

## ***Course guide on **What To Do? Moral Dilemmas: Practical Study of Ethical Theories*****

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<i>Term:</i>	Spring
<i>ECTS credits:</i>	5
<i>Form of study:</i>	Lecture and Seminar
<i>Hours per week:</i>	90 min. + 90 min.
<i>Language:</i>	English
<i>Instructor:</i>	MA. Tomáš Beniak (tomas.beniak@gmail.com)

### **Prerequisites**

None

### **Course objectives**

This course has four main objectives:

- 1) First of all, this course wants to offer the students hands-on experience with moral dilemmas. We will look on several moral dilemmas and see how the different ethical theories of virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism answer these difficult challenges.
- 2) Second, students will obtain the ability to discuss and criticize positions given by all three of these ethical theories.
- 3) The third objective of the course is to make students aware of the fact that any knowledge, information and positions they will get from this course is usable in their everyday life and is beneficial (if not necessary) for individual moral development.
- 4) Finally, this course will provide students with basic understanding of the three main ethical theories.

### **Contents**

[Examples of moral dilemmas](#) which we will study.

- The Overcrowded Lifeboat
- Sophie's choice
- The trolley problem
- The principle of confidentiality
- Kingsman dilemma
- The value of promise

During the course, we will discuss three main ethical theories. Each theory discusses what process is necessary for a person to determine right and wrong in action. Students need not necessarily identify with one discussed theory. Rather, they will understand what are the possible ways of thinking about right and wrong in an action.

We will begin by reading parts of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he lays out the foundations for virtue ethics. We will supplement this main discussion by reading part of a commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. We will continue by reading Kant's *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, where we will be immersed in the world of duty ethics. This discussion will also be supported by a brilliant commentary on Kant's *Groundwork* by Henry Allison. Finally, we will discuss the utilitarian view on right action. A book edited by S. Darwall, which consists of passages of primary sources regarding utilitarianism, will help us achieve the goal of understanding this theory in particular. Since all three theories propose different positions they will also provide actual criticisms of each other, which students will appreciate at the end of the term, when they will be asked to write a final paper.

### **Form of study**

Students are required to read the text that is going to be discussed in the upcoming lecture in advance. This serves to ensure that students are at least a little bit familiar with the topic before they are given a lecture and that they have the ability to ask specific questions about the text, if there is something unclear. This also enables the class to discuss interesting, or problematic passages during the lecture. The second class of the week will be dedicated to an in depth discussion of the topic from the lecture, where students are stimulated to discuss the text between themselves. We will first explore a theory and then discuss its answer to a specific moral dilemma.

### **Obligatory readings**

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans: Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Kraut, R. *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Engstrom, S. Whiting, J. *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kant, I. *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*. Edit and Trans: Allen W. Wood. New York: Yale University Press, 2002.

Allison, H.E. *Kant's Groundwork for Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Korsgaard, C.M. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Darwall, S (ed). *Consequentialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

### **Evaluation criteria**

25 % - Class attendance / Participation

25 % - Bi-weekly assignments

20 % - Final exam

30 % - Final paper

*Attendance.* During the term students are allowed four absences from the class, five or more absences will result in failing the course. Students also should not come late to classes and if there is a student who does so regularly, then several late arrivals will culminate in one absence.

*Participation.* Students are also required to actively participate in class discussion, either by raising questions or commenting on discussed points. Students can also get participation points by e-mailing the instructor to ask a question or seek clarification regarding a topic concerning the course.

*Bi-weekly assignments.* Students will be asked to deliver written assignments every two weeks. Students will write these assignments on the basis of a question regarding the current topic discussed in class; their answer (short essay of sorts) will consist of minimum 550 words and maximum of 750 words.

*Final exam.* At the end of the course there will be a final exam which will consist of open questions, where students will need to prove that they have at least a basic understanding of the fundamental topics discussed during the course.

*Final paper.* The whole course will conclude by submitting a final paper, students will be given the possibility to choose topics on their own, but they will also have the possibility to choose from a given set of topics provided by the instructor. The optimum word count is 2000 words (+/- 10%).

**Grading scheme:**

A – 100-93%

B – 92-84%

C – 83-74%

D – 73-63%

E – 62-51%

Fail – 50-0%