

Ethics: Contemporary Moral and Political Problems (Honours), PHL 230, section 80

Spring 2012
MWF 2:00pm-2:50pm
Popplewell 201
Office hours: MWF 11am – 12noon
MWF 1pm – 2pm

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Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the philosophical field of ethics, both in theory and in practical application to contemporary issues. Students will be introduced to terminology, concepts, and the variety of ethical theories—e.g., the deontological theory of Kantianism (among others), the teleological theory of utilitarianism (or consequentialism), and the aretaic theory of virtue ethics. Related issues of relativism and egoism will also be covered. The majority of the course will however be devoted to the application of theory in the detailed discussion of a list of pressing contemporary topics, such as capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia, gun control, economic justice, war, human rights, and environmental justice—as determined partly by student interest.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will become familiar with the variety of ethical theories (especially—but not limited to—deontological, teleological, and aretaic moral theories) and discuss their application to a range of contemporary moral and political problems.
2. Develop critical thinking and writing skills.
3. Apply those skills to the analysis of moral problems and the presentation of moral reasoning in ethical argumentation.

Requirements and Evaluation:

Students are responsible for the information presented in *all* course material—reading assignments, videos, *and* lecture. Class lectures will highlight and explain, but also expand on and supplement the reading. Neither the lecture nor the reading is a substitute for the other. Students are therefore expected to come to class having read the assigned materials and ready to discuss them as part of the learning process. Outlining or note-taking is strongly encouraged as one way to prepare for class discussion. The professor reserves the right to give any number of unannounced reading quizzes, which may constitute a maximum of 1/4 of the attendance and participation portion of your grade.

As a demonstration of experimental democracy, students will have the opportunity to vote in an online election to determine some of the normative issues to be covered in the course, as well as expressing preferences for a film to be viewed in class.

A list of books can be found in the texts section of this syllabus from which students will choose one to read and write a 2-3 page report on. (A fuller description of this assignment will be forthcoming.) There will be 3 unit tests that will cover terminology, concepts, theories, major figures, and relevant details of issues discussed in class. After the first unit test (primarily on

theory), tests will primarily serve as a place for students to develop written arguments on a topic discussed. These essays will be graded on the ability of the student to (1) make a compelling moral case (this includes effective writing, consideration of counter-arguments and counter-examples, and cogent reason-giving), (2) demonstrate awareness and application of relevant ethical theories, and (3) demonstrate knowledge of the relevant details of the particular issue (as well as the relevant arguments considered in the readings and class discussion). Study guides will be provided in advance; students should be certain to make use of these and prepare their arguments before the test (by making outlines of their arguments, reviewing relevant materials, and thinking of good examples to cite). There will be a cumulative final exam, worth the same as a unit test.

The major project for the course will be to write an argumentative research paper (7-8 pages). While keeping the basic requirements of the assignment in mind (research and presenting a compelling argument), students will be asked to be as creative as possible in answering the following question: How can you make the world a better place? (A fuller description of this assignment will be forthcoming.)

Specific to the honours section of this course is a movie review assignment, covering a selection of films presenting contemporary moral and political issues. Each student will select in advance two films from the provided list to be responsible for viewing and writing a brief review (about 200 words via e-mail) that will be circulated to the rest of the class. Towards the end of the semester, the class will vote on which film to view in class based on the students' circulated reviews.

Please be aware that grading is not simply an assessment of mistakes (what you got wrong), but involves as well the quality (and even the quantity) of the work done. For essays and papers, this may involve effectiveness of writing, evidence of thoughtful preparation as exemplified by both the quantity and quality of details or supporting examples (including research where relevant), and creativity—as well as demonstrated mastery of the relevant course material. (Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments must involve engagement with—and explicit reference to—the assigned reading materials; omission of this requirement will be graded accordingly.) Along these lines, a 'B' represents not merely work that has adequately completed the assignment or answered the essay question on a test, but work that is also above average in quality; an 'A' correspondingly represents work that is *outstanding* in comparison with the overall class.

E-mailed paper submissions will be confirmed with an e-mail reply from the professor. It is the student's responsibility to enquire about the status of the submission if you have not received a confirmation within 24 hours of submission. Late papers will be deducted 1/3 letter grade per day, including weekends and holidays. Except in the case of emergencies, requests for excused lateness submissions must be made in writing and in advance, and specifying the reason for the request. **Unless otherwise specified, absolutely no papers will be accepted after the final exam period.**

Opportunities for Contributions to your Class Participation Grade:

Every day in class presents opportunities for students to improve their grade by asking or answering questions and otherwise contributing to class discussion; occasional reading quizzes offer further opportunity to add to class participation grade. Here is a list of some additional opportunities (others may be announced as they arise):

1) Reviewing any unclaimed films (beyond the two required) before the assignment deadline.

2) Viewing any additional films from the list (beyond what you personally review) before the final exam date.

3) Attending or viewing on your own any of the films from the Spring Film Series in Peace and Conflict (*further details forthcoming*).

4) Attending the Webinar ‘Bricks and Mortar of Restorative Justice: Built to Withstand the Winds of Change’ on Thursday 26 January, 1:00pm – 2:30pm in Agenstein 224. See www.ojjdp.gov/enews/flyer/ResJusWeb0126.pdf for more information.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend class regularly and participate actively. For the purposes of grading, students are allowed three class absences (either ‘excused’ or ‘unexcused’), but beyond those three, every *unexcused* absence will result in a 1/3 letter reduction of your attendance and participation grade. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. Students who arrive for class after attendance has been taken are responsible for coming to the instructor after class to make sure their presence is noted. Such students will be marked late (3 latenesses = 1 absence). Except in the case of emergencies, requests for excused absences must be made in writing, in advance, and specifying each date to be excused, with appropriate documentation.

Please note as well that attendance is a minimal requirement for the attendance and participation grade. Students are invited to ask questions or add appropriate comments at any time and active participation in class discussion is strongly encouraged: Perfect attendance without ever (or only seldom) speaking in class will receive a grade of ‘C’ for the attendance and participation component of the final grade.

Departmental Make-up Exam Policy:

Students who, under exceptional circumstances, are granted permission to make-up exams must do so during time-periods designated by the Department of History, Philosophy and Geography. One make-up period will be scheduled during the last full week of classes prior to the date when mid-term grades are due; a second make-up date will be scheduled during the last full week of classes. The professor is, however, under no obligation to allow a ‘make-up’ if a student cannot provide written documentation demonstrating why they could not attend class.

If a student misses the final exam, he or she will receive a ‘0’ for that exam *or* a course grade of ‘Incomplete’ (I), at the discretion of the professor. *No exceptions may be made to this policy without the approval of the chairperson of the department.*

Academic Dishonesty:

Please note that there is no assignment for which it is acceptable to submit someone else’s words as your own work! All assignments must be completed in your own words, with direct quotations clearly marked (either quotation marks or offset/indentation for longer quotes) and proper credit given for any use of sources (parentheticals, footnotes, or endnotes).

Taking a substantial portion of a source—anything longer than a phrase—and substituting a word here or there is *not* paraphrasing. If you need to rely that much on a text, make sure you quote it and mark it.

Also make sure that *every time* you make use of someone else's ideas or information, *even if* you do not directly quote from the text, you cite your source with appropriate academic referencing (e.g. MLA, APA, or Chicago style). If you are not sure, please consult an appropriate style guide or the professor—please note, however, that page numbers in citations are *obligatory* (where relevant and provided in the source material) rather than optional, regardless of style guide specifications.

Any assignment submitted that involves direct quotation without proper identification (as explained above) will receive a zero (rather than an 'F'). At the discretion of the professor, such fraudulent assignments may be documented and submitted to the Provost's Office for further action, according to university policy. For specific details of the university's Academic Honesty Policy and for information on the student due process procedure, please see Western's Student Handbook, available online at <<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>>.

All students will be required to print out, sign, and submit a statement of understanding concerning this policy in connection with specific assignments for the course. Please see the appropriate form in the course WebCT (and at the bottom of this syllabus).

Students with Disabilities:

If you have been diagnosed with a disability or if you suspect that you may have a disability that has never been diagnosed and would like to find out what services may be available, please visit the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Eder Hall, room 203N or visit the ODS website at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/ds/> as soon as possible. This syllabus, as well as all other printed or electronic materials, can be made available in alternative/accessible formats if requested with sufficient prior notice. Missouri Western is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

Other Important University Policies:

Students should refer to the university *Student Handbook* for details on the policy for the grade appeal process and the guidelines for classroom behaviour, both available at <<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>>.

Requirements and Final Grade Calculation:

Attendance and active class participation 25%
Book report (minimum 2 pages) 10%
Major project (7-8 pages) 20%
4 written examinations (@ 10% each) 40%
Honours assignment 5%

Books and Materials:

Required Text:

Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. 2nd ed. Oxford, 2011. ISBN: 9780199773558.

Book Report Options:

Hill, Steven. *10 Steps to Repair American Democracy*. Paradigm, 2006. ISBN: 9780976062158.

- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. Holt, 2008. ISBN: 9780805088380.
- Reid, T.R. *Confucius Lives Next Door: What Living in the East Teaches Us about Living in the West*. Reprint ed. Vintage, 2000. ISBN: 9780679777601.
- Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Eating Animals*. Reprint ed. Back Bay, 2010. ISBN: 9780316069885.

Statement of Understanding Regarding Plagiarism in Assignments

(Name)

I have read the syllabus for the course and

I understand that all course assignments (both class presentations and papers) must be in my own words or with quotations clearly marked.

I understand that these are NOT examples of my own words:

rearranging whole phrases so that they appear in different order in the sentences and paragraphs of my source

taking source sentences and replacing some of the words with synonyms.

I understand that my options for making use of sources are:

restating the ideas in my own words—the way I would explain it to someone else, using words and phrases that I would use—and then marking it with a reference citation

using the direct quote (clearly marked with either quotation marks or indentation for a longer block quote) and then marking it with a reference citation.

I understand it is my responsibility to clearly mark quotes and submit all other work in my own words—with both ideas and quotes clearly cited with appropriate references—and that failure to do this will result in my work receiving a grade of 0.

(Signed)

(Date)