

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.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON SYLLABUS LANGUAGE: SPRING 2023

Required Language for All Courses

COVID-19 Information

Students are encouraged to visit the University's [COVID-19](#) website for important information including diagnosis and symptom protocols, testing, vaccine information, and post-exposure guidance. Please check the website throughout the semester for updates. Consult the (select: [Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy](#) or [Graduate Excused Absence Policy](#)) for information regarding excused absences due to medical reasons.

Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for disabled students. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, UH strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustments/auxiliary aid, please contact [the Justin Dart Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#) (formerly the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with Disabilities).

Excused Absence Policy

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston [Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy](#) and [Graduate Excused Absence Policy](#) for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition. Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to [military service](#), [religious holy days](#), [pregnancy and related conditions](#), and [disability](#).

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the [Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#). If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with *anyone* without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Recommended Language

Resources for Online Learning

The University of Houston is committed to student success, and provides information to optimize the online learning experience through our [Power-On](#) website. Please visit this website for a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and tips including: obtaining access to the internet, AccessUH, Blackboard, and Canvas; using your smartphone as a webcam; and downloading Microsoft Office 365 at no cost. For questions or assistance contact UHOnline@uh.edu.

UH Email

Please check and use your CougarNet email for communications related to this course. To access this email, [login](#) to your Microsoft 365 account with your CougarNet credentials.

Webcams

Access to a webcam is required for students participating remotely in this course. Webcams must be turned on (*state when webcams are required to be on and the [academic basis](#) for requiring them to be on*). (Example: *Webcams must be turned on during exams to ensure the academic integrity of exam administration.*)

Academic Honesty Policy

High ethical standards are critical to the integrity of any institution, and bear directly on the ultimate value of conferred degrees. All UH community members are expected to contribute to an atmosphere of the highest possible ethical standards. Maintaining such an atmosphere requires that any instances of academic dishonesty be recognized and addressed. The [UH Academic Honesty Policy](#) is designed to handle those instances with fairness to all parties involved: the students, the instructors, and the University itself. All students and faculty of the University of Houston are responsible for being familiar with this policy.

Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

Security Escorts and Cougar Ride

UHPD continually works with the University community to make the campus a safe place to learn, work, and live. Our Security escort service is designed for the community members who have safety concerns and would like to have a Security Officer walk with them, for their safety, as they make their way across campus. Based on availability either a UHPD Security Officer or Police Officer will escort students, faculty, and staff to locations beginning and ending on campus. If you feel that you need a Security Officer to walk with you for your safety please call [713-743-3333](tel:713-743-3333). Arrangements may be made for special needs.

Parking and Transportation Services also offers a late-night, on-demand shuttle service called Cougar Ride that provides rides to and from all on-campus shuttle stops, as well as the MD Anderson Library, Cougar Village/Moody Towers and the UH Technology Bridge. Rides can be requested through the UH Go app. Days and hours of operation can be found at <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/parking/cougar-ride/>.

Syllabus Changes

Please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through (*specify how students will be notified of changes*).

Helpful Information

Coogs Care: <https://uh.edu/dsa/coogscare/>

Student Health Center: <https://www.uh.edu/healthcenter/>