CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Applied Contemporary Ethics
Course code: PHIL 3002 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

This course takes the most influential ethical theories and insights of the last 250 years (and particularly the last 50 years) and applies them to the current challenges that face contemporary societies in Europe and America. It explores three broader topics – an individual as a moral subject; justification of a government and an individual as a moral actor in a state; and the concept of justice as a regulatory and an inspirational goal. In each topic the course examines the groundwork of modern ethical inquiries (such as Kant, Hobbes and Marx) and proceeds through the philosophical tradition, exploring its challenges. Accounts of a rational subject are contrasted with the problems of irrationality, the question of good with the reality of evil, ideas of justice with problems of everyday injustice. Thinkers discussed include Nietzsche and Freud as well as more contemporary ones such as Arendt, Havel, Fromm, Berlin and Rawls.

The course applies theoretical concepts to the most urgent ethical issues of our day in Europe, the US and beyond. The topical themes explored include those emerging from the tension between liberalism and socialism (tax policies, health care, public/private education and media, etc.), those emerging from the tension between religious and secular society (abortion, animal rights, gender issues, environmentalism and climate change, etc.) and those posed by the recently ascendant movements of nationalism and authoritarianism (including racism, xenophobia, delegitimization of journalism and parliamentary debate, etc.). Ultimately, the course seeks to think anew about the core pillars of the Western philosophical and democratic tradition and find new ways how to strengthen them.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Explain and assess key ethical concepts of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries;
- Illustrate the relevance of these concepts for contemporary (and future) society;
- Relate these concepts to the wider disciplines of political science, economics, sociology, psychology, history and philosophy;
- Demonstrate skills in critical reasoning such as the construction of logical arguments and become more proficient in the communication of abstract ideas;
- Construct a working philosophical framework of critical analysis with “real life” application.

Course Prerequisites

Previous courses in one or more of the following fields are an advantage: Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, History, or the other humanities.

Methods of Instruction

A combination of lecture, seminar-style open discussion and smaller group discussion. One or two class meetings will be at historical points of interest in Prague.

A note on the readings:

- All readings (unless otherwise specified) can be found in the Course Reader (Exact page numbers can be found in the "Table of Contents" of the Course Reader).
- After the mid-term, readings have the designation "Group A" and "Group B". This indicates that half the
class will read the “Group A” text and half the class will read the “Group B” text (Of course, each group is welcome to read the other group’s text, but it is not necessary). The class meeting will be spent discussing, comparing and evaluating the arguments and concepts found in the texts. This arrangement is meant to cut down on the amount of reading while still being exposed to plenty of ethical arguments and concepts.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Midterm Exam 20%
2. Final Exam (Written or Oral) 25%
3. Term Paper 25%
4. Quizzes 10%
5. Class Participation 20%

**Course Requirements**

**Midterm Exam**

Written: Short essay style: the student will answer 4 essay questions

**Final Exam (Written or Oral)**

Written: Short essay style: the student will answer 4 essay questions

Or

Oral: 20 minute (or more) interview with the professor

**Term Paper**

The final paper on a chosen topic should be between 2,000- and 3,500-word long, double-spaced, and has to demonstrate students’ use of the course materials. Online research resources should be discussed and approved prior to the paper topic registration into the CIEE essay database.

**Quizzes**

Short in-class quizzes will be administered throughout the course to assess students’ understanding of required readings.

**Class Participation**

Students are expected to contribute to class discussions regularly. To that end, students are also expected to have finished the readings by the day on which they are listed. There will be periodic pop quizzes over the readings, as part of the class participation grade.

**CIEE Prague Class Participation Policy**

Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor's or other students’ line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.
Class participation also includes students’ active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

**Attendance**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.

If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas. You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home school, based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of course hours missed</th>
<th>Number of CIEE classes</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>One to Three 90-min. classes; or One 180-min. class</td>
<td>No penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% - 20%</td>
<td>Four 90-min. classes</td>
<td>Written notification* to the student, followed by a warning letter to the student and home school; 3% reduction in the final grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five 90-min. classes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two 180-min. classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Six 90-min. classes; or Three 180-min. classes</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion with notification to the home school</td>
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* The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, **missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, over-sleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.**

If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor’s note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24 hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable)
- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.

**Please note:** Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor’s note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

**Other attendance-related policies**

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

CIEE staff does not manage absences at partner institutions providing direct enrollment classes (FAMU, ECES and FSV), but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.
N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Class: 1.1** Introduction
- Introduction
- Methodology and structure of the course
- Syllabus

**Class: 1.2** Ancient Greek Ethics: Plato and Epicurus

**Required readings:**
- Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” (from The Republic)
- Selection from Plato’s Euthyphro
- Epicurus’s “Letter to Menoeceus” (p. 69-71)

**Week 2**

**Class: 2.1** Ancient Greek Ethics: Plato continued
- Plato on the relationship between power, justice and the Good

**Required readings:**
- Selection from Plato’s Republic

**Class: 2.2** Ancient Greek Ethics: Aristotle
- Virtue ethics, ancient, medieval and modern:
  - A note on St. Thomas
  - A note on Taylor and MacIntyre

**Required readings:**
- Selections from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (Books I, II and X)

**Week 3**

**Class: 3.1** Intro to Modern Ethics
- Kantian Ethics
- A response to Hume
- Overcoming the passions
- The “categorical imperative”
- The “realm of ends”
- The legacy of German Idealism

**Required readings:**
- Selection from Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals

**Class: 3.2** John Stuart Mill’s “utilitarian” ethics
- Teleological, consequentialist ethics
- Hedonistic calculation?

**Required readings:**
- Selection from Mill’s Utilitarianism
Week 4
Class: 4.1 The ethical challenges of Nietzsche and Freud

**Required Readings:**
- Selection from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* (“Against Conventional Morality”)
- Selection from Freud’s *Civilisation and its Discontents*

Class: 4.2 Marx and The Frankfurt School

- A note on Horkheimer and Adorno
  - Instrumental rationality and the limits of the Enlightenment
- Marcuse and the new challenges of the post-war “affluent society”
- A note on Habermas’s reappropriation of Kantian Ethics
  - “Ideal rational subjects” and “ideal speech situations”

**Required Readings:**
- Selections from Marx (*The German Ideology, Grundrisse, Wage Labor and Capital, and Capital*)
- Marcuse’s “New Forms of Control” (from *One-Dimensional Man*)

Week 5
Class: 5.1 2 Historical Detours: Nazism and the Czechoslovak surveillance state

- Arendt and Havel: 2 existential analyses of responsibility and “authenticity”
- A note on Heidegger

**Required Readings:**
- Arendt’s “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility”
- Selection from Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless”

Class: 5.2 French Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

- A note on Claude Levi-Strauss
- A note on Lacan
- A note on Althusser
- Foucault, “disciplinary power,” and “panopticism”

**Required Readings:**
- Foucault’s “Panopticism” (from *Discipline and Punish*)
- Optional: Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”

Week 6
Class: 6.0 Midterm Exam Period

- Review for Exam

Class: 6.2 Midterm Exam Period

**Midterm Exam**

Week 7
Class: 7.1 Structure of the course going forward

- Structure of the course going forward
- Topics up for discussion
- References for logic and argumentation
- Identifying and analyzing moral arguments
- Assessing moral arguments

**Required Readings:**
Class:  7.2  Ethics Lab:
   - Exercising moral reasoning
   - Various short ethical cases for practice

**Required Readings:**
   - TBD (Selections will be linked on this week’s Canvas module)

**Week 8**
Class:  8.1  Ethics Lab: Euthanasia
   - Structuring the sides of the argument
   - Evaluation
   - Conclusions

**Required Readings:**
   - Group A: Brad Hooker, “Rule-Utilitarianism and Euthanasia”
   - Group B: John Hardwig, “Dying at the Right Time”

**Week 9**
Class:  9.1  Ethics Lab: Singer and others on animal rights and "speciesism"
   - Structuring the sides of the argument
   - Evaluation
   - Conclusions

**Required Readings:**
   - Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”
   - Group A: Michael Allen Fox, “The Moral Community”
   - Group B: R. G. Frey, "Moral Standing, the Value of Lives, and Speciesism"

Class:  9.2  Liberalism vs. Socialism

**Liberalism vs. Socialism**
   - Liberty and Democracy: Some notes on Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and de Tocqueville
   - The Framing of Contemporary Ethical, Political and Economic Debate
   - Quantitative (economic) value vs. Qualitative (political) value
   - Berlin on freedom, positive and negative
   - Taylor on positive freedom

**Required Readings:**
   - Group A: Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty”
   - Group B: Charles Taylor, "What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty?"

Note: Both texts should be read before final exam!!!

   - **Paper topics due!!!** (See CRE p. 162 for some ideas, or feel free to email me and we can discuss possible topics)

**Week 10**
Class:  10.1  Ethics Lab: On Justice
   - Structuring the sides of the argument
   - Evaluation
   - Conclusions

**Required Readings:**
   - Group A: John Rawls, “A Theory of Justice”
   - Group B: Robert Nozick, “The Entitlement Theory of Justice”
Note: Both texts should be read before final exam!!!

Class: 10.2 The Ethics of Free Speech

- Mill on free speech
- A note on Karl Popper
- The contemporary free speech debate

**Required Readings:**

- John Stuart Mill, “Freedom of Thought and Discussion” (From *On Liberty*)
- Group A: John Arthur, “Sticks and Stones”
- Group B: Andrew Altman, “Speech Codes and Expressive Harm”
- Alan Jacobs’ “Wokeness and Myth on Campus” (linked in this week’s Canvas module)

**Week 11**

Class: 11.1 Ethics Lab: Gender and Sexuality

- Structuring the sides of the argument
- Evaluation
- Conclusions
- A note on Jordan Peterson and the "naturalistic fallacy"
- Short paper presentations and feedback (presentation worth 5% of final paper grade)

**Required readings:**

- Group A: Michael Levin, “Why Homosexuality is Abnormal”
- Group B: John Corvino, “Homosexuality and the Moral Relevance of Experience”

Class: 11.2 Ethics and Postmodernism

- Derrida, Blanchot and Nancy
- **Outline of final paper due!** (worth 5% of final grade)

**Required readings:**

- Selection from Derrida, Blanchot and Nancy (TBD)
- Optional: Selection from Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*

**Week 12**

Class: 12.1 Postmodernism and “liquid modernity”

- The fate of traditional distinctions and norms in fluid, “liquid” societies
- A note on Sygmont Bauman
- Qualification vs. Quantification
- A note on Deleuze and Guattari
- Butler, “performativity,” and gender
- Short paper presentations and feedback (presentation worth 5% of final paper grade)

**Required readings:**

- Butler’s “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”
- Optional: Bauman’s “Migration and Identities in the Globalized World”

Class: 12.2 Aristotelian Ethics revisited: Alisdair MacIntyre

- Panacea for late modernity?

**First Draft of Final Paper due!!!** (worth 10% of paper grade)

- Short paper presentations and feedback (presentation worth 5% of final paper grade)

**Required readings:**

- MacIntyre’s “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of Tradition” (from *After Virtue*) (linked in this week’s Canvas module)
Week 13
Class:   13.1 Final Exam Week

Liberal vs. Illiberal Democracy in Europe and the West

- The relationship between economic and spiritual anxieties to authoritarianism
- Authoritarianism, racism and xenophobia
- Authoritarianism, truth and media
- Warnings from the East: the growing discontent from CEE countries, spreading westward (Former Yugoslavia, Russia, Hungary, and others)
- Our possible futures: Autocracies, Democracies or Otherwise?
- Short paper presentations and feedback (presentation worth 5% of final paper grade)
- Review for Exam

Required readings:

- Readings TBD...
- Optional: Umberto Eco’s “Ur-Fascism”

Class:   13.2 Final Exam Week

Final Exam

Final Paper due!!! (worth the remaining 80% of paper grade)

Course Materials
Readings
Required:

Immanuel Kant’s “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals”

Judith Butler’s “Giving an Account of Oneself”

Additionally, a course reader supplied by the instructor made up of selections of texts by the following authors: Plato, Thomas Jefferson, G. F. W. Hegel, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Hayek, John Maynard Keynes, Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Jurgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Zygmunt Baumann, Slavoj Žižek, Peter Singer and Fareed Zakaria.

Other Resources:


Online Resources

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy