

Normative Ethics

University of Houston, Spring 2023
ILAS 4350-16227, Interdisciplinary Problem Solving
Tuesday 230-4pm, Melcher Hall 127

Instructor: Dr. Luca Oliva
Email: loliva@uh.edu
Teaching Fellow: Dr. Robert Tierney
Email: rbtierne@uh.edu

Course Description

This capstone course helps students to achieve a meaningful synthesis of their three distinct minors. It is centered on substantive social “problem-solving” methodologies as applied through the particular minors completed by each student. Students will thus work on a research project that comprehensively integrates their chosen minors. This senior seminar is individually customized around each student’s specific program of study.

In Spring 2023, the course discusses normative ethics as it appears in Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and Paton’s standard commentary on its central topics (1947). Among them are *moral judgment, good will, duty and obligation, categorical imperative, autonomy and freedom, and the kingdom of ends.*

Time and Place

In Spring 2023, this course will be offered as a hybrid class with face-to-face and asynchronous components. The face-to-face part will take place on Tuesday, 230-4 pm in Melcher Hall Building room 127. The online platform for the asynchronous part of the class is *Blackboard Learn*. There, you can also find all the relevant information about the course, including the syllabus, readings, and links for class submission. Finally, the teaching assistant (Dr. Tierney) organizes weekly office hours by appointment (in person or on Microsoft Teams) to clarify the class subjects and prepare their final research project.

Requirements and Assessments

Part of the course consists of attending and discussing the class materials. The readings will provide the moral knowledge you require for your final research paper, representing the course’s real purpose. Below is the breakdown of your final grade.

(a) *30% Attendance and Class Discussion* - On Tuesdays (230-4pm), students must attend class and discuss the assigned readings.

(b) *30% Weekly Class Reviews* - On Thursdays, students must submit a brief paper (around 750 words) about the arguments discussed in class. Links for submissions are available on *Blackboard Learn*.

(c) *40% Research Paper and its Presentation* - Students must first write a research paper (3000 words) on any subject encompassing the collection of minors. Then, they will defend it before a committee at the end of the semester. Guidelines for writing the research paper are available below.

Class Schedule

| | |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jan 17 | Class Introduction |
| Jan 24 | Elements of Moral Cognition (Kant, pp. vii-xi, 1-10) |
| Jan 31 | Moral Judgments (Paton, pp. 19-30) |
| Feb 7 | Will and Moral Maxim (Kant, pp. xi-xv, 10-18) |
| Feb 14 | Good Will (Paton, pp. 34-45) |
| Feb 21 | Duty and Categorical Imperative (Kant pp. xv-xxi, 19-31) |
| Feb 28 | Duty (Paton, pp. 46-57) |
| Mar 7 | Humanity and Universal Law (Kant pp. 32-40) |
| Mar 21 | The Moral Maxim and The Law (Paton, pp. 58-63, 69-73) |
| Mar 28 | Autonomy vs Heteronomy (Kant pp. xxi-xxv, 40-51) |
| Apr 4 | Freedom (Kant pp. xxv-xxx, 52-59) |
| Apr 11 | The Kingdom of Ends (Kant pp. 59-66) |
| Apr 18 | Formulae of the Categorical Imperative (Paton, pp. 129-44) |
| Apr 25 | The Moral Kingdom (Paton, pp. 185-97) |
| May 1 | Research Paper Deadline, 11:59 pm (Blackboard Learn) |
| May 2-3 | Presentation Days, 9 am – 5 pm (S 243) |

Bibliography

Kant, Immanuel (1785), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.
Paton, Herbert James (1947), *The Categorical Imperative*. London: Hutchinson.

Research Paper Schedule

- Feb 9 Meeting with Dr. Tierney (2:30 pm, TBD) - Submit an outline of the research project to discuss with him (no more than 750 words, printed). The outline should contain (a) a title, (b) a brief description of the problem to solve, (c) a short draft of the solutions according to the research methods of the minors, (d) a list of desired professors to contact as supervisors (one professor for each minor).
- Apr 6 Meeting with Dr. Tierney (2:30 pm, TBD) - Submit an advanced draft of the research project (no less than 2000 words, although not definitive), including (a) title and question, (b) proposed solutions, (c) established contact with the supervisors, (d) bibliography.
Dr. Tierney is also available for virtual meetings. So, if students are unavailable on those dates, they can reschedule virtually. Further, students can ask for a meeting with Dr. Tierney when they need extra help preparing their research papers. Please, don't hesitate to contact him.
- May 1 Research Paper Deadline, 11:59 pm (Blackboard Learn)
- May 2-3 Presentation Days, 9 am – 5 pm (S 243)

Research Paper Guidelines

Here are the necessary steps for writing your paper. Make sure to implement each of them. If anything is unclear, do not guess, but ask the teacher. Expect suggestions and corrections on each of these steps as you submit your outline.

- 1 Format - The research paper must have 3000 words and include a bibliography (not contained in the 3000 words). Write single-spaced, 9pt (Montserrat or Garamond font), and turn in a pdf file.
- 2 Framing your question - Consider a problem or question that encompass the collection of your minors. Research its current status quo and think of a possible solution.
- 3 Paper Structure - Structure your paper according to the following steps.
Introduction - Introduce your question/problem and why it's important (400 words). Identify the problem you want to discuss. Describe it with simple words and motivate your choice by telling us why the chosen issue matters.
Thesis - Make your claim (100 words). This part represents your thesis, namely your answer to the question. You are making a claim about how you will solve the problem.
Use arguments to solve the problem. Apply methodologies and approaches you have learned from your three minors. Use the class bibliography to substantiate the arguments. The argument from each of your three minors (statement and supporting claims) should be around 700 words.
Conclusion - The conclusion (300 words) offers your solution to the chosen problem or question, naturally deriving from your arguments.
- 4 Conducting Research - You must conduct research, formulate claims, and defend them. You will not be able to develop an original perspective on a topic nor write a sufficient answer to the question without surveying established literature. To produce arguments, you must research how others have handled the problem either adequately or inadequately. Your view will be original because of your perspective derived from your three minors.
Further, the research you conduct will lead to an established bibliography for your paper. Your instructor must previously approve these sources.
Seek guidance from professors teaching in your minors' programs or departments.
- 5 Examples of problems for your research paper follow below.

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Social Justice</i> | Immigration, Police Brutality, Racism, Gender Discrimination. |
| <i>Evil and Injustice</i> | Violence, Climate Change, Economic Inequalities and Poverty, Environmental and Economic Sustainability. |
| <i>Bioethics</i> | Abortion, Euthanasia, Bioengineering. |
| <i>Mathematics</i> | The Nature of the Integers, Induction vs Mathematical Induction. |

Writing Support

The UH Writing Center works with undergraduates enrolled in any course who would like help with their writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS's students: [UH-Writing-Center](#).

University Policies

You must comply with the university policies about ethics and academic honesty. See the following links and read their documents thoroughly: [Student-Conduct-Policy](#) and [Academic-Honesty](#). For counseling and psychological services, visit [CAPS](#). Finally, you can request special accommodations here: [Adjustments/Auxiliary-Aids](#). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Houston has issued extraordinary policies listed at the end of the syllabus.