202-02: Foundations of Moral Philosophy
Fall 2015, August 24th-December 11th
Tuesday/Thursday 2-3:15
Gosnell 1305
Mr. Robison, Hale Chair in Applied Ethics
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http://people.rit.edu/wlrgsh/courses.html

IMPORTANT:

Electronic devices: All cellphones are to be off in class: no answering, no calling, no texting. You may use computers to take notes, but for nothing else. But see why writing notes by hand is better because it involves a different part of the brain.

No incompletes: no early exams and no make-ups.

202 Introduction to Moral Theory -- This course critically examines the three major ethical theories. We will discuss particular ethical issues in the context of studying the ethical theories, but the focus is on the theories, not ethical problems. The aim is to lay out three different visions of how you ought to lead your life. A choice among these three will affect you and what you do as well as those around you. Failing to choose will also affect you and those around you -- but in not so positive a way. You might find this article on the point of college enlightening about what we will be doing in this course.

(1) Office and hours: 1116, College of Liberal Arts; Tuesday 3:15-5, by appointment and by e-mail.

(2) Required Texts: All texts are downloadable with links on the syllabus.

(3) Aims of the course: We will learn the details of the three major ethical theories, along with their difficulties and how they might be met.

(4) Requirements:

   (a) Attendance and participation are presumed. I will assume that you have read and studied the reading assignments. We will be discussing those in class as well as issues that arise in those discussions that you will not be able to read about. The fruit of these discussions will make their way into future discussions and presentations. So a crucial element is to attend classes and participate in discussion: if you do not understand something, you should ask about it. All this requires paying attention, of course, and that is one reason for not using a cellphone or playing on a computer in class. The other reason, obviously, is that it disturbs others and impedes discussion.

   One prerequisite of doing philosophy is the realization that we do not know a great deal and a great deal of what we think we know is likely false or miscon-
ceived. In any event, the aim is to understand, and you not likely to understand these issues well without a thorough discussion of them. 10 points of your grade will depend upon class participation.

(b) Exams -- Five major quizzes, one every three weeks, each worth 20 points. You may skip one quiz or drop your lowest score, whichever you prefer. A final, worth 20 points: you may take it to raise your grade or to replace a quiz you have missed or dropped. Participation will be taken into account in making a final decision about your grade: a sustained concern to understand and helpful questions and comments can make a difference to grades that are on the fence. Ditto for a failure to attend and unhelpful comments.

(c) Grades -- 93 to 100 equals an A, 90-92.99 = A-, 87-89.99 = B+, 83-86.99 = B, 80-82.99 = B-, 77-79.99 = C+, 73-76.99 = C, 70-72.99 = C-, 60-69.99 = D, F < 60, with 100% of your grade determined by your summaries, your paper, and your class participation. The likelihood of my making such subtle grading judgments as that between, say, 81.63 and 82.10, is nil, and, for some reason, the grading system does not permit anyone to earn an A+. So...lower your expectations.

(5) Electronic devices: attention with attendance -- As a courtesy to us all, cellphones are to be off: no answering, no calling, no texting. Computers may be used for taking notes or for accessing the web for information relevant to the discussion. If you wish to use your computer to play games, or for any other purpose, I would suggest you simply not come to class: you get no credit merely for attending, and your playing games or doing something other than taking notes for the class is a distraction to those around you.

(6) Honor policy -- I presume honesty, am embarrassed to bring up the issue, and find it hard to believe that someone could contemplate dishonesty in a course in ethics. But, just so you will know, I will flunk for the course anyone found cheating.

(7) I do not give incompletes. Plan your life -- and your time -- accordingly.