

Philosophy 211—Internet Course
Spring 2012
Dr. Martin Spear

Here is some contact information for your instructor, but after the course has begun please use the tools of the webcourse for routine contact:

Office: Main Campus, Mint Bldg., Room M3-2 (Honors Curriculum)

Phone: 215-751-8215 (but please use email.)

Email: mspear@ccp.edu

Texts:

Being Good by Simon Blackburn

Moral Literacy or How To Do the Right Thing by Colin McGinn

Medical Ethics (A Very Short Introduction) by Tony Hope

In addition there will be numerous reproduced articles available online.

Requirements:

- Satisfactory Completion of Reading, Writing and Discussion Assignments and participation in the Required Submission Forums and the Supplementary Discussion Forums.
- Mandatory Satisfactory Completion of the formal 'long' writing assignments (this means that a failure to submit any of the three formal long writing assignments will produce an automatic grade of 'F' in the course.)

There are three "long" writing assignments i.e. 3-5 pages due at the end of the fifth week of class, the end of the tenth week, and at the end of the course i.e. the beginning of the fifteenth week.

Each writing assignment will be graded on a scale of 0-20 for a possible total of 60 points. Roughly, F is 10; D is 12; C is 14; B is 16; A is 18; all with appropriate adjustments for plus and minus at each level.

Each student will submit responses to the Required Forum questions each week. (Formal Forum submissions will be graded acceptable +2; unaccept-

able =0; Total forum submissions equal 12 (there are actually two weeks in which no required forum is due); the student will be notified of unacceptable submissions.)

Each student will participate in the Supplemental and Student discussion forums by reading and responding to posts from the class. (At the end of the semester students will be graded holistically on the quantity and quality of their participation as satisfactory or unsatisfactory participants. Excellent = 16; Good = 10; Marginal = 5; Unsatisfactory = 0)

Grading:

A = 89+

B = 79-88

C = 69-78 (i.e. the lowest possible 'C' is 69 points, not 68 or 67, and similarly for the other grade levels.)

D = 59-68

F = 0-58

What to expect

The course will proceed topically rather than by reading texts "straight through." Each week students will be assigned two or three (usually three) readings on the topic for the week. Since each of the issues is somewhat complicated, and one might expect people's initial views to become more nuanced through exchange with others, most topics will span two weeks, and the more theoretical issues will span three weeks (and may well keep reappearing.)

Typically the readings for the week will represent somewhat different aspects of an issue, or even be oppositional to each other. The idea is not to try to settle things--since settling things is not likely to be a reasonable hope for all sorts of reasons--but for students to learn to engage responsibly in the intellectual rigor of ethical analysis and debate. Readings will also vary in difficulty. In most weeks there will be a fairly easy reading (although even "fairly easy readings" will have nuances that need attention), "moderately difficult readings" (more difficult but still aimed at an ordinary educated and literate audience) and "very difficult readings" (in the sense that these readings are imagined as proceeding from technical analysis.) Among the required books for the course, the Blackburn is "fairly easy", the McGinn, and Hope "moderately difficult". The other readings distribute themselves here and there along the difficulty dimension.

If one were to project: Students successfully handling material and issues from the "fairly easy" category probably would grade at 'C'; Students successfully handling material and issues from the "moderately difficult" category probably would grade at 'B'; Students successfully handling material and issues from the "very difficult" category probably would grade at 'A'. Students not successfully handling material and issues from any of those categories would certainly grade at 'none of the above'. (By the way, these 'projections' are meant only for your own use, to be helpful as you assess your ongoing achievement. They absolutely do not trump the grading system described above.)

Each week will see reading assignments, either from the books, or from the other materials, usually both. Accompanying the reading assignments will be reading/study questions which raise various sorts of issues about the texts being read and discussed. These questions are designed to focus your attention on certain aspects of the texts. They should not be read as "the questions which I have to answer"; especially the questions should not be read as exhausting what is worthy of attention in the reading for the week. The questions are meant to be helpful, and that is pretty much the end of it. **You are specifically not required to submit "answers" to the list of questions, although discussion of them in the student forums is a really good idea especially as preparation for the formal submissions in the Required Submission Forum and as preliminary discussion for the long writing assignments.**

For ten weeks of the semester, a question will be posted to the **Required Submission Forum** by the professor. Perhaps the question will be drawn from the list of reading/study questions, but perhaps not. Each student is required to post a formal response to the question in the forum. The suggested length of such response is substantial; somewhere perhaps between 300-500 words. Please remember that these responses are formal submissions and hence must be presented with all the appropriate care such things require. At the end of the week, the instructor may post a global response to the various submissions, calling attention to various features of those submissions. The point of this process is for students to try out strategies of interpretation, understanding, and presentation, appreciate the alternative strategies used by other students, and learn how a philosophy professor interprets such strategies. **You should not expect individual responses to your posting from the professor as a matter of routine. Instead, expect "global" commentary from the professor on the full range of student responses to the Forum questions.**

Also each week the professor will post discussion questions to the **Supplemental Forum**. These questions are often drawn from the "Reading and Study questions" for the week's readings. Although formal responses to particular questions are not required, this forum is designed to initiate discussion of particular important aspects of the reading assignments. **Students are strongly encouraged to use this forum extensively, not only to reply to the questions but also to thread discussions of the issues. It is especially valuable to engage your classmates in discussion. Indeed, the other students in the class are a very very important resource for coming to understand some difficult material.** The professor will not allow students to circle around the student forum to consult directly with him unless the issues have first been aired in the student supplementary forum. The professor will not interfere with this forum, or evaluate individual postings – except when it is necessary to moderate, or remind posters of the ordinary rules of academic exchange e.g. one writes in formally correct English. Occasionally, if it seems helpful, the professor will post additional questions for consideration, or suggest reformulations of problems or redirection of discussion that seems dead-ended.

An additional "**student discussion**" forum will be made available for discussion of whatever topics they find interesting, or for class exploration of any questions they may have. This forum will not be read by your professor at all; the point is to provide a vehicle where you can discuss without worrying about professorial eyes peeking over your shoulder. **The professor will not even look at these postings except in response to specific charges of abuse (something which has never happened.)**

Every week the same activities will be engaged in: reading, study questions, formal Required Forum postings, Supplemental and Student forum reading and posting. And three times a long paper is required.