanon

April 29 – Liberation Theory I. Selections from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire

May 1 – Liberation Theory II. “Liberation Ethics: Fundamental Hypotheses” by Enrique Dussel

May 6 – Catch-Up

May 8 – Film: *District 9*

May 13 – Film: *District 9*

May 15 – Course Conclusion