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PHL 110E.03: Introduction to Ethics - The Conduct and the Context of the Good Life

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Recommended Citation

Borgmann, Albert, "PHL 110E.03: Introduction to Ethics - The Conduct and the Context of the Good Life" (2013). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 1771.

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INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS: The Conduct and the Context of the Good Life

I. Intent of the Course

The course teaches ethical literacy—a command of the major ethical theories of human conduct and an understanding of the influence that the context has on our conduct as Churchill’s Principle tells us: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.”

II. Course Outline

We will spend roughly three weeks on each section of the course and the rest of the time on the Introduction and Conclusion.

Introduction: The conduct and the context of the good life. The power and the limits of reason and of the emotions.

Readings: Moss, “The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food” and Richtel, “Attached to Technology and Paying a Price,” on ERes and regular reserve in the Mansfield Library.

(1) The rise of the contemporary context.

Readings: Welch, *Fools Crow*, all of it. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. II.

(2) Reason and its context.

Readings: Kant, *Foundations*, tr. Lewis White Beck, pp. 5-6, 9-17, 29-40, 46-47, 49-52, 53-54.

(3) Care and its context.

Readings: Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Introduction and chs. 1-3.

(4) Happiness and its context.

Readings: Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, pp. 3-11, 45-77, 79-83, 88-99, 102-112, 115-169.

(5) Moral excellence and its context.

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Martin Ostwald, I, 1-5 (book one, chs. 1-5), 7, 9-11, 13; II, 1-2, 5-8; III, 6-9; V, 1-3, 4, 7; X, 7-9.

Conclusion: Making contexts conducive to the conduct of the good life.

III. Requirements

There will be a 20 minute test every Thursday. The first test will be on Thursday, September 5. The tests will be graded according to the stepped traditional grading system: A, A-, B+, B, B-, etc. Each test will consist of (a) three questions that will test your command of the course content and are to be answered with brief statements of about 30 words total for each question; (b) a text identification question that will test your command of the assigned readings, to be answered in about 30 words; and (c) an essay question to be answered in 150 to 200 words. The three answers to the questions in part (a) will jointly receive a letter grade. The answer to (b) will be graded P (passing) or U (unsatisfactory). The answer to (c) will be graded P, U, or E (excellent). A P will raise the grade for the questions in part (a) by one step (e.g., B to B+); U will lower it by one step (e.g., B to B-); E will raise it by two steps (e.g., B to A-). The tests will be returned on the following Tuesday. You are required to receive the test that day and to keep your tests to track your progress in the course and to prepare for the final.

On the day of the final, Wednesday, December 11, at 10:10 AM, there will be a final test of twelve course content questions, nine taken verbatim from previous tests, three on the material of the preceding week. The final test will have the weight of three ordinary tests. To pass the course, you have to pass the final.

You can make up one test without questions asked—a free makeup. If you bring me a note from a doctor or the Health Service or if there has been some hardship (caring for small children is a valid reason for missing), then it’s an excused makeup, and you don’t lose your right to a free makeup. To get the hardship exception, you have to come see me during my office hours and plead your case. Makeup tests cover the same material and have the same format as the regular tests, but the questions are different. Makeup tests will not be returned. Email me to find out the grade, and come in if you want to look at the test.

You can retake one test other than a makeup. The higher of the two grades (regular and retake) will count. You cannot use a retake to make up a test you missed. To take a makeup or retake, email me a note with the number of the test you want to make up or retake and tell me whether the test in question is a free or an excused makeup or whether it’s a retake. I will respond with instructions for the makeup or retake. The deadline for all the makeups and retakes is Friday, November 22, 4 PM.

V. Office Hours

Borgmann: TR, 11:05-11:30 AM, W 11:05-12:00 noon, and by appointment in LA 149.

Phone and messages: 243-2792. e-mail: Albert.Borgmann@umontana.edu.

Please let us know if you have a disability so that we can make accommodations.