

Larry Blum

W-5-012

**Office Hours:**

Tues 9:45-10:45

Thurs 12:30-1:30

*or by appointment*

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PLEASE COME SEE ME IN MY OFFICE!! AND FEEL FREE TO E-MAIL ME WITH ANY  
QUESTIONS

**Required books (in UMass Bookstore):**

1. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (Norton, 1989)
  2. W. Somerset Maugham, The Moon and Sixpence (Penguin, 2005)
  3. Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober (eds.), Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved (Princeton, 2006)
  4. Dalai Lama, An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life (Little, Brown, 2001)
- [Editions of these books other than those listed are fine, but you will have to figure out how to correlate the page numbers of the assigned readings, as given below on the syllabus, with your edition. I can help you do this.]

These books are also on reserve at Healey Library at the Reserve Desk

**Course website:**

Course material will be posted on the course website. The site will have all course readings not in the books; announcements; assignments; handouts; this syllabus, and other materials related to the course. You should check the website regularly and *especially if you miss class*. The URL of the site is: <http://www.BlumPhilosophy.com>. The course is listed on the left, under "current courses." Readings are listed by which class ("class 3," class 10," etc.) they are to be read for, rather than by the date of the class.

\*\*Most readings other than the books can also be found on Electronic Reserves (marked "ERes" on the syllabus), accessible on the Healey Library website. (If you are not familiar with the ERes system, let me know.) Try accessing it at: <http://docutek.lib.umb.edu/eres/courseindex.aspx?&page=instr>  
The password for the course is "altruism."

**You must bring readings to class on the day they will be discussed.**

**About the course:**

The course concerns two distinct but related questions that have concerned philosophers for more than 2500 years, and have also been of concern to the great world religions. The first is a question about human nature and motivation: Are human beings fundamentally self-interested, only out for themselves; or, are they capable of concern for the welfare of other persons for their own sakes and independent of any personal gain to themselves? (This is called "altruism.") The second is a question about morality: Do human beings have good reason to be concerned about anyone's well-being other than their own? *Should* they be concerned for others?

Although the questions are philosophical ones, our approach to them will be interdisciplinary. We will read from psychology, fiction, evolutionary biology, sociology, and religion, and will watch a documentary film, to help us answer these questions.

By the end of the course students in the class will be able to recognize, describe, and analyze differing viewpoints on these two questions, and will be able to make a reasonable attempt to come up with your own answers to them.

The course will help develop your capacity for critical reading of a variety of historical texts written in unfamiliar language, as well as contemporary ones. **You must do the assigned reading for every class and bring the reading with you, prepared to answer questions about it and to explore its meaning, interest, and validity with other students.** You will strengthen your ability to reason about

moral issues, and recognize how both philosophy and other disciplines shed light on moral questions and questions of motivation and human nature. The class will involve some lecturing, but will be heavily dependent on class discussion as the best way in which students can learn to analyze intellectual issues and back up as well as question your own and others' beliefs. These discussions will also enhance your skills of communication and interchange on moral matters. The written assignments will help you develop your skills of critical reading, as well as of engaging in philosophical analysis, including the providing of arguments of your own.

***No computer or electronic device is allowed in class!!***

**Requirements and grades:**

1. three 4-5-page take-home exams [due March 6, April 24, exam week {May 14}]: **20% each** [any take-home exam can be rewritten, within two weeks of your getting it back from me]
2. Final paper on topic of your choice (suggestions provided) (8-10 pages): **30%**
3. Attendance and class participation: **10%** [Attendance will be taken every class and students will be expected to attend class having done the reading and being prepared to discuss it.]
4. There may also be occasional unannounced "diagnostic quizzes." These will not be graded but will help me see how you are doing with the material.

**Academic honesty:**

I know most students are honest and are here to learn. But academic dishonesty and plagiarism carry severe penalties. The University's detailed rules for academic honesty are stated in the Student Handbook (under "Academic Honesty," part of the "Code of Student Conduct"), summarized at [http://www.umb.edu/life\\_on\\_campus/policies/code/](http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code/) (Scroll down to "VI: Academic Honesty") Penalties for cheating normally range from failing the assignment through failing the course but can also include suspension or expulsion from the university.

**Disability:** If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services (Campus Center, UL, room 211): 617.287.7430

**READING:**

---Are human beings fundamentally selfish? The historical debate on "psychological egoism"---

Jan 24: Introduction. from *Plato, The Republic*: Gyges's Ring [**handout**]

26: (a) Thomas *Hobbes*, from *Leviathan* (1651), chapter XIII: "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery," pages 82-85 (paragraphs 1 – 11)[in this selection, the word "diffidence" means "distrust or fear of others"]

(b) Bishop Joseph *Butler*, excerpt from *Five Sermons* (1726)

31: (a) Petr *Kropotkin*, from *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (1888): "Mutual Aid Amongst Ourselves (continued)," 231-241 [last 10 pages of chapter]; and "Conclusion," 242-247 [**ERes**]

(b) S. *Freud*, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) [**required book**]

(i) chapter II: first 4 pages (22 - 27 "...in which our organism is regulated")

(ii) chapter IV: 56 ("Before we go on to enquire...") – 59 ("...in all organic—development.")

(iii) chapter V: 64-74

Feb 2: *Freud*, continued:

(iv) chapter VI: 81-82 (last paragraph of chapter)

(v) chapter VII: 83-86 ("...getting it punished by the external world.")

(vi) chapter VIII: 100 ("Though it cannot be of great importance...") – 109 ("idealistic misconception of human nature.")

7: James *Rachels*, from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, "Psychological Egoism," 63-75

-----“Ethical Egoism:” Should we be concerned about the well-being of other people, or only our own?-----

9: (a) Ayn Rand, from For the New Intellectual (excerpt from the novel, The Fountainhead [1943]), 68-71, 77-86 [ERes]

recommended: Craig Biddle, “Introducing the Objective Standard” (especially the section “A Proper Morality”) [ERes]

14: W.S. Maugham, The Moon and Sixpence (1919), pp. 1 – 125 (through chapter XXXIX)[explanatory notes for some references in the text are on 201-204] [required book] [PLEASE DO NOT READ AHEAD!!]

[16: NO CLASS]

21: The Moon and Sixpence, remainder of book: 125 [chapter XL] – 200

23: James Rachels, from The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 4<sup>th</sup> edition [2003] “Ethical Egoism,” 76-90 [ERes]

\*\*\*\*\* 1<sup>st</sup> take-home exam handed out\*\*\*\*\*

-----Difficulties in distinguishing ‘self’ and ‘other’-----

28: Anna Freud, from Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense (1936), “A Form of Altruism,” 122-134 [ERes]

March 1: Elizabeth V. Spelman, Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering (1997), chapter 5: “Changing the Subject: On Making Your Suffering Mine,” 113-132 [ERes]

6: (continued)

+++++ 1<sup>st</sup> take-home exam due+++++

-----Evolutionary approaches to altruism-----

8: Frans de Waal, “Morality Evolved: Primate Social Instincts, Human Morality, and the Rise and Fall of ‘Veneer Theory’,” 3-42, from Primates and Philosophers [required book]

[13: SPRING BREAK]

[15: SPRING BREAK]

20: (a) de Waal, 42-58

(b) Philip Kitcher, “Ethics and Evolution: How to Get Here From There,” 120-130 [not whole article] from Primates and Philosophers

22: (a) Kitcher (continued), 130-139

(b) Peter Singer, “Morality, Reason, and the Rights of Animals,” 140-151 [not whole article], from Primates and Philosophers

27: (continued—no new reading)

-----The development of emotion-based altruistic motivational capacities-----

29: Shaun Nichols, “Sparks of Benevolence: The Varied Emotional Responses to Suffering in Others,” 30-48, from Sentimental Rules: On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment (2004)

April 3: Nichols, 48-64

{April 5: course withdrawal & Pass/Fail deadline}

-----Egoism, Altruism, and Cooperation-----

5: V. Held, “The Grounds for Social Trust,” from Rights and Goods, 62-74 [ERes]

- 10: (a) Peter Singer, "Altruism and Commerce: A Defense of Titmuss Against Arrow," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, #3 (1973): 312-320  
 (b) Kieran Healy, Last Best Gifts: Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs [2006], 89-91

----Social influences on altruism: profound and trivial----

12: film: "Weapons of the Spirit"

\*\*\*\*\*2<sup>nd</sup> take-home exam handed out\*\*\*\*\*

17: remainder of film, and L. Blum, pages 148(bottom)-169 of "Virtue and Community" (NOT WHOLE ARTICLE)(from Moral Perception and Particularity [1994]) [ERes]

19: (a) John Doris, "Moral Character, Moral Behavior," 28-39, from Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior (2002) [ERes]

----Buddhist and Christian Conceptions of Compassion and Universal Love----

24: The Dalai Lama, 5-25, 91-125, 147-159 (Introduction, and Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 13) from An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life

+++++2<sup>nd</sup> paper due+++++

26: (continued)

May 1: Soren Kierkegaard, from The Works of Love (1847): 58-98, but focus on the following:  
 [NOTE: the "poet" is the advocate of erotic love and friendship]

(a) 58 - 60 (top, end of paragraph at top)

(b) 62 (paragraph in middle: "Therefore we will test...") – 65 (end of par. at top)

(c) 66 (par. in middle: "That passionate preference...") - 72

(d) 73 – 79 (end of par. at top)

(e) 80 (first full par.: "Love to one's neighbor...") – 86 (end of last full par.: "... the double danger.")

(f) 89 (first full par., in middle: "Let us now consider...") – 93 (line 9 from top: "...the advantages granted him in life")

(g) 95 (first full par.: "Consider for a moment...") – end of chapter (p. 98)

[ERes]

3: John Cottingham, "Partiality, Favouritism, and Morality," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 144, July 1986: 357-373 [ERes]

May 8: (continued)

final take-home exam due May 14

final paper due May 17