

# Philosophy 201: Critical Thinking about Moral Problems

Dr. Miles Tucker

T/TH 9:30-10:45  
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## *Class Summary*

How should we live our lives? What do we owe to each other? And how might we answer such questions?

This course will provide an introduction to moral reasoning. We will first learn about basic logic and the nature of arguments. After, we will try to determine whether there might be some overriding principle that we can rely on to specify our obligations and resolve our moral disputes. Finally, if time permits, we will turn to topics in applied ethics, and employ the skills we have acquired over the semester to extract and evaluate arguments from popular philosophical papers. Our investigations will be rigorous: in each case, we will attempt to provide careful formulations of the relevant doctrines, methods, and arguments.

## *Course Readings*

Our course textbook is Russ Shafer-Landau's *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (Oxford, 2018). I'm using the fourth edition. The textbook is required; it's available at the campus bookstore and on Amazon.

## *Requirements*

### •Exams (60%)

We will have three in class exams. The tentative dates are as follows:

First Exam: Tuesday, February 27<sup>th</sup>.

Second Exam: Thursday, April 5<sup>th</sup>.

Final Exam: Thursday, May 10<sup>th</sup>.

Each exam will consist of approximately 20-30 multiple choice questions, one short answer question and one long answer question. I'll discuss the nature of these exams with you in class. I'll also release a study guide on Blackboard no less than one week before each exam.

### •Quizzes (20%)

We will have three multiple-choice quizzes in class. These will be announced roughly one week in advance. They will contain 10-20 questions. We will also have a number of very short pop quizzes. I want to see that you are doing the readings and keeping up with the course. (If you're struggling, come see me; I'm eager to help.)

- Group Work (10%)

I will assign in class exercises regularly. I would prefer that you complete these assignments in groups (although you may complete them alone if you insist).

- Participation (10%)

I expect every student to contribute to class discussions. (You will not receive any credit for participation if you don't speak on at least a semi-regular basis.) I believe that philosophy is quite difficult—if we're to make progress we will need to work together to understand and solve the puzzles we confront.

I also expect all of us to show proper respect in our interactions with each other. I understand that you may feel very strongly about these issues—but that just makes it more important for us to attempt to understand each other.

Please note that minor class disruptions, especially in the form of cell phones buzzing, ringing, or singing, will damage your participation grade. (Please put those things away. I know they're fun and shiny.) More serious disruptions may lead me to ask you to leave the class, or to report your behavior to the VCU Division of Student Affairs.

- Optional Assignments and Extra Credit

There is an optional short paper; it may replace your lowest exam score. It is thus worth up to 20% of your overall grade. The paper assignment will be explained and announced after the second exam.

I may announce small extra credit contests, quizzes, or questions in class; these will be worth extra credit 'quiz points' and will be added to your overall quiz grade.

## *Regulations*

- Exams Dates

Exams, quizzes, and group work will only be proctored at specified times barring a legitimate academic excuse, with documentation.

- Grading

Grades will be distributed as follows:

A: 90%-100%

B: 89%-80%

C: 79%-70%

D: 69%-60%

F: 59% or below.

- Email

I check my email frequently. If you have any questions or concerns about the class, please write me; I am eager to help and I will reply as quickly as I can (usually within two days). However, please note that it is your responsibility to keep up with the class: *I will not reply to emails asking me to cover what you missed because of an unexcused absence.*

- Academic Honesty

I will not tolerate cheating of any kind. If I discover that you have violated the academic honesty policies of the university, I will immediately turn over the evidence I have obtained to the relevant authorities, and an investigation will begin. I encourage all of you to read VCU's definition of academic honesty and misconduct here: [https://students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/vcu-honor-system/academic-misconduct-/](https://students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/vcu-honor-system/academic-misconduct/)

- Schedule of Topics

This is an outline of the topics we *may* address, along with *possible* readings and handouts. This is only to give you an idea of the shape of the semester; *you must check Blackboard regularly* for the current handouts and assignments. Note that I reserve the right to change the course schedule at any time.

| <b>Topic</b>             | <b>Readings</b> | <b>Handouts</b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Introduction             | SL, pp. 1-9     | IH1             |
| Introduction to Logic    | SL, pp. 9-19    | PM1, PM2        |
| Moral Fallacies          | Kagan, pp. 7-11 | F1              |
| Morality and Religion    | SL, pp. 63-75   | MR1             |
| Natural Law Theory       | SL, pp. 76-90   | NL1             |
| Psychological Egoism     | SL, pp. 91-106  | E1              |
| Ethical Egoism           | SL, pp. 107-119 | E2              |
| Utilitarianism           | SL, pp. 139-159 | U1, U2          |
| Kantianism               | SL, pp. 160-174 | K1, K2, K3      |
| Topics in Applied Ethics | Short Passages  | EX1, EX2, EX3   |

- Additional VCU Policies

Please see <http://go.vcu.edu/syllabus> for additional regulations common to all VCU classes. Topics include: “Campus emergency information, Class registration required for attendance, Honor System: upholding academic integrity, Important dates, Managing stress, Mandatory responsibility of faculty members to report incidents of sexual misconduct, Military short-term training or deployment, Student conduct in the classroom, Student email policy, Student financial responsibility, Students representing the university - excused absences, Students with disabilities, Withdrawal from classes.”

This additional information is also available on our Blackboard site as “VCU Syllabus Statements.”