

PHIL 314: PHILOSOPHICAL ETHICS

The Good Place and Philosophy
Samford University, Fall 2021

Basic Information:

Instructor: Dr. Taylor Cyr

Instructor's Email: tcyr@samford.edu

Instructor's Office: Chapman Hall 315

Class Meeting Times: TTh 3:00pm-4:50pm

Class Meeting Location: DBH 217

Office Hours: TTh 9:00am-10:00am (and by appointment)

Required Texts:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. ISBN: 9780872204645.
- Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. ISBN: 9781107008519.
- Mill, *Utilitarianism*. ISBN: 9780872206052.
- Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*. ISBN: 9780674004238.

Course Overview

Catalog Description:

Exploration of fundamental bases of morality by presenting and examining the salient features of virtue, duty, utilitarian ethics, and Divine Command ethics.

Our Focus:

In this course, we will watch the NBC sitcom *The Good Place* and explore several of the philosophical topics introduced by the show, including what it means to be a good person, how popular ethical theories say we should live, and whether immortality is desirable.

Course Requirements (% of Final Grade)

- Midterm Exam (20%)
- Final Exam (20%)
- Papers (40%) — two papers, worth 20% each
- Participation (10%)
- Reading Quizzes (10%)

Midterm Exam and Final Exam:

- The midterm exam and final exam will be similar in length and in format. The final exam is not cumulative (it will only test material from the second half of the course).
- The format of both exams will be a combination of true/false, multiple-choice, and essay questions designed to test understanding of the material covered in the assigned readings and class discussions.

Papers:

- There are two required papers, one on ethical theory and the other on some other topic in philosophical ethics.
- Each of the papers will be roughly 5 double-spaced pages in length (1,250-1,500 words). The first is due during week 7, and the second is due in week 14. More information will be provided in weeks 5 and 12, respectively.
- Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B- to C+) for each day past their due date.

Participation and Reading Quizzes:

- You must attend class, be on time, bring your copy of the assigned reading(s), listen attentively, and answer and ask questions. Your final participation grade will include an evaluation of your overall contribution to class discussion.
- There will be 12 unannounced reading quizzes throughout the term. These will be short, multiple-choice quizzes that will test basic comprehension of the assigned readings for the day of the quiz. At the end of the course, I will drop students' two lowest scores (i.e., only a student's 10 best reading quizzes will count toward the final grade).
- Make-up quizzes will not be offered.

Grading Scale: 93-100= A; 90-92= A-; 87-89= B+; 83-86= B; 80-82= B-; 77-79= C+; 73-76= C; 70-72= C-; 67-69= D+; 63-66= D; 60-62= D-; 0-59= F

Course Communications:

There will be times when we need to communicate with each other outside of our regular class meetings. I will provide all relevant and updated information to you through Canvas. Although I may use Samford email for individual communications, communications with the class as a whole will normally be handled using the Canvas Announcement feature. You should make sure that your Canvas settings are such that you receive an email alert whenever I post a Canvas Announcement. You may also email me with the expectation that I will respond to emails within 24 hours.

Course Policies

I. Statement regarding online or remote delivery if the course must transition to a digital learning format:

The 21-22 academic year will see the return of many regular activities and operations; however, as the presence of COVID-19 is monitored on campus and within our community, state law, local health orders, and CDC guidance could affect the course activities and modality (including a change to an emergency remote or online course). Students must attend class and check email and Canvas regularly for any important updates from the course instructor and/or university administration.

II. Mask requirements within the educational setting:

It is very difficult to differentiate vaccination status within the more interpersonal and intimate indoor educational settings such as the classroom. Therefore, masking is required for all participants in this course, regardless of vaccination status. This small act supports our calling to respect and serve others within the Samford community and may reduce academic disruption in this course. Failure to comply with instructions to wear a mask from a member of the Samford faculty could result in an Honor Code warning letter and/or violation.

III. Student illness or vulnerable to COVID-19:

Vaccination is the best way for a student to reduce the risk of academic disruption due to COVID-related illness. Samford University strongly encourages all members of our community, including students, to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. However, there may be individual circumstances where students may not be able to receive the vaccination or choose not to receive the vaccination. Students who are not able to attend a required class meeting because of quarantine, illness, or contact with a COVID-19 positive individual should notify the instructor of record within 24 hours of the class meeting. Additionally, students should respond to contact by the Academic Success Center for

assistance in coordinating academic support due to COVID-19 related absences. An excused absence does not relieve a student of responsibility for the academic work in the class missed.

Students who have a disability which makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 (e.g., immune-compromised) must register with Disability Resources and follow standard procedure.

IV. Technology needs:

Because of the possibility of a student needing to participate in the course virtually at some point during the semester, all students should have the following technology available to them:

- A Windows 10 or Macintosh desktop or laptop computer; although Chromebooks and mobile devices are capable of accessing the Canvas learning management system, they may not be compatible with certain third-party software.
- A web cam (built into most modern laptops)
- A microphone and speakers, headphones, or earbuds (also built in to most modern laptops)
- The most recent version of the Chrome or Firefox Web browser; the Safari browser can be particularly problematic when accessing online courses.
- A stable Internet connection capable of at least 2 Mbps upstream and 5 Mbps downstream. Students may test the speed of their connection at <http://speedtest.net>

V. Emergency Readiness:

RAVE is the primary method of communication used by Samford University during a campus emergency. If you have not registered for RAVE alerts, please use the link provided below and go to the My Contact Information box on your Portal homepage to update your RAVE Emergency Alert Information. <https://connect.samford.edu/group/mycampus/student>

Samford University utilizes Alert Samford for desktop, laptop, tablet, and mobile devices to provide students with information, procedures, and links about what to do in the event of a variety of emergency situations that could occur on our campus. If you do not already have the Alert Samford app on your mobile device, laptop, desktop, or tablet, please click on this link <https://connect.samford.edu/group/mycampus/student> and go to the Emergency Information box on your Portal homepage for instructions on downloading the App. Once you have downloaded the App, please take time to review the information provided, it is important that you know what to do in the case of a campus emergency.

VI. Americans with Disabilities Act:

Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should register with Disability Resources (205) 726-4078, disability@samford.edu, DBH 103, www.samford.edu/dr. Students who are registered with Disability Resources are responsible for providing me with a copy of their accommodation letter and scheduling a meeting with me to discuss how their approved accommodations will apply to this course. Accommodations will not be implemented until we have met to review your accommodation letter.

VII. Title IX:

Samford University is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the University community. In accordance with federal policy all University employees are required to report information related to discrimination and harassment which includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. For this reason, if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak with an employee who is not required to report information, you

can find a list of confidential resources listed in the online student handbook and the Title IX website or contact the Counseling Center at 205-726-4083 or the Office of Spiritual Life at 205-726-2825.

VIII. Student Bereavement Policy:

In the event a student experiences the death of a significant member of his or her family or community, the University may excuse absences up to five days for travel and bereavement. The Provost's office will notify advisors and instructors of excused absences. It will be the responsibility of the student to follow up with faculty regarding missed exams, quizzes and required work for the class.

IX. Communication Resource Center:

The Communication Resource Center (CRC) offers *free* tutoring for Samford students in oral and written communication, as well as support for developing and improving critical reading skills. CRC appointments are available Monday-Thursday. Students can schedule appointments at samford.mywconline.com. Students will upload files for the tutor to review and meet in real-time sessions with a tutor. For more information,

visit <http://www.samford.edu/departments/communication-resource-center/>

Note: The first time you schedule an appointment, you will need to create an account, using your Samford email and password.

X. Inclement Weather:

Inclement weather or other events beyond the control of the University that might cause risk or danger to students, faculty and staff may occasionally result in changes to normal University operations, including cancellation of classes or events; the class schedule and/or calendar may be adjusted.

XI. Counseling Services:

Students may benefit from meeting with a counselor at some point to discuss difficult issues, gain insight for dealing with stress, or to process and understand events from the past. When a need for counseling arises, students should contact Counseling Services & Wellness Programs. On-site appointments are prepaid through student fees and there is no extra cost to the student. To schedule an appointment, please email counseling@samford.edu, call 205-726-2065, or stop by Dwight Beeson Hall (DBH) room 203.

XII. Library Services:

Samford University Library (library.samford.edu) is more than just a building; it is a vast array of resources curated to support your success. In addition to print, media, and online resources, the library has collaborative meeting and study spaces, technology that supports your academic endeavors, and professional librarians with the expertise to assist with research needs. Please Ask Us (samford.libanswers.com), email us (reference@samford.edu), or call us at 205-726-2196 for more information about how we can help. We are here to assist with your information and research needs.

XIII. Student Government Association Samford University Honor Pledge:

Preamble

Samford University's motto—For God, For Learning, Forever—brings together our commitment to our Christian heritage, the pursuit and transmission of knowledge, and the enduring virtues.

Only a particular kind of person and institution can fulfill such a demanding motto. To do this, the individuals who form the Samford community must embrace honor in all areas of life and

scholarship. Thus, an honor pledge is an appropriate way for the Samford community to live out its motto.

Honor Pledge

I believe that the members of the Samford community possess dignity and are worthy of honor. I understand that honoring others fosters academic achievement, personal growth, and spiritual development.

I commit to hold myself and my peers to the standards of conduct and academic integrity maintained by the University.

To this I, _____, pledge my sacred honor.

For God, For Learning, Forever

Course Schedule and Readings¹

Part 1: Introduction

- Week 1
 - 8/31: Introduction to the Course
 - *No Assigned Reading*
 - TGP: Season 1
 - 9/2: Does Studying Ethics Make Us Better People?
 - Eric Schwitzgebel, “Cheeseburger Ethics”
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 1

Part 2: Ethical Theory

- Week 2
 - 9/7: Divine Command Theory
 - Plato’s *Euthyphro*
 - Robert Merrihew Adams, “A New Divine Command Theory”
 - Eleonore Stump, “Simplicity” (focus on p. 255)
 - 9/9: Aristotle
 - *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (1-18)
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 2
- Week 3
 - 9/14: Aristotle (continued)
 - *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II (18-30)
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 3
 - 9/16: Aristotle (continued)
 - *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX (119-153)
 - Sabrina Little, “Friends and Tethers”
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 4
- Week 4
 - 9/21: Aristotle (continued)
 - *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X (153-171)

¹ About half of the readings are from the required texts. All other materials will be provided electronically through Canvas. If you have not seen *The Good Place* (TGP), I have included a recommended viewing schedule alongside the required readings. If you have already seen all episodes, you should at least watch the episodes that I say to focus on here (e.g., Season 3, Episode 5 for class on 11/4) This schedule is subject to change (at the instructor’s discretion) with advanced notice.

- 9/23: Kant
 - *Groundwork* 3-20
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 5
- Week 5
 - 9/28: Kant (continued)
 - *Groundwork* 21-37
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 6
 - 9/30: Kant (continued)
 - *Groundwork* 37-55
 - *Discuss First Paper Topics*
- Week 6
 - 10/5: Mill
 - *Utilitarianism* 1-12
 - TGP: Season 2, Episodes 7-9
 - 10/7: Mill (continued); Moral Particularism
 - *Utilitarianism* 12-26
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 10
- Week 7
 - 10/12: *Fall Break (No Class)*
 - 10/14: Scanlon
 - *What We Owe to Each Other* 1-13, 147-158
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 11
 - *First Paper Due*
- Week 8
 - 10/19: Scanlon
 - *What We Owe to Each Other* 189-218
 - TGP: Season 2, Episode 12
 - 10/21: Scanlon; *Review for Midterm*
 - *What We Owe to Each Other* 218-247
- Week 9
 - 10/26: *Midterm*

Part 3: Assorted Topics in Ethics

- 10/28: The Trolley Problem
 - Phillipa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”
- Week 10
 - 11/2: The Trolley Problem (continued)
 - Judith Jarvis Thomson, “The Trolley Problem”
 - 11/4: Moral Luck
 - Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck”
 - TGP: Season 3, Episodes 1-5 (focus on 5)
- Week 11
 - 11/9: Moral Luck (continued)
 - Dana Kay Nelkin, “Moral Luck”
 - TGP: Season 3, Episodes 6-7
 - 11/11: Poverty and Hunger
 - Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
 - TGP: Season 3, Episodes 8-10 (focus on 8)

- Week 12
 - 11/16: Effective Altruism
 - Theron Pummer, “Risky Giving”
 - TGP: Season 3, Episodes 11-12
 - *Discuss Second Paper Topics*
 - 11/18: Responding to Wrongdoers: Protest and Forgiveness
 - Myisha Cherry, “Why I Don’t Believe in Forgiveness”
 - TGP: Season 4, Episodes 1-7 (focus on 6-7)
- Week 13
 - 11/23: Responding to Wrongdoers: Punishment and Justice
 - Alec Walen, “Retributive Justice”
 - TGP: Season 4, Episodes 8-10
 - 11/25: *Thanksgiving (No Class)*
- Week 14
 - 11/30: Is Immortality Desirable?
 - Bernard Williams, “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality”
 - TGP: Season 4, Episodes 11-13
 - *Second Paper Due*
 - 12/2: Is Immortality Desirable? (continued)
 - John Martin Fischer, “Identity, Boredom, and Immortality Realism”
 - *Guest Presentation by John Martin Fischer*
- Week 15
 - 12/7: Is Immortality Desirable? (continued)
 - Yujin Nagasawa, “Pro-Immortalism and Pro-Mortalism”
 - 12/9: Course Summary; *Review for Final Exam*
 - *No New Readings*
- *Final Exam*
 - Thursday, 12/16, 1:00pm-3:00pm