

Syllabus for PHIL 441 – Ethical Theory  
Taught by Justin Kalef, Rutgers University, Spring 2020

**Contact information:** The easiest way to contact me outside of class is by email, at [jkalef@philosophy.rutgers.edu](mailto:jkalef@philosophy.rutgers.edu)

**Office Hours:** I will hold office hours every week from 9:30 to 10:30am on Mondays and from 4:30 to 5:30pm on Wednesdays. All students are very welcome to seek assistance from me then: no need to make an appointment. My office is Room 547 in the Gateway Building (106 Somerset – just by the Barnes and Noble with the Rutgers clock).

**Text:** There are two texts for this course. We will begin in January with Michael Huemer's *Ethical Intuitionism*, and then turn (immediately after Reading Week) to Joshua Greene's *Moral Tribes*. **Please be sure to purchase paper copies rather than electronic ones, since no electronics may be used in class.** Both books are available in the bookstore.

**Assessment:**

This course is graded on a 100-point scale, as follows:

90 points or more = A	85 – 89 points = B+	80-84 points = B
75-79 points = C+	70-74 points = C	60-69 points = D
0-59 points = F		

Points will be assigned for the following work:

**1. Midterm exam (March 25<sup>th</sup>) = 30 points**

The midterm will consist of one essay question. To put your mind at ease, I will provide you in advance with an extensive, but complete, set of all possible essay questions that may be on the exam. On the day of the exam, you will be given a choice of three of those questions to write on.

**2. Essay (Due May 8<sup>th</sup> (or May 5<sup>th</sup> with a 10% bonus, or May 11<sup>th</sup> with a 10% penalty) = 40 points**

Early drafts of your work will receive critical comments from two other students. You will receive up to 30 points for your essay and up to 10 points for the essays of the two students you helped with your comments. Those who work with you will be matched up with on the basis of their, and your, demonstrated commitment to the course.

### **3. In-class teamwork = 15 points**

On most days of class, the teams will be called upon to do collaborative active work. You will be awarded up to 5 points in each third of the course on the basis of this work. Since your success at this is to some extent bound up with the performance of your team, I will make adjustments to the teams where necessary before the middle third and again before the final third of the course.

### **4. Online discussion forum = 15 points**

You will earn up to 5 points each third of the course for your contributions to the discussion forum in that third. Points will be only be awarded for posts that clearly demonstrate original, reasoned engagement with the readings, lectures and activities for the course. Preliminary feedback will be added to threads in the middle of each third. The discussion forum will be used as the basis for essay topics.

#### **Bonus points**

##### **a. Questions forum = 10 points**

Asking good questions in the Questions forum will earn you up to 1 point per question (to a maximum of 5 points for asking questions). Being the first to provide the correct answer to a question in the Questions forum will earn you up to 1 point per answer (to a maximum of 5 points for answering questions). If you try asking or answering a question and don't get a good score, just keep trying with more: there's no penalty for asking or answering too many questions. Fuller instructions on using the Questions forum will be provided soon.

##### **b. Online quizzes = 10 points**

Quizzes will appear online from time to time. These will always be announced on Sakai at least a day before the closing date for the quiz. While these quizzes are optional, and the scores you earn on the quizzes will *not* be converted to points awarded in the course, the top 10 students (by total quiz score for the course) will receive bonuses of 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 point(s), respectively.

##### **c. Plus/Minus/Equal activities = Between 10 and -10 points**

At the start of class on random days, you will be given a short, in-class individual assignment (lasting about ten minutes) to test your understanding. There will be at least six assignments of this type. Your work on those assignments will receive a grade of plus (for a student who shows clear and complete understanding), equal (for a student who shows significant but imperfect understanding), or minus (for a student who shows a serious failure of understanding). Your overall Plus/Minus/Equal score begins at 2 points and goes up by two points every time you earn a plus, drops by 2 points every time you earn a minus, and stays where it is if you earn an equal. The highest score you can receive for the Plus/Minus/Equal activities is 10 points, and the lowest is -10 points (in which case you *lose* 10 bonus points from the other two categories!). However, the lowest *overall* score you can receive for bonus points is 0.

## **Schedule of topics and readings:**

**Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>:** Introduction to the course.

**Monday, January 27<sup>th</sup>:** Metaethics, introduced; a first look at subjectivism. **READING:** Huemer, Chapter 1, plus 3.1 of Chapter 3.

**Wednesday, January 29<sup>th</sup>:** A closer look at subjectivism. **READING:** Huemer, the rest of Chapter 3.

**Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Analytic reduction and the Open Question argument. **READING:** Huemer, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.1 in Chapter 4.

**Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>:** Analytic reductionism: some technical points. **READING:** Huemer, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, and 4.3.5 in Chapter 4.

**Monday, February 10<sup>th</sup>:** Synthetic reductionism. **READING:** Huemer, the rest of Chapter 4.

**Wednesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>:** Moral knowledge. **READING:** Huemer, Chapter 5.

**Monday, February 17<sup>th</sup>:** Moral disagreement. **READING:** Huemer, Chapter 6.

**Wednesday, February 19<sup>th</sup>:** Reasons and motivations, introduced. **READING:** Huemer, Chapter 7 to 7.3.

----- **Start of the middle third of the course** -----

**Monday, February 24<sup>th</sup>:** A closer look at the Humean model; why we should be moral. **READING:** Huemer, the rest of Chapter 7.

**Wednesday, February 26<sup>th</sup>:** The trouble with noncognitivism, introduced. **READING:** Huemer, 2.1 to 2.3 in Chapter 2.

**Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Hare and Gibbard attempt to salvage noncognitivism. **READING:** Huemer, 2.4 and 2.5 in Chapter 2.

**Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>:** Blackburn and Timmons attempt to salvage noncognitivism; some introspective evidence for cognitivism. **READING:** Huemer, the rest of Chapter 2.

**Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup>:** Further objections. **READING:** Huemer, Chapter 8.

**Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>:** Overview of Huemer's case, and some concluding remarks. **READING:** Huemer, Chapter 9.

--- Reading Break ---

**Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 1

**Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>: MIDTERM EXAM**

**Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 2

**Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 3

----- **Start of the final third of the course** -----

**Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 4

**Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 5

**Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 6

**Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 7

**Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 8

**Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 9

**Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 10

**Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 11

**Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>: READING:** Greene, Chapter 12

**Preparation for each day of class:** There are readings for every day of class after our first meeting. Please make sure that you have completed all readings prior to each class meeting. ‘Completing all readings’ does not merely mean bringing your eyes into contact with every word on the pages in order: it means taking the time to understand what you have read. Please be sure to give yourself enough time with the book to allow you to digest its contents, and to get help prior to class if you need it. If you have never before taken a course that taught you the skills of close, critical reading, don’t worry: I will teach those skills in the course.

**Class meetings:** None of our meetings will consist of a summary and explanation of the day’s readings. Rather, it will be assumed that you have come to class prepared, having

completed the readings on your own or (even better) with study partners, and that you are now ready to spend class time applying and thinking critically about what you have read. Failure to show up prepared will hold back not just you, but your fellow students. Please respect everyone's learning by staying on top of things.

**Attendance:** Students should avoid missing any classes, or being late for class, unless there is a serious and *very* rare emergency. **Students who miss class are responsible for finding out from other students (NOT from me!) everything they missed.** I advise that you make an account of your absences to your teammates. It is not necessary for you to give me excuses for your absences or lateness, provided that they are rare. Talk is cheap. Instead, show your commitment with actions: after an absence, just make sure that your work in class demonstrates sufficient preparation, energy and attentiveness to make up for the energy that you failed to contribute when you were away, and makes clear that you have not fallen behind.

**Avoiding disruptions:** Our class time is precious to all your serious classmates. I hope it is also precious to you. Class begins at exactly 6:10pm and ends at exactly 7:30pm. Please join me in ensuring that we can begin on time without distractions, and that no time is shaved off the end of class (the normal time for a review that presents the big picture) by the nuisance of students arriving after 6:10 or starting to pack up before 7:30. These distracting behaviors are very disrespectful to your fellow students as well as to me.

If you anticipate that you will have to show up late, leave early or miss class more than once or twice this semester, I advise you to take a different course instead.

**The absolute ban on all electronics in class:** Study after study shows that electronics use is one of the major obstacles to focused thought and learning in the classroom and elsewhere – even on those somewhat rare occasions when the electronics use is limited to taking notes. Merely having one's phone out on one's desk – face down! – is enough to considerably worsen the ability of students to learn. Moreover, even students who keep their phones in their bags or pockets learn less than those who do not have their phones in the same room. Electronics use in class has a profound second-hand effect, and reduces the learning of other students in the room who are not using electronics. Those who take notes on laptops or tablets *routinely* learn much less, and take less thoughtful notes, than those who use pencil and paper or who engage a pencil-and-paper note-taker.

You may think you have all sorts of reasons for thinking that this is untrue or that it doesn't make a difference. Unless you can point to clear evidence from well-constructed studies that clearly refute the abundant scientific evidence that suggests that you are wrong, nothing you say will – or should – change my mind on this issue. My policy is simple: the use of electronics is completely forbidden in my classroom. **This applies from the moment you enter our classroom to the moment you leave.** Please respect the classroom environment by switching off your electronics and putting them away *before* you enter, and keeping them that way until you are out in the hallway again.

If a *very rare* crisis is taking place and you absolutely *must* be on call for even the 80 minutes of one of our class meetings, then please put your phone on vibrate (so that nobody else will be distracted) and keep it in your pocket for the entire time you are in class. If it should go off, then please be sure that you take it out of your pocket **only** when you are in the hallway, and that you move as quickly as you can far away from the door to our classroom.

I appreciate your attention to this important policy. **Those who violate the policy will lose a letter grade in the course for the first two offenses and will fail the class outright on the third offense.** I sincerely hope that nobody will ever disrespect the class and incur such a penalty.

**Conduct during the exam:** The midterm exam is 80 minutes long. You may not converse with or distract anyone else during the exam. You may not consult any book or notes or electronic device, or have any electronic device turned on or out of your bag or pocket during an exam. You may not bring any food or drink to your desk during an exam. You may only use scrap paper that is supplied to you by the examiners during an exam.

You may leave an exam room at any time, but you may not return to the room until the exam is over. No exam that has been removed from the sight of the proctor may be turned in for credit, and no student who has been out of the sight of the proctor during the exam period may turn in an exam during that exam period. Students with a genuine medical condition that makes it impossible for them to stay in an exam room for the eighty minutes of an exam may provide me with a Letter of Accommodation documenting this condition. Those students may take their exams at the Office of Disability Services. They will be given the questions one at a time in a random order, seeing the next question only on completion of the previous question; and will be permitted to leave the exam room only after submitting a final response to the last question they have seen.

No student may enter an exam room during an exam period after *any* student has left the exam room.

Students must not do anything to distract other students during an exam. For example, students must not:

- a) ask any question or make any comment about how to answer a question on the exam;
- b) make any unnecessary noise in arriving late or leaving early;
- c) talk immediately outside the doors of the classroom when the exam is still in session;
- e) loudly sniffle and snort throughout an exam; or
- f) remain in the classroom after completing and turning in their exam.

**Cheating and plagiarizing:**

**Anyone caught cheating in any way on any exam, or plagiarizing work, or aiding anyone else in cheating, or academic dishonesty, will receive an automatic F for the**

**course and be referred to the appropriate authorities for further measures to be taken. These further measures may include suspension or expulsion. They will certainly involve a permanent note on your transcript indicating to anyone who reads it that you are a cheat. Don't risk it!**

**Requests for extra makeup work, special dispensation on grades or for easier grading standards**

In my role of assessor, it is of great concern to me to treat all students *fairly*. Therefore, I promise that I will give no special dispensation to any students, nor will I allow my evaluation of a course to be influenced by the willingness of an entire class of students to whimper when other classes I've taught did not compromise their dignity in that way and were graded fairly by the standards outlined here.