



We are seeking not merely to know what is good, but to become good.
— Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*



Ethics 2050

The Good Life: Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems

Foundation Question

How should I live?

Ethics 2050 is one of a group of five courses that we call the foundation courses. The courses make a Villanova education distinctive and work together to answer a series of related questions:

WHO AM I?

Augustine and Culture Seminar 1000 (Ancients) and 1001 (Moderns)

WHAT CAN I KNOW?

Philosophy 1000: Knowledge, Reality, Self

WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Theology and Religious Studies 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture

HOW SHOULD I LIVE?

Ethics 2050: The Good Life—Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems

By seeking answers to these questions, you will conduct an interdisciplinary inquiry that is informed by Augustinian and Catholic intellectual traditions, develop your skills in critical thinking and communication, deepen your understanding of yourself and the world, and engage with issues of personal responsibility and social justice.

Ethics 2050-015

The Good Life: Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems

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The Ethics Program

SAC 490

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T/R 11:30-12:45, St. Mary Hall 016.

What is the good life for human beings? The vision of human flourishing that emerges from Christian, particularly Roman Catholic and Augustinian, sources receives special consideration as a viable resource for answering this question as the central concern of the moral life. There are, however, very robust, convincing, and sometimes competing alternative accounts of the moral life that emerge from other traditions, notably those associated with secular liberalism. Students learn to explore the tensions among these traditions through discussing a variety of contemporary moral topics that highlight their relationship to themselves, to others, and to the natural environment.

Office Hours

SAC 490, Time TBD. I am also available by appointment. The best way to contact me is at Christopher.noble@villanova.edu. I will also use this address to distribute information about assignments and other course-related matters.

Course Goals

1. To provide students an opportunity to examine the normative claims to which they have been introduced in other elements of the core curriculum.
2. To advance understanding and critical reflection on Christian and especially Roman Catholic Augustinian accounts of a distinctive and viable vision of human flourishing that challenges and is challenged by alternative visions of the moral life in certain fundamental respects.
3. To explore the significance of those different approaches to the moral life through the examination of various contemporary moral questions.

Learning Objectives

Content

1. Develop an understanding of the basic tensions between Christian approaches to the moral life and other alternative accounts, particularly as manifested in the following areas: the social dimension of human existence, the individual good vs. the common good, moral relativism vs. objective moral claims, and questions of justice.
2. An ability to trace at least some of these tensions with respect to some particular contemporary moral relation.

Skills

1. The ability to read texts carefully and critically, so as to advance the conversation about the moral life with one's peers.
2. A capacity to engage in practical reasoning to arrive at reasoned judgment about some aspect of contemporary moral relations.

Course Grades and Grading Policy:

Class participation (15%).

The participation grade consists of attendance, participation in classroom discussion, and responses on regular reading quizzes. To receive full credit, students must attend class regularly, complete all readings and quizzes, and actively participate in classroom discussion.

Two 5-6 page papers (25% each).

Students will compose two papers exploring course material based on prompts distributed by the instructor. These assignments will evaluate student's abilities to read and interpret texts, as well as apply ideas in thinking through ethical questions of contemporary significance.

One in-class group presentation (10%).

Students will make small group (~4 members) presentations in the second to last week of the semester on topics pertaining to the collective future of humanity. Presentations will be 12-15 minutes in length and will be followed by a 5-minute Q&A session. This assignment aims to help students develop the ability to work together with their peers to address ethical questions, as well as to publicly articulate potential solutions.

Final exam (25%).

Two and a half hour final exam covering all of the material from the semester. Students will be given five short essay questions, and must respond to three of them.

A = 100-94 B+ = 89-87 B- = 83-80 F = 69-0

A- = 93-90 B = 86-84 C = 79-70

Late Work:

Work turned in after the due date will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day. This means that, e.g., a B+ paper turned in one day late will be awarded a B.

Course Policies and Resources:

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken daily. Students may be excused from a class meeting in the event of a sports trip, illness or family emergency. Please submit proper excuse form. More than two unexcused absences will affect the student's participation grade.

Academic Integrity:

All students are expected to uphold Villanova's Academic Integrity Policy and Code. Any incident of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for disciplinary action. For the College's statement on Academic Integrity, you should consult the [Enchiridion](#). You may view the university's Academic Integrity Policy and Code, as well as other useful information related to writing papers, here: <https://library.villanova.edu/help/academicintegrity/>

Office of Disabilities and Learning Support Services:

It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. You must present verification and register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5176 or at learning.support.services@villanova.edu or for physical access or temporary disabling conditions, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 610-519-4095 or email Stephen.mcwilliams@villanova.edu. Registration is needed to receive accommodations.

Cell Phone and Computer Use:

All cell phones must be turned off during class meetings. Cell phone use during class will affect the student's participation grade. Computers and Tablets are only allowed when discussing readings posted on Blackboard or with permission of the instructor.

Grade Appeals:

To formally appeal a grade you have received, send me an email detailing why you think you should have received a different grade. I will take the time to review your assignment and then consider your comments. I will never lower your grade because of this process.

Required Textbook:

Marino, Gordon. *Ethics: The Essential Writings*. New York; Random House: 2010. Additional Readings are posted on the course Blackboard page.

Units and Tentative Schedule of Readings:

Introduction

Tuesday 1/16: Syllabus Review and Introductions.

Introduction to Virtue Theory

Thursday 1/18: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 43-65.

Tuesday 1/23: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 66-84.

Thursday 1/25: Julia Annas: "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," Blackboard.

Virtue, Knowledge, and Action in the Confucian Tradition

Tuesday 1/30: Kongzi (Confucius), Selections from *Analecets*, Blackboard.

Thursday 2/1: Wang Yangming, *Questions on the Great Learning*, Blackboard.

Christianity and the Natural Law

Tuesday 2/6: Saint Augustine, *City of God* Book XIX, 107-118; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Question XCIV, 119-133.

Thursday 2/8: Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

Kant on Autonomy and Duty

Tuesday 2/13: Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 191-203.

Thursday 2/15: Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 203-224.

Utilitarianism: Cost/Benefit Analyses

Tuesday 2/20: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 228-255.

Thursday 2/22: J.J.C. Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism," Blackboard.

Tuesday 2/27: Ian Parker, "The Gift," Blackboard.

Thursday 3/1: *Singer: A Dangerous Mind* (in class film screening),

Friday 3/2: First paper due on Blackboard by 5PM.

Spring Break

Catholic Social Teaching and Society

Tuesday 3/13: Pope Leo XIII, selections from *Rerum Novarum*, Blackboard.

Thursday 3/15: William Byron, "10 Building Blocks of CST," Blackboard.

Environmental Ethics

Tuesday 3/20: Aldo Leopold, selections from *A Sand County Almanac*, 487-505.

Thursday 3/22: Pope Francis, selections from *Laudato Si*, Blackboard.

Tuesday 3/27: Ronald Sandler, "A Theory of Environmental Virtue," Blackboard

Thursday 3/29: Easter Recess.

Animal Rights

Tuesday 4/3: Tom Regan, "In Defense of Animal Rights," 531-544.

Thursday 4/6: Justin E.H. Smith, "We Are Not the Only Political Animals," Blackboard.

Friday 4/7: Second paper due on Blackboard by 5PM.

Technology and the Future of Humanity

Tuesday 4/10: Christopher J. Preston, "Rethinking the Unthinkable: Environmental Ethics and the Presumptive Argument against Geoengineering," Blackboard.

Thursday 4/13: Peter Frase, "Four Futures," Blackboard.

Tuesday 4/17: Nicholas Bostrum, selections from *Superintelligence*, Blackboard.

Thursday 4/19: Nicholas Agar, "Don't Worry about Superintelligence," Blackboard.

Tuesday 4/24: In-class presentations.

Thursday 4/26: In-class presentations.

Tuesday 5/1: Deemed Friday schedule, no class.

Thursday 5/3: Review for final exam.