

Spring 2019

Montgomery College

Germantown Campus

PHIL 140 33148– Introduction to the Study of Ethics (Distance Learning), Spring 2019

Instructor: Dr. Michael Harding

Office: Email is the best way to reach me, as I will not be on campus during the holiday break. Please do *not* email me through the course shell, as I will not be notified that you have done so. Email me directly at the email below.

Email: michael.harding@montgomerycollege.edu. Please note: the college considers the Montgomery College email account to be the official means of communication between students and faculty. It is recommended that you check this account routinely for official communication or as directed by your instructor(s). Some items you may find there are: course announcements, invoices, important admission/registration information, waitlist status. To check your e-mail, log into your MyMC online account and locate the e-mail icon in the upper right hand corner of the page. If you email me during the week, I will try to respond within 24 hours (if I am in my office on campus, I will probably respond immediately).

Telephone: 240.567.7759 (again, email is the best way to contact me).

Course Description: “Covers contemporary ethical issues in public policy and personal conduct. Topic areas may include bioethics and medicine; inequality and discrimination; justice and punishment; information ethics; environmental ethics; or other areas. Practical issues in these areas will be discussed in relation to ethical theories. Various ethical perspectives will be critically examined. (HUMD) Assessment levels: EN 101/101A, MA 097/099, RD 120. Three hours each week.”

Course Materials/Supplies Needed:

All required materials will be provided through the course shell, predominately as PDF files.

Recommended Text: Crider, Scott F. *The Office of Assertion: an Art of Rhetoric for the Academic Essay* Published by ISI Books. ISBN 193223645-7

This text is not required; however, it is the finest guide to undergraduate academic writing I have come across, and I highly recommend it. You can read it in an afternoon, and it will greatly improve your writing, and therefore your grades. I wish I'd had it as an undergraduate.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Comprehend current moral issues in light of various ethical theories.
- Recognize classical thinkers from around the world as they explore normative judgments and foundations for those judgments.

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- Distinguish normative and nonnormative ethical theories and the distinction between metaethics and normative ethics.
- Critically evaluate different moral points of view, including altruism, universalism, and self-interest.
- Discuss different schools of ethical thought.

Assignments and Grading Policy:

1. Discussion Board – There will be multiple discussion board assignments for a total of **100 points**. Extra credit is possible on discussion board assignments if a student contributes to the conversation beyond the bare minimum requirements (see the grading rubric in the “start here” section for these requirements). Since the purpose of this section of the class is discussion with others, *you must adhere to the schedule*. Because of this, late postings will not be graded. These assignments are crucial to the class: you should engage in thoughtful debate and discussion with each other throughout the semester. I implore you take this seriously, because you will learn more by engaging in thoughtful debate and discussion with each other than you will by doing almost anything else. Additionally, this sort of assignment will help you develop habits of argument and rhetoric that will improve your written work across the board, not just in this class, but in all your classes. The first discussion board assignment will be an introduction, and therefore an easy 10 points. The second discussion board assignment will require you to make strong arguments in defense of certain contradictory positions, and will be worth 20 points (please note that this means that you will almost certainly be arguing for a position you *disagree* with – that is the whole point). Do not wait until the last minute to do these assignments! If you do, you are not only hurting yourself, because you are doing things in a hurry without adequate time to reflect on what your colleagues have said, you are also hurting others, insofar as you are denying them your insight and the opportunity to respond to you.

Discussion board postings will be graded according to the rubric mentioned above. Please note that you will not receive full credit for doing the barest minimum, and you will not receive *any* credit for low-content posts such as “I like what you said,” or “I agree.”

2. Midterm Exam – The mid-term exam will be worth **100 points** and will involve a multiple choice exam with one additional, written response.
3. Final Exam – the final essay exam will be worth **150 points** as well, and you will have a few days to write it.
4. Quizzes – including the orientation quiz (which is meant to ensure that you have read and understood the syllabus), will be worth a total of **50 points**. The reading quizzes will focus on details from the assigned reading, and, unsurprisingly, you will do significantly better on them if you have done the readings first.
6. Extra credit – you can earn extra credit on the discussion boards by going beyond the bare minimum required for the assignments (i.e., posting more than twice and keeping the

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conversation going).

Grading Scale: this grading scale is based on the total number of points you earn through the assignments above. Because of the extra credit, it is possible to earn *more* than 400 points.

360-400 points is an A.

320-359 points is a B.

280-319 points is a C.

240-279 points is a D.

0-239 points is an F.

Make-up Work/Late Work:

Generally speaking, late work or make-up exams will only be accepted in extreme circumstances. If you think your circumstances warrant a deadline extension or a make-up exam, you must speak to me about it *before* the deadline. I am also sorry to say that due to past negative experience, most requests will require some sort of official notification (i.e., if you are ill, I will need documentation from a doctor).

Audit Policy:

If you are taking the class as an audit, you are expected to do the readings and participate in discussion. You do not have to do any of the written work, however.

Classroom Behavior:

The following chiefly applies to the traditional classroom, but I am leaving it here to remind you that you are adults, and your rights as students bring with them duties toward others as well. The College seeks to provide an environment where discussion and expression of all views relevant to the subject matter of the class are recognized and necessary to the educational process. However, students do not have the right to interfere with the faculty member's right to teach or the other students' rights to learn. Faculty and staff set the standards of behavior that are within the guidelines and spirit of the Student Code of Conduct or other College policies for classrooms, events, offices, and areas, by announcing or posting these standards early in the semester.

If a student behaves disruptively or inappropriately in the classroom, an event, an office, or an area after the instructor or staff member has explained the unacceptability of such conduct and the consequences that will result, the student may be asked to leave that classroom, event, office, or area for the remainder of the day. If the student does not leave willingly, the faculty member may request the assistance of Security. This does not restrict the student's right to attend other scheduled classes or appointments.

Disruptive/inappropriate behaviors include (but are not limited to) the following:

- continuing to socialize once class has begun;
- refusing to complete assigned tasks in the class or labs;

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- sleeping in class;
- arguing¹ with the professor (disagreement issues including grading of work should be discussed privately with the professor during his or her office hours);
- participating in any activity that disrupts the class, including the use of cell phones and CD players. **Cell phones, beepers/pagers, and devices with headphones are to be turned off during class time.**

If a student is asked to leave the class because of disruptive behavior, the faculty member and the student are expected to meet to resolve the issue before the next class session (See the *Student Code of Conduct*, 07/01/03, for further information).

Obviously, most of the above does not apply to an online class. However, it is possible for students do disrupt online courses as well. In light of that, *I would like to add an important reminder of my own here*: this is a class on ethics, and we will discuss contentious issues which can inflame the passions. While I expect and even encourage disagreement, and I want these discussions to be frank and open, I urge you to always remember your manners. To put it another way: criticize arguments and ideas, but not people. Ask yourself: which is more likely to convince someone who disagrees with you to adopt your view – shouting at them and calling them names or rationally justifying your position through philosophical argument?

Academic Dishonesty/Misconduct:

Academic dishonesty in college is a very serious offense. Each student is expected to do his/her own work on all tests, papers, and other assignments. Students who engage in any act that the classroom instructor judges to be academic dishonesty or misconduct are subject to sanctions. (See the *Student Code of Conduct*, 07/01/03, for further information.)

Academic Dishonesty or Misconduct can occur in many ways. Some common forms include

- cheating on assignments or examinations;
- plagiarizing from written, video, or Internet resources;
- submitting materials that are not the student's own;
- taking examinations in the place of another student, including assessment tests.

For purposes of this course, any one of the above will result in an automatic failure for the course.

Academic Labs:

¹ This is a philosophy course, so argument (in the precise sense) is encouraged—provided the argument concerns ideas, and is based in reasoning. I encourage you to question the text, myself, and your fellow students during our classroom time. In other words, arguing about philosophy is perfectly fine. After all, that's what Socrates did. This is an ethics class, and we will discuss controversial issues. Disagreement is expected, but so are good manners.

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The Computer Writing Center, the Writing & Reading Center, the Language Lab and reading and English tutors are available for MC students.

Disability Concerns:

If you need any accommodations because of a disability, please tell your teacher early in the semester. Bring your teacher a letter from the Disability Support Services (DSS) office authorizing the kind of services you will need. Contact information for DSS can be found at: <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/dss/contact.htm>. Please remember that your teacher needs a letter from the DSS office before you can receive any services or accommodations.

Veteran's Services:

“If you are a veteran or on active or reserve status and you are interested in information regarding opportunities, programs and/or services, please visit the Combat2College website at www.montgomerycollege.edu/ combat2college.”

Campus Closings:

Official announcements regarding the late opening, closing, or early closing of Montgomery College will be made on local radio and television stations. **NOTE:** Announcements regarding Montgomery County Public Schools *do not* apply to Montgomery College! *For a recorded announcement about Montgomery College call (240) 567-5000 or check the College website: www.montgomerycollege.edu. Alert Montgomery*, a service of the County, can also provide this information.

Campus Emergencies:

In the event of an emergency that may require evacuation, please follow the direction of College personnel and move, if directed, to the designated Emergency Evacuation Assembly Area. All College students, faculty, and staff should note the locations of exits in the buildings they are in and the locations of Emergency Evacuation Assembly Areas. Campus Evacuation maps are posted by elevators and exits. Designated evacuation areas are color-coded with buildings.

NOTE: Any student who may need assistance in the event of an emergency evacuation should create a personal emergency plan through the Disability Support Services Office. Guidelines for emergency evacuations for individuals with disabilities are found at www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/dispsvc/evacprocedures.htm.

General Information:

If you are having difficulty understanding the material assigned for this class, contact me as soon as possible. If you don't, there's nothing I can do to help you. If you find the texts and concepts difficult, contact me outside of class, ask questions of me via email, or of your colleagues on the discussion board (I cannot emphasize how much you will learn from diligent participation in the discussion board!).

I urge you to try get to know one another (another purpose of the discussion board assignments). This is difficult material, and discussing it with your fellow students will

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be very beneficial to you. There is a reason that Plato presents Socratic *dialogues* rather than *monologues*. Dialectic will help you learn.

Lastly, **philosophy is hard**. Students are frequently surprised by this fact, since in contemporary usage “philosophy” simply means one’s general point of view. But this is not what philosophy means in an academic context. Likewise, the readings assigned in this class are not “textbook” readings. In some cases, they are translations of works written hundreds, if not thousands of years ago; in all cases, they are complicated, subtle and rigorous arguments. As such, they are not immediately clear in their meaning. You cannot simply “skim” the text in order to understand it. Your goal here is not to learn *about* the philosophers we read, but to learn *from* them. From that point of view, it is more important to focus on understanding those with whom you disagree rather than those with whom you agree.

Because of this, it is *highly* recommended that you write in your books. Underline passages that seem important. Mark cross-references, and write comments, notes and questions in the margins. To truly engage these philosophers, one must enter into a conversation with them, and not read them passively. Real reading is done with a pen or pencil in hand.

Niccolò Machiavelli’s description of his reading habits might serve as a useful illustration:

On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day's clothing, covered with mud and dust, and put on garments regal and courtly; and re clothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men [*his library*], where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death; entirely I give myself over to them. And because Dante says it does not produce knowledge when we hear but do not remember, I have noted everything in their conversation which has profited me...

He describes himself as entering his library where he is in the presence of ancient men. Reading is described as a conversation, where he questions those ancients and they, through their books, answer him. Finally, he takes careful notes in order to ensure that he remember what they said and profits from it.

Like Machiavelli, you need to read actively and attentively. The liberal arts of reading, thinking, and writing have perhaps always been under assault in one way or another (cf. the popularity of cliff’s notes or quickie summaries of various sorts), but on-line resources (frequently unreliable!) have encouraged a cottage-industry of brevity and short-cuts. Such temptations need to be resisted, because ultimately they do not help you

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do the most important thing – thinking for yourself. John Locke writes: “the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers... Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work, to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter’s satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight; and he will have reason to think his time not ill spent, even when he cannot much boast of any great acquisition.”²

² John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Epistle to the Reader