CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

**Contemporary Ethical Issues (RS 361)**

(Class Number: 20500)

**Fall 2016**

**Instructor:** Albert Tevanyan

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Office hours online: Monday: 11:00am. to 12:00pm.

**Course Description:**

This course aims to introduce the students to the multi-faceted and complex nature of morality and ethics taking into consideration the wealth of various religious and intellectual traditions and approaches. We will begin the course with an overview of ethical reasoning in antiquity, particularly, how Plato and Aristotle treated the philosophical principles of ethics. We will then examine how ethics was shaped by various religious and cultural belief systems, including Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic schools of thought. We will also discuss how morality and ethics were influenced by some of the Enlightenment thinkers and how contemporary ethical issues are treated today in light of Post-Modern thought. Among the issues to be discussed are rational foundations of moral judgment, bio-ethics, gender issues, human freedom, environment, the question of “ethical economy”, violence and war, secularization and various concepts of religious piety.

**RS 361 SLO’s in Contemporary Ethical Issues**

1. Students will be able to think logically and analytically about various religious traditions.

2. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the basic contents and major themes in various religious traditions.

3. Students will be able to distinguish between the religious/faith and Historical/Critical approaches to sacred texts and dogmas.

4. Be able to contextualize religious ethics in Post-Modern Society

5. Acquire knowledge of the influence that various religious traditions have had on modern human civilization.

6. Understand religious diversity in the United States.

**RS 361 GE SLO’s**

Goal: Students will understand the rich history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literatures, religions, and philosophy.

Students will:

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and

expression in one or more areas, periods or cultures;

1. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and

expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities;

1. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated

understanding and fluency of expressive forms;

1. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development

within the arts and humanities;

1. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression,

literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which

a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;

1. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was

created or a tradition emerged.

**Texts for this course:**

1*.Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction: Second Edition*. Harry J. Gensler. New York: Routledge, 2011

2. *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?.* Michael J. Sandel. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010

Additional Electronic books available online (selected chapters)

3.*The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice and Religious creativity*. Willis Jenkins. (Washington DC: George Town University press, 2013)

*4. Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant

*5. The Routledge Companion to Ethics.* John Skorupski ed.

6.*Comparative Religious Ethics*, *A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics*, Darrel J. Fasching et. al. (Blackwell Publishing, 2011)

*7. The Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, John Locke

*8. Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche

*9. Euthypro*, Plato

*10. The Republic*, Plato

*11. Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle

**Course Requirements:**

• **Tests and Exams:**

**Midterm and Final.**

There will be two main examinations: a midterm and a final. For the dates of the exams see Moodle.

Midterm: 40 questions. 20 multiple choice (2 points each) and 20 true and false (1 point each). Total: 60 points.

Final: 40 questions. 20 multiple choice (2 points each) and 20 true and false (1 point each). Total: 60 points. The final grade for the course will be calculated based on the average of quizzes, writing assignments, the midterm and the final.

**Online Reading Quizzes:**

All online quizzes will be based on the reading material. We will have two online quizzes before the midterm and two before the final. Students will take total of 4 online quizzes during the entire course.

Each online quiz will have 10 questions (1 point each question, multiple choice). A Study guide for the Midterm and the Final exams will be posted on Moodle a week prior to the test.

**Discussions and Extra Credit**

Students are expected to read all the assigned texts (available either as a hard copy or online) and post their comments, questions, analysis and input (see discussion forum/Ethical Dilemmas). Students will be granted 5 max. extra points for participating in each *Ethical Dilemma* discussion forum. Participation means voting (see Ethical Dilemmas on Moodle) and posting meaningful and thoughtful comments. There will be 5 discussion forums amounting 25 extra credit points maximum.

**Writing assignments**

There will be 4 short essays on the assigned readings. 2 p. min. Students need to upload them on Moodle. Each paper is 10 points. See below for dates.

**Main research paper** is 15 p. min. (80 points). Students may choose a topic for research from the list of topics posted on Moodle. Also see writing instructions on Moodle.

**Grading**: your grades will be computed based on the following:

a. Your final grade will be based on the average of all the assignments.

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| --- | --- |
| **5 Forum Posts/Extra credit** | **25 points** |
| Reading Quiz 1 | 10 points |
| Reading Quiz 2 | 10 points |
| Reading Quiz 3 | 10 points |
| Reading Quiz 4 | 10 points |
| Short Essay 1 | 10 points |
| Short Essay 2 | 10 points |
| Short Essay 3 | 10 points |
| Short Essay 4 | 10 points |
| Midterm Exam | 60 Points |
| Final Exam | 60 Points |
| Main Research Paper | 80 Points |
| **Course total** | **280** |

**Grading scale**: Plus/minus grading system will be implemented. There will be no A+ grade.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Highest** | **Lowest** | **Letter** |
| 100.00 % | 93.00 % | A |
| 92.99 % | 90.00 % | A- |
| 89.99 % | 87.00 % | B+ |
| 86.99 % | 83.00 % | B |
| 82.99 % | 80.00 % | B- |
| 79.99 % | 77.00 % | C+ |
| 76.99 % | 73.00 % | C |
| 72.99 % | 70.00 % | C- |
| 69.99 % | 67.00 % | D+ |
| 66.99 % | 60.00 % | D |
| 59.99 % | 0.00 % | F |

**Academic Integrity:**

Cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated. Any form of plagiarism will result in a failing grade. The following violations of academic integrity will be addressed formally:

* Submitting the same work in whole or in part in more than one course;
* Submitting as one’s own work material (s) obtained from another source;
* Unattributed quotations or ideas from published, unpublished or electronic sources;
* Unauthorized collaboration in preparing assignments;
* Cheating on exams by any means: using search engines, lecture notes (unless permitted by the instructor) during the test

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

**WEEK 1**

# Definition of Ethics and Morality.

Rational Foundations of Morality: Religion, Natural Law Theory and Utilitarianism

Reading: *Euthyphro* (*Short Essay #1*).

Gensler: *Ethics: A contemporary Introduction* pp. 1-7

Darrel J. Fasching, *Comparative Religious Ethics*

Sandel, *Justice*: Chapter 2 “The Greatest Happiness Principle” pp. 31-57

**WEEK 2**

## Ethical Dilemma # 1 – What is Happiness? (vote and discuss)

## Ethical Theories

Reading: The Routledge Companion to Ethics: *Ethics, Science and Religion*

Gensler, *Ethics*, pp. 8 – 55

**WEEK 3**

Short Essay #1 on “*Euthypro*” due

Ethical Theories continued.

Reading: Gensler, *Ethics*, 56-65; Plato, *The Republic* (*Short Essay #2*)

Reading Quiz #1

**WEEK 4**

Ethical Dilemma # 2 – Stealing and the Trolley problem (Vote and discuss)

Teleological and Deontological Ethics (Aristotle, Kant, Moore,)

Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Sandel, *Justice*, Chapter 5 “What Matters is the Motive” pp. 103-140

Sandel, *Justice*, Chapter 8 “Who Deserves What?/Aristotle” pp. 184-207

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**WEEK 5**

Ethics, Metaphysics and Asceticism in Hinduism and Buddhism

Reading: The Routledge Companion to Ethics: *Ethical Thought in India*

*Krishna and Arjuna*

**WEEK 6**

### Ethical Dilemma # 3 – Helping the school (Vote and Discuss)

### Short Essay #2 on “Republic” due

Plato’s Republic: Ethics, Theories of Reality and Human Consciousness

Reading: Comparative Religious Ethics, Christianity: “*Ethics, Spirituality, and Original Sin*” Preparation for the Reading Quiz

Reading Quiz # 2

**WEEK 7**

Metaphysics and Asceticism in Religions

Augustinian and Calvinist understanding of human depravity

Christianity: Grace vs. Law

Societal vs. devotional ethics

Islamic ethics

Reading: Comparative Religious Ethics*: “Islamic Stories”*.

**WEEK 8**

Preparation for the Midterm Exam

Midterm Exam – October 17th. 2016

**WEEK 9**

Ethical Dilemma # 4 – Business Ethics (vote and discuss )

Ethics, Morality and Government

“Utopia” by Thomas More

Religious, Economic, Technological and Ecological Utopia

Social Justice, Government and Natural Rights.

Ethics of Economy and Distribution of Wealth

Reading: John Locke, *A Second Treatise of Government*…,

Sandel, Justice, , Chapter 6 “*The Case for Equality, John Rawls*” pp. 140 -166

**WEEK 10**

Reading: Francis Galton: *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development (Short Essay #3)*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra (Also for the Short Essay #3)*

Reading Quiz# 3

**WEEK 11**

Short Essay # 3 (on Galton and Nietzsche ) due

Human Evolution, Competition and Survival

Imperialism, Colonization and Racial Tensions

Reading: Comparative Religious Ethics: *War and Peace*

Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*: *Impoverishment*

Sandel, Justice, Chapter 3 “ *Do We Own Ourselves*?” pp. 58-75

**WEEK 12**

Thanksgiving Holidays

**WEEK 13**

Types of government, human rights and civil disobedience

Environmental Ethics

Reading: Comparative Religious Ethics: *Just war theory*

**WEEK 14**

Controversial Ethical Issues

Gender Issues, Bio-Ethics

*Supreme Court Decisions on Controversial Ethical Issues: Case Studies (Short Essay # 4)*

Sandel*, Ethics,* Chapter 10 “Justice and the Common Good” pp. 244-271

Reading Quiz # 4

**WEEK 15**

Ethical Dilemma # 5 –Eugenics (vote and discuss)

Short Essay # 4 “Supreme Court Decisions” due

**WEEK 16**

December 9th - Main 15 pg. research paper due

Overview: Preparation for the Final Exam

**FINAL EXAMINATION: December 7th, 2016**