I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophers have always taken a special interest in thinking carefully about ethics, the study of how we ought to live, along with the related concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, duty and obligation.

We begin our treatment of these matters by considering a wide range of act-centered normative methodologies, each of which purports to answer ethical questions in a unique way. Such methodologies include ethical egoism, utilitarianism, and Kantianism. We then investigate how these methodologies affect judgments concerning specific issues such as civil disobedience, capital punishment, and right to life. We learn to analyze the specific issues clearly, to reason through them using the various available methodologies, and to develop our own positions.

Once we have reached a clear and critical grasp of these methodologies, we examine the agent-centered approach to ethics. Living the good life, according to this approach, does not depend on an understanding of which actions are morally permissible; rather, it depends on identifying and cultivating the morally relevant character traits. We draw from Plato and Aristotle, among others, in our consideration of this alternative approach to ethics.

Finally, in the last part of the course, we study some advanced topics in philosophical ethics, such as meta-ethics and the literary expression of ethical insights.

II. COURSE GOALS

1) To give students an appreciation of the philosophical mode of inquiry.
2) To impart to students skills in conceptual analysis and critical reasoning.
3) To introduce students to various moral theories and their applications.
4) To introduce students to ancient Greek ethics and its importance for modern moral philosophy.

III. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course, the student is expected to:

1. Understand key features, themes, and issues of ethics.
2. To know and distinguish different ethical traditions and schools.
3. Have experience reading key texts of prominent moral philosophers.
IV. TEXTS

Plato, Meno.
Other material available on iLearn.

V. REQUIREMENTS

There will be two tests. The first is an in-class test and the second is a take-home essay test. Each counts for 50% of the grade. There will also be an optional essay assignment to improve your midterm grade. I will discuss that in class after the midterm. In addition, regular attendance and thoughtful and active participation in class discussion can enhance your final grade by one gradation. For example, a “B-” might become a “B” if you have contributed productively to the class. A final word about attendance. This course is structured in such a way that the later portions of the course depend heavily on the earlier portions. Not unlike a course in language or mathematics, missing the earlier class sessions come at great cost to your work in the rest of the semester. If you know that you will have to miss more than two class sessions, it is recommended that you not take the course this semester.

VI. TEACHING ASSISTANTS

The names and the availability of the teaching assistants will be announced in the first class and will be posted on iLearn.

VII. POLICIES

Missed or Late Work
Assignments turned in late will be docked 1/3 a letter grade per day (e.g. a B+ would become a B).

Electronic Communication
The best way to get in touch with me is via email (azad@sfsu.edu). Feel free to email me at any point during the semester if you have any questions or concerns. I do not answer emails in the evening, but you can expect to receive a response within a day from my receiving your email.

Laptops and Cellphones
Laptops are permitted in class for the sole purpose of taking notes. Please do not visit any websites (especially social media), as it distracts other students and disrupts the learning environment of the class. Please do not text or browse the Internet on your cellphone during class. If you feel that you must use your cellphone, please leave the classroom and do so outside.

Plagiarism
Students are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is, and for not committing it in any of their submitted work. For more details see: http://conduct.sfsu.edu/plagiarism. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Humanities will be reported to the Dean of the College.

Religious Holidays
Students who must be absent from class in order to observe religious a holiday must inform the instructor, in writing, about such holidays during the first two weeks of the class each semester. If such holidays occur during the first two weeks of the semester, the student must notify the instructor, in writing, at least three days before the date that he/she will be absent. Students who meet these conditions will not be penalized for their absence, and will be able to make up the work missed.

The Learning Assistance Center
The Learning Assistance Center (LAC) provides free, on-campus writing tutoring for SF State students. It offers both one-time and ongoing tutoring sessions, with some same day appointments available. The LAC is open Monday through Friday from 9am-4pm and Friday from 9am-12pm. For more information and to schedule an appointment, see http://www.sfsu.edu/~lac/index.html.
Disability Accommodation
Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC: http://www.sfsu.edu/~dprc) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC in the Student Services Building 110. They can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email dprc@sfsu.edu.

VIII. SCHEDULE: This schedule is subject to revision.

1. January 27, 29: What is Ethics?

2. February 3, 5: Egoism
   Moral problems, pp. 35-46.
   Supplement: Hobbes’ “Egoism as the Beginning of Morality” and selections from Gauthier’s Morals by Agreement, iLearn.

3. February 10, 12: Utilitarianism
   Moral problems, pp. 63-77, 139-141.

4. February 17, 19: Right to Life
   Moral problems, pp. 176-184, 111-118.

5. February 24, 26: Kantianism
   Supplement: Kant’s “The Foundation of Ethics” and Wood’s “Kant and the Right to Lie,” iLearn.

6. March 3, 5: Punishment

March 10: Review

March 12: Midterm Exam

7. March 17, 19: Virtue Ethics: Introduction
   Moral problems, pp. 157-159.
   Annas, “Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality,” Hadot’s “Philosophy as a Way of Life” and Arendt’s “The Two in One,” iLearn.

March 24, 26: No Class. Spring Recess

March 31: No Class. Cesar Chavez Day

8. April 2, 7: Virtue Ethics: Plato
   Plato’s Meno.
   Supplement: Hadot’s “Philosophy as a Way of Life.”

9. April 9, 14: Virtue Ethics: Aristotle
   Selections from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, iLearn.
10. April 16, 21, 23: Nietzsche’s Voluntarist Virtue Ethics
   Selections from Nietzsche’s “Schopenhauer as Educator,” iLearn.
   Selection from Russell’s A History of Philosophy, iLearn.
   Selection from Rawls’ A Theory of Justice, on iLearn.
   Selections from Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra, iLearn.
   Azadpur’s “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” iLearn.

11. April 28, 30: Introduction to Meta-Ethics
   Supplement: Selections from G. E. Moore’s Principia Ethica, iLearn.

12. May 5, 7: Meta-Ethics: Non-Cognitivism and Realism
   McDowell’s “Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following,” & Blackburn’s “Reply” iLearn.
   Supplement: McDowell’s “Values and Secondary Qualities,” iLearn.

13. May 12, 14: Ethics & Literature
   Murdoch’s “Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts,” iLearn.

May 14: Final Prompt SUBMITTED to students.
May 22: Final DUE, by noon.