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PHL 110E.01: Introduction to Ethics

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PHIL 110: Introduction to Ethics, Velasco

Class Info and Office Hours:

- Dr. Melodie Velasco Stenger, melodie.velasco@mso.umt.edu (Please call me Dr. Velasco or Dr. V)
- **Office:** Liberal Arts Building, Room 156
 - **Office Hours:** 1pm-2pm MW (no appointment needed) and by appointment

Teaching Assistant(s): Shalom Kristanugraha and Kirstin Waldkoenig

- **Office Hours:** *Please write them down here when they are announced!*

Course Description:

We often find ourselves feeling we know the fictional characters within our favorite stories as well as if not better than the people around us. As readers and viewers, we are in the position of being able to judge those characters' actions with clarity. But what does it mean, and what does it take, for one to be a *person* of character? What does it mean and what does it take to live a *whole* life, a life of integrity? Considering various works of fiction and memoir and a few developmental psychologists alongside such canonical philosophers as Descartes, Hegel, and Aristotle, this course is an attempt to answer that question. We end by considering the current ethical climate, taking up Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* as well as some works on animal ethics to extend the question thusly: what is most required of the person of character by today's society? This is a lecture course with a conversational tone that makes considerable use of Moodle. Weekly reading journal assignments, Moodle-based tests, in-class assignments, and a final exam are all required.

Learning Outcomes:

As an introductory *philosophy* course, this course will coach students to attain, at minimum, an ability to *read* exceedingly complicated and nuanced texts; this ability is not presupposed. The excellent student, however, will surpass this skill if she attains the ability to *write* in such a way that her complicated and nuanced understanding—her *reading* of the text—is communicated in a clear and persuasive fashion.

As an introductory *ethics* course, this course uses the self-development of the traditional college-aged student within broader society as its touchstone. The excellent student will discover that the sensitivity and responsibility required by successful reading and writing are also required by successful listening and speaking, and that these last two actions, when performed well, are central to being a person of character.

At the conclusion of this course, the successful student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate habits of a successful reader (vocabulary, marginalia, Spark Points);
2. List and define the chief parts of a Problem Synopsis and an Argument Analysis;
3. Define each of the Key Terms identified in each lesson's Text Map;
4. Recognize and identify the outline of an argument within a text;

The excellent student will, in addition, be able to:

1. Critique the argument or a sub-argument in a given portion of text;
2. Formulate a counter-argument in response to a given text's argument;
3. Construct a clean and organized prose presentation of a counter-argument, once formulated.

Texts:

These two texts are required in hardcopy unless a learning difference requires another medium. **Do not wait to purchase these**; do it now. Do not purchase a different translation of the Aristotle.

- Aristotle, and Joe Sachs. [*Nicomachean Ethics*](#). Newburyport, Mass.; Cardiff: Focus ; Drake, 2003. ISBN 978-1-58510-035-4

- Gilligan, Carol. [*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*](#). Reissue edition. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993. ISBN 978-0-674-44544-4

These two texts are required, but the format and edition are up to you: electronic and audio versions are acceptable.

- Ilgunas, Ken. [*Walden on Wheels: On The Open Road from Debt to Freedom*](#). 4/14/13 edition. Boston: New Harvest, 2013. ASIN: B00CQAVRD6
- Thomas, Angie. [*The Hate U Give*](#). Walker Books Ltd, 2018. ISBN-10: 1406387932

While I encourage you to read both, you may select one of the following if you wish; electronic and audio versions are acceptable:

- Alderman, Naomi. [*The Power*](#). Reprint edition. S.l.: Back Bay Books, 2019. ASIN: B075LMWF3F
- Frankel, Laurie. [*This Is How It Always Is: A Novel*](#). Reprint edition. Flatiron Books, 2018. ISBN-10: 1250088569

You may choose to purchase this last text (electronic and audio versions and alternate translations are acceptable), or see the film when it is offered outside of class:

- Ibsen, Henrik. [*A Doll's House*](#). Dover Publications, 1992. ISBN: 978-0-486-27062-3

Requirements:

Spark Points (25% of final grade):

Upon completing each philosophical reading assignment, each student shall post at least one and not more than three Points (separate posts) on the appropriate Moodle discussion board. In no more text than will fit on one side of a 3x5 card, each SP should contain two parts: A **cited quotation** from the reading assignment that grabbed your attention, typed in full and cited such that I can find it again, and a **question** about that quotation.

Grading: Only Points with both parts (cited quotation, question/response) will be graded. One Spark Point per assignment earns a C; 2, a B; 3, an A. *Please note that these are graded not on intellectual brilliance, but on completion as per the directions. That being said, putting your best (thoughtful, grammatical, proofread) foot forward is always a good idea.*

Opinion Journal and Activities (25% of final grade):

Students need a bound notebook (no 3-ring binders, please) in which to develop their opinions about course material. A typical entry should identify some choice or action made by a character within the literature we have read and then consider that choice in light of the philosophical texts that we have read—most likely but not necessarily those assigned within the same unit.

These journals should always be brought to class meetings, as they will occasionally, and without warning, be collected for grading. In-class written assignments will also be completed within these notebooks.

Grading: Reading journal entries will be evaluated according to how much effort has gone into their creation. A journal which makes evident that a student has been reading the literary texts will earn an A; a journal in which this evidence is somewhat lacking or not convincing will receive a C; a journal in which this evidence is entirely lacking will receive an F. The presence or absence of in-class assignments will raise or lower these grades depending on the number assigned in a given collection period.

Tests (30% of final grade):

The Tests will

- be administered via our Moodle website;
- consist of ~10 multiple choice/true/false/short-answer style questions;
- be timed, taking no longer than ~25 minutes.

Students may

- use notes, books, the internet, and even peers, but not TAs during the Tests;
- may take each Test up to 3 times (highest grade will be recorded); an hour must separate each attempt.

Grading: The Tests will receive a stepped letter grade (A, A-, B+...). Students earning an A- and above will be allowed to write a short two page paper (a “Dialectic”). A grade of an A- or above on a Dialectic will earn the student the “Right to Write,” effectively allowing them to write a paper instead of taking either part of the Final Exam.

Final Exam (20% of final grade):

The Final Exam will consist of two parts: the first consists of approximately 75% questions taken from previous exams and/or study guides. The remaining questions, including questions drawn from the last week of reading assignments, will be new. This portion will be given via Moodle (with 3 re-takes allowed, much in the manner of the Tests). The second part will consist of a comprehensive 400-word essay question which will require you to use one of the philosophical texts in the course to analyze a literary character’s choice or action. The second part of the Exam will be given in the classroom on *Monday, December 10th from 8-10am*. Those students who have earned and wish to exercise the Right to Write (about which, see below) must submit their Final Paper by 11:59pm on that same day.

Grading: The first part of the Final Exam will receive a traditional stepped letter grade (A, A-, B+...). The second part will be graded as **P** for “passing,” **E** for “excellent,” **U** for “unsatisfactory,” or **Z** for “zero” (used solely for instances in which the second part is not submitted.) A **P** will increase the grade on Part One by one step (from a B to a B+), an **E** by two steps (from a B to an A-). A **U** will decrease the grade on Part One by one step (from a B to a B-), a **Z** by two steps (from a B to a C+).

Extra Credit:

Extra Credit is fun! Occasionally, but only ever in class, short quizzes **may** be offered to supplement your Spark Point grade. In the event that your Spark Point grade is 100%, the extra credit will be applied in the “Test” category. There is no guarantee that it will be offered! Extra credit may not be made up in any case.

Policies:**Attendance:**

I expect you to do your best to attend all class meetings and arrive on time. If you are going to be absent or late, email me as soon as possible to inform me. Assignments given and collected in class (except extra credit) may only be made up when such an email was sent ahead of time.

The Right to Write:

Students earning an A- or better on a particular Test are invited to write a 2 page paper called a “Dialectic” expanding upon one of the Spark Points they have written pertaining to that Test’s material. (Specific directions for the Dialectic will be issued along with the invitation.) Students earning an A- or better on a particular Dialectic are invited to expand that Dialectic into a 4-6 page Final Paper which will take the place of the Final Exam; students who submit this paper need not take either part of the Final. (Specific directions for the Final Paper will be issued along with the invitation.) The paper must be submitted via email as a Word document no later than 11:59pm on the day of the in-class Final.

Missed Assignments:

Because both Spark Points and Tests are administered online and over a large period of time, there should be very few circumstances in which arrangements need to be made for missed assignments. In-class assignments, as stated above, may only be made up when advance notice of the absence was given. If you are allowed to make up an assignment completed in class, you may be asked to do so by visiting with me in office hours so that I can ascertain that you have read and understood the material in question. Lastly, if you email me a short message about something you are passionate about right now, I am more likely to think of you as an honorable person who read the syllabus at the outset of the semester as directed, and I will likely be more inclined to do my best to accommodate your requests.

Academic Honesty:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by myself (at least the failing of the assignment in question, perhaps the failing of the course in its entirety) and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. Written work may be screened by various plagiarism-screening websites. For more, please review the University of Montana [Student Conduct Code](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php): (http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php).

Technology:

The use of mobile phones outside of photographing overheads (and this is largely discouraged, as the overheads are made available on Moodle) is not permitted in class. Students using phones will be asked to leave. I strongly discourage students from [using laptops or tablets to take notes](#). If you would like to hear [more](#) about [why](#), please visit me in office hours. If you feel strongly about using a laptop to take notes, or learn best by note-taking in that way, please be courteous by sitting in the very back of the classroom.

Accessibility:

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodations. Please place your request with sufficient advance notice and be prepared to provide verification of disability and its impact from Disability Services. If you are going to take the Final Exam at DSS, please schedule it well in advance. See the [Disability Services for Students](#) website at www.umt.edu/dss/.

ESL Students:

This course is expected to be difficult for those for whom English is the primary language; it will be exceedingly difficult for those for whom English is a secondary language. I encourage ESL students to contact me early in the term to discuss how I might best support their success in the class. ESL students are permitted the use of a hardcopy dictionary during in-class assignments, and are encouraged to find translations of our required texts to use as *additional* support in reading and studying their assignments.