

29 April 2014

John J. Stuhr, Department of Philosophy, Emory University; PHILosophy 115: Introduction to Ethics (an introductory undergraduate course with no prerequisites)

Introductory Paragraph:

I have taught courses in environmental philosophy and in ethics and the environment for many years, and I directed a humanities center that was involved in mediation activities between environmentalist groups and members of various extractive economies (lumber, fishing, mining, etc.) and communities that depend on these economies. At the same time, I have taught courses in ethics, and these courses have focused on notions of the good life, individual flourishing, and the ways in which this life depends on one's own character and the ways in which it depends on resources external to individuals. As I undertook teaching and research in both these areas—related but distinct areas—I was and to a large extent remain highly suspicious of the notion of sustainability and, in particular, the ways in which it functions as a normative ideal that is often put forward with no justification other than itself—as if it were self-justifying (and as if nature were ever static and non-evolving). It often also seemed to be viewed as a social good in the abstract—independent of the very different conditions that persons face and independent of concerns about justice. As I delved deeper into the scholarly literature about sustainability—much of it brought to my attention via Emory University's Piedmont Project in which I participated in winter/spring 2014, I found materials that seemed to me to move beyond earlier notions of sustainability in ways that highlighted the notion of flourishing and the different meanings of good lives, and in ways that highlighted political concerns with justice, egalitarian treatment, and basic rights. I continue to be frustrated often and to a large degree by what I take to be the inadequate theorization of the very notion of sustainability—particularly the inattention to normative dimensions (more common in writings outside the humanities) and particularly the temporal aspect of the notion that appears to require a retrospective judgment at least as much as a prospective one. This is not a dead end and it is not a dilemma; it is simply a measure of the differences in disciplines and habits of thought. At the same time, the philosophical pragmatist in me—this is perhaps my major philosophical orientation—has found a way to approach many sustainability issues simply in terms of problem-solving in a piecemeal, time-bound way. This allows philosophical ideas or theories to be tested and illuminated in, and by, practice, and in this light issues about sustainability lie at a cross-section for both employing and also assessing theory. As a result, in my ethics course, I am trying to provide students with a deep background in ethical theory—ideas that are central in any answer to the question “how should I live?”—and at the same time to place this ethical theory in relation to contemporary demands that we live in a lighter, less destructive, more just and flourishing way. This allows students to consider in depth questions about how to live, and then to consider further how to live here and now, in our time and place. Last, as in all philosophy courses, it is crucial that students do not believe that there are easy or ready-made answers waiting to be discovered. As a result, after providing three large (long, difficult, complex, multi-authored packets of reading that students must complete in part in class and in part via online activities), I then allow students to divide themselves into groups (focused on particular sustainability topics) and ask that they—with plenty of instructor input and advice—formulate readings for the whole class and structure the organization and flow of a class meeting on their topic at the end of the class. This process leads students to take some ownership of their own education—the unexamined life is not worth living, philosophers say—and it provides them an opportunity to think hard about what it means for each of them individually and as members of communities to live ethically in our world.

PHIL 115: **Ethics and Sustainability**

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Office hours:

Here are the steps needed:

- a) Finish your syllabus and please save it in Word. Be sure it says on the first page somewhere “Emory University” and your name, department, and level of course (this info is for external readers).
- b) Write an Intro paragraph (see below) and paste it in front of the syllabus, so we can upload both to the web at the same time.
- c) Put a heading at the top of the statement’s first page that gives your name, discipline, date, and course name.

Description and Objectives: This introduction to ethics considers critically questions of value that are central to human life. Are moral values or the value of human life absolute? Are they relative? Is it possible to reason about values at all, and is it possible to establish that some values are more justified than others? If so, how? And, what is the relation between moral theory and moral practice--actually leading a good life and being a good person? Is leading a sustainable life ethically good or even ethically required? What would this mean for different persons in different situations? What is sustainability? Is sustainability an absolute good? What is the relation between sustainability and flourishing or the good life? This course introduces students to these questions and related issues that every person inescapably must confront. The course approaches these topics in two ways: through the writings of several key thinkers in the history of philosophy (including Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Kant, Mill, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Camus) and through recent analyses of the issue and ethical importance of sustainability for individual persons and for social practices and institutions. The course focuses not simply on understanding this material but on critical reflection on human values--both one's own values and those of others; ultimately, the course focuses on the application of this reflection to action in daily life.

Format: Informal lecture and as much discussion as class size allows. Frequently the class will be divided into in-class project groups. This course assumes students should not be passive spectators to their own education, and all students are required to prepare for, attend, and participate in all class meetings.

Texts: The following are required and available in the University Bookstore: Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics; Epictetus, The Handbook (The Enchiridion); Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals; Mill, Utilitarianism; Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil; Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus. Additional required readings (see the schedule below) will be made available at the course’s Blackboard site. This includes a selections from many books on sustainability, as well as readings chosen by student groups. Students should bring the assigned text to each class session.

Course Requirements:

1. *Preparation for, attendance at, and participation in all class meetings.* No unexcused absence is permitted and any such absence will result in a course grade of F. (Examples of excused absences are: student illness/accident; religious holidays; Emory Athletics authorization; or family loss or pressing problems. Examples of unexcused absences are: feeling tired or less than perfect;

oversleeping; roommate or car problems; staying up late the night before for work or play; tests or papers or other requirements in other courses; leaving early for holidays or other travel plans or reservations; or losing all sense of time while playing video games.) Regarding cell phones, personal computers, and electronica: The use of cell phones is prohibited in class. Students may take notes or access texts on a laptop or tablet, but must disconnect all wi-fi connections during class time, as personal web surfing, emailing, tweeting, Facebook posting, etc., is academically, intellectually, and socially unacceptable in a learning community.

2. *Analytical papers*: Every class meeting a one page paper is due on the reading assigned for that day. Unless there are other instructions, these papers should include only the following: a) your account of the author's major point(s) or thesis(es); and, b) your account of the author's justification, support, reasoning, or evidence for the(se) main point(s). These papers must be no longer than 300 words, must use standard fonts and margins, and must be submitted to the instructor by email (to jstuhr@emory.edu; no attachments) no later than 15 minutes prior to class the day they are due. Late papers will not be accepted. Papers will be returned electronically before the following class session with comments and one of the following three marks: + (excellent understanding of reading), a √ (adequate understanding), or a – (insufficient understanding of the reading and an invitation to meet with the instructor). Students who do not submit a paper on a given day (or who submit a paper that is substantially incomplete or does not reflect even a serious effort) will receive no grade for that assignment. Students who receive no grade on more than four total papers, or on more than one paper about the same author, will not pass the course. These papers aim at raising the quality of class discussion, allowing the instructor to follow closely each student's work, and ensuring that students keep up with assigned readings.

3. *Group discussion leadership*: Each student, as part of a small group, will lead one class session late in the semester on a particular contemporary moral issue related to sustainability. Assignments will be made in late September on the basis of student preferences. Readings will be selected by students in each group, and those students will structure the class session they lead.

4. *Final exam*: The final exam will consist of two parts. The first part will be 12 short-answer questions covering major concepts, arguments, and ideas in the readings and discussions. These questions will be distributed at the time of the exam. The second part of the exam will be two essay questions, selected by the instructor at the beginning of the exam from a list of seven essay questions distributed in class on 11/26. The essay part of the exam, but not the short-answer part, will be open to books, notes, preparations, etc.

For students who satisfy the first course requirement:
class participation, including especially the group discussion leadership, will count for 30% of the course grade;
the analytical papers will count for 40% of the course grade; and,
the final exam will count for 30% of the course grade.

Reading Schedule:

Date	Author	Assignment
1	introductory	class meeting, no reading assignment
2	Plato	<i>Euthyphro</i>
3	Plato	<i>Crito</i>
4	Aristotle	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books I and II
5	Aristotle	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books III (1-5) and VII (3-10; pp. 118-132)
6	Aristotle	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books VIII and IX
7	Aristotle	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books VI (3-13; pp. 100-109)) and X
8	Epictetus	<i>Manual (The Enchiridion)</i>
9++	various	sustainability e-packet 1: What is sustainability and what is its ethical significance? (Readings by: Lisa Newton, <i>Ethics and Sustainability</i> ; Paul Thompson, <i>The Agarian Vision: Sustainability and Environmental Ethics</i> ; Robin Attfield, <i>Environmental Ethics</i> ; Robert Taylor, <i>Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Sustainability</i>)
11	Kant	<i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , part 1
12	Kant	<i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , part 2 (1 st half)
13	Kant	<i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , part 2 (2nd half)
14	Kant	<i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , part 3
15	fall break—no class, no reading assignment	
16	various	sustainability e- packet 2: What is the significance of sustainability given a shared human environment, cultural pluralism, and widely unequal distribution of resources? (Readings by Agyman, Bullard, and Evans, <i>Just Sustainabilities</i> , and Bryan Norton, <i>Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management</i>)
17	Mill	<i>Utilitarianism</i> , chapters 1, 2, and 5
18	Mill	<i>Utilitarianism</i> , chapters 3 and 4
19	Nietzsche	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , pp. 1-3, 9-22, 41-56. 64-76
20	Nietzsche	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , skim chapter 4, read pp. 100-118, 145-159
21	Nietzsche	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , 201-237
22	James	"The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life"*
23	Dewey	<i>Theory of Valuation</i> , chapters 1-4*
24	Dewey	<i>Theory of Valuation</i> , chapters 5-9*
25	Camus	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> , part 1 (pp. 1-65)
26	Camus	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> , parts 2-4 (pp. 66-123) and
	Stuhr	"God, Death, and the Absurd"
27***	various	sustainability e-packet 3: Sustainability: From Theory to Habit, Action, and Practice. (Readings by: Andres Edwards, <i>Thriving Beyond Sustainability</i> ; Margaret Robertson, <i>Sustainability Principles and Practice</i> ; and Garrett Hardin, <i>Living within Limits</i> .)
	thanksgiving break—no class, no reading assignment	
T 12/3	STUDENT GROUP 1 Presentation: Topic & Readings*	Sustainability and Place
TH 12/5	STUDENT GROUP 2 Presentation: Topic & Readings*	Sustainability, Persons, Ethics
T 12/10	STUDENT GROUP 3 Presentation: Topic & Readings*	Sustainability, Globalization, Justice
TBA	Final Exam	

* = readings available on Blackboard

++ = student group information and preference sheets distributed

*** = final exam information distributed in class

Office for Undergraduate Education – Information for Syllabus – Fall 2013

- The Office for Undergraduate Education (OUE) central office is located in White Hall 300
- Please visit or call 404.727.6069 with questions about academic affairs, concerns or policies.
- All Emory College of Arts and Sciences policies may be found in the College Catalog:
<http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/catalog/index.html>
- For a full list of Religious Holidays can be found here:
<http://www.religiouslife.emory.edu/pdf/Religious%20Holidays%202013-14.pdf>

Academic Advising and Class Deans

If you have any academic concerns or questions about Emory College of Arts and Sciences policies, you should first meet with an OUE academic adviser. If an academic adviser is unavailable to meet with you, you may meet with an OUE dean during open hours.

- OUE Academic Adviser appointments: Visit White Hall 300 or call 404.727.6069
- Deans' Open Hours: <http://college.emory.edu/home/administration/office/undergraduate/hours.html>

Academic Support

There is a range of resources available to Emory undergraduates designed to enrich each student's educational experience.

- Visit <http://college.emory.edu/advising> for a list of support programs and appointment directions

Access and Disability Resources

Students with medical/health conditions that might impact academic success should visit Access, Disability Services and Resources (ADSR formerly the Office of Disability Services, ODS) to determine eligibility for appropriate accommodations. Students who receive accommodations must present the Accommodation Letter from ADSR to your professor at the beginning of the semester, or when the letter is received.

Attendance Policies (Absences and Absences from Examinations)

- Absences: Students should understand that they are responsible for the academic consequences of absence and that instructors may set specific policies about absence for individual courses—*as is the case with this course!*
- Absences from Examinations: A student who fails to take any required midterm or final examination at the scheduled time may not make up the examination without written permission from a dean in the Office for Undergraduate Education. Permission will be granted only for illness or other compelling reasons, such as participation in scheduled events off-campus as an official representative of the University. A student who takes any part of a final examination ordinarily will not be allowed to defer or retake that final. Deferred examinations must be taken during the student's next semester of residence by the last date for deferred examinations in the academic calendar or within twelve months if the student does not re-enroll in the college. Failure to take a deferred examination by the appropriate deadline will result automatically in the grade IF or IU.

Honor Code

Upon every individual who is a part of Emory University falls the responsibility for maintaining in the life of Emory a standard of unimpeachable honor in all academic work. The Honor Code of Emory College is based on the fundamental assumption that every loyal person of the University not only will conduct his or her own life according to the dictates of the highest honor, but will also refuse to tolerate in others action which would sully the good name of the institution. Academic misconduct is an offense generally defined as any action or inaction which is offensive to the integrity and honesty of the members of the academic community.

- The Honor Code, a list of offenses and the Honor Council process may be found;
http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor_code.html