

Ethics: Seminar (B-KUL-W0EB9a)

First Semester 2018-2019

Group 1 – Tuesdays 16:00-18:00

Room: PSI – room 02.60 (leslokaal)

Instructor: Sergi Morales-Gálvez

Office Hours: Tuesdays 18.00 (immediately after class), or by appointment

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Course Description

The primary goal of this course is to present a general introduction to ethics through an analysis of some crucial issues discussed in the discipline. The field of ethics tries to answer questions such as: what is the good life? What are our fundamental moral duties? Which character traits count as virtues, which as vices, and why? We will deal with these general questions through one concrete area of moral philosophy known as *normative ethics*, a branch of moral philosophy devoted to identifying the principle(s) of right action. In this respect, the main question we will tackle during this seminar is: What is the right thing to do? We will approach this question by analysing the main ethical traditions in contemporary moral philosophy and dealing with controversial ethical debates in our current world such as poverty, abortion, cultural diversity, language rights, and animal rights, among other topics.

The purpose of the seminar is 1) to introduce some key concepts of ethics (such as justice, right, morality, good...) that have been debated in the discipline since its inception; 2) to understand and highlight the importance of those concepts by approaching complex ethical questions of our contemporary world.

Course Readings

All the required readings will be uploaded on Toledo by the Instructor, and a complete list of references will be made available in the first session of the seminar.

Recommended reading is Sandel, Michael 2010. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* London: Penguin Books.

Complementary reading: MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2002. *A Short History of Ethics: a History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the 20th Century*. Oxon: Routledge.

Useful links: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

Seminar Structure

The course consists of a weekly two hour-seminar. Each session of the seminar will be composed as follows: general introduction to the issue by the tutor, followed by a presentation of the reading by students, questions and answers, and general discussion. Students must have read and prepared the compulsory readings each week and participate to the discussion based on the readings.

Course Goals

- Students will acquire an overview of the main ideas and positions in contemporary ethics, both in theoretical as well as practical ethics, and will be able to articulate these ideas.
- Students will acquire a sound knowledge of the theoretical and argumentative language of ethics in order to deal with relevant ethical questions of our world.
- Students will be able to distinguish between different approaches in ethics, and evaluate them critically.
- Students will be able to read and engage critically with texts, analysing their structure and identify the arguments, methodology and the issues the texts deal with.
- Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the texts in an oral presentation and a class discussion
- Students will learn to critically assess and evaluate the arguments of the texts.
- Students will acquire skills in thinking and writing about questions concerning ethics through reading the assigned texts, participating in class discussion and writing a final paper for the course.

Course Requirements

Evaluation of this course is based on three criteria.

1. **Course attendance.** Attendance and active participation is required to pass this course and counts for 10% of your overall mark. This will require the students to read the assigned texts in advance and contribute to the discussion in class.
2. **A presentation.** Every week one or two students, depending on the number enrolled, will have to deliver a presentation (15-20 minutes). The presentation must be accompanied by either a brief handout of approximately one page or a power point presentation. The purpose of the presentation is to encourage and focus class discussion; as such, students should summarise the main arguments of the text and provide at least one question for discussion. This counts for 20% of the student's overall mark.
3. **A paper.** Each student will be required to write a paper. It should be on a topic of the student's own choice, based on the material covered in the course (it should engage with at least one of the texts we have read in class). This counts for 70% of their mark (5% the draft paper and 65% the final paper).

Please Note: The second examination attempt is limited to (re)submitting the course work. Participation and/or presentation cannot be retaken. The student who in the course of the

academic year did not attend class as required or who did not give a presentation will again receive the NA result.

Paper Submission Guidelines

- The title of their paper and an abstract/proposal (200 words ca.) is required. Deadline: 19th of November (23.59 o'clock). It should be on a topic of the student's own choice, based on the material covered in the course (should engage with at least one of the texts we have read in class). A set of essay questions will also be provided by the tutor at the beginning of the academic year that the students can choose from.
- A draft of their paper (1000 words ca.) is required. Deadline: 19th of December (23.59 o'clock). Student must write the introduction to their paper in advance of writing the paper. The Instructor will provide guidelines and advice in class as to how to perform this task effectively.
- The final paper (min 2500 - max 3500 words) must include an abstract (200-250 words), keywords (4-6), word count, as well as a complete bibliography and complete and coherent referencing. Deadline 11th of January (23.59 o'clock).
- All submissions should be submitted in electronic form (always Word format, Times New Roman size 12, Footnotes size 10, 1.5 spaced) to sergi.morales@kuleuven.be
- Please note that submission postponement and exoneration from missing too many classes can only be officially handled by the "Ombudsperson" of the Institute of Philosophy (ombuds@hiw.kuleuven.be). Therefore, if you need an extension or need to excuse yourself from a great number of classes—for *legitimate reasons* (e.g. a long sickness)—it is the Ombudsperson that decides, not the tutor. Please also note that, should problems arise, you need to contact the Ombudsperson *in a timely fashion*. Otherwise you run the risk of receiving an N/A, which means you will have to re-take the whole course at a later date.

Grading Guideline for papers

The standard 1–20 grading scale will be used for the papers (the standard scale grade of the HIW is available online, please see: <https://hiw.kuleuven.be/eng/programmes/gradetranslation>. Important criteria to fulfil are:

- Accurate textual analyses.
- Correct and coherent formulation of main ideas and issues in the debate.
- Logical consistency and soundness of arguments, as well as a clear and precise structure of the paper.
- A well formulated and clear answer or position you yourself take in the paper.
- Proper English and style for an academic paper.

18-20	A+	Excellent	high distinction, work of excellent quality
16-17	A	Outstanding	work of very good quality and well above average
15	A-	Very Good	distinction, work of good quality
14	B+	Good	generally competent work of quality
13	B	Satisfactory	fair but with some shortcomings
12	C+	Sufficient	fair but with shortcomings

11	C	Barely Sufficient	performance meets the minimal criteria
10	D	Barely Sufficient	performance just meets the minimal criteria
8-9	F	Insufficient	some more work is required to obtain a passing grade
6-7	F	Very Insufficient	more work is required to obtain a passing grade
0-5	F	Totally Insufficient	considerable further work is required to obtain a passing grade

Feedback (comments, reasons for the marks, suggestions) will be given by the instructor upon students' request after the evaluation session. Plagiarism results in failure of the course.

Absence

If, for legitimate reasons, the student cannot attend the required amount of classes or have to postpone the submission of the essay, this has to be handled by the 'Ombudsperson' (ombuds@hiw.kuleuven.be). If you have to excuse yourself from classes over a prolonged period of time or need an extension on a deadline, you need to contact the Ombudsperson and let him/her know. They make the decision whether the student is excused, not the tutor.

Use of Toledo and Writing Lab

- All relevant material will be placed on Toledo, which should therefore be checked frequently.
- Students are encouraged to contact the writing tutors of the HIW Writing Lab (Writing.Lab@hiw.kuleuven.be) for help with writing their papers (please note, though, that it is not an editing service).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and will result in failure of the course. For further information about plagiarism, please consult the following official KU Leuven website: <http://www.kuleuven.be/plagiarism/>

Course Schedule

1st Session: Introduction to 'Ethics: Seminar'

Requirements, biographical and bibliographical background details, key philosophical questions to be addressed in the course.

2nd Session: A short introduction to Ethics

Sandel, Michael. 2010. *Justice. What's the Right Thing to Do?* London: Penguin Books, chapter 1.

3rd Session: Seven Threats to Ethics

Blackburn, Simon. 2001. *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 9-55 (small book).

4th Session: The Origins of Morality

Singer, Peter. 2011. *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution and Moral Progress*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chapter 2.

5th Session: Poverty

Singer, Peter. 1972. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1(3): 229–243.

6th Session: Membership

Walzer, Michael. 1983. *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 31–63.

7th Session: Cultural Diversity

Kymlicka, Will. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 75–93.

8th Session: Language Rights

Van Parijs, Philippe. 2000. "The Ground Floor of the World: On the Socio-Economic Consequences of Linguistic Globalization." *International Political Science Review* 21(2): 217–233.

9th Session: Secession

Beran, Harry. 1984. "A Liberal Theory of Secession." *Political Studies* 32(1): 21–31.

10th Session: Animal Ethics

Singer, Peter. 1989. "All Animals are Equal." In *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, eds. Tom Regan & Peter Singer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 215–226.

11th Session: Abortion

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 1971. "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1(1): 47–66.

12th Session: Health/Organ transplant

Harris, John. 1975. "The Survival Lottery." *Philosophy* 50(191): 81–87.

13th Session: Short presentations of their papers by students and conclusions