

Ethics: Introduction to Moral Philosophy Across the Disciplines

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Fall 2020

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Course Description and Objectives:

Whether or not you realize it, you engage in moral reasoning on a regular basis. It is a basic part of being human that we struggle with and ponder how we should act and who we should be. The basic fact of the matter, however, is that the conclusions we come to about these questions vary wildly. Many of our profoundest social problems come from disagreements about moral questions. Sadly, all too often these debates involve little substantial discussion. On a simple level, writing in ethics aims to help us offer reasons for our moral conclusions. The material from this class should assist you in putting words to why you believe certain things, and will also, I hope, lead you to question some of your beliefs as well.

This course is an introduction to ethical theory. It surveys major positions in ethics (egoism, deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics) and considers a number of issues relating to ethical theories in general (relativism, skepticism, moral alienation, and cultural diversity in ethics).

In this course, we will be taking two approaches to the field of Ethics. We will be focusing on the ideas of some of the most important thinkers in the field (Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Mill, Kant, Rousseau, Singer, etc...). We will also come up with case studies and practical examples to see how these theories play out in our world. Using this Applied Ethics approach we will examine issues like poverty, military ethics, the environment, euthanasia, and animals. In particular this term, we will be using case studies from across the disciplines (math, science, social science, humanities, arts, etc...to explore the way moral reasoning operates). I encourage you to let me know if there is a particular subject that interests you; I'll do my best to find an opportunity for us to study it.

Course Policies and Requirements:

Class Discussion: A discussion based class works only if everyone is prepared, open-minded and above all respectful. This is especially true of an Ethics class, since many of you may have strong and deeply held beliefs. I would ask that everyone remember that the point of this class is to **UNDERSTAND** and **ANALYZE** different philosophical writings about Ethics. This course is **not** intended as a forum for discovering TRUTH. In short, this is an academic class like any other -- you will be responsible for **understanding** the positions of different philosophers. Whether or not you choose to agree with anything we study is a personal choice of yours. There is a very important distinction between understanding and advocating an idea. I will expect everyone to respect this distinction so that we will be able to explore ideas that are both explosive and controversial.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Regardless of the source (newspaper, magazine, textbook, internet, etc...), if you want to use someone else's description of an idea, you must give it full credit or you will receive a zero.

Attendance: It is in the nature of a Philosophy class that the material needs to be worked through together; if you're not in class you'll miss the discussion of the texts and your participation grade will be significantly lowered.

Participation: Philosophy classes are based on understanding and analyzing, not memorizing; passive listening will not be adequate. You're expected to come to every class prepared to discuss the readings. Be on time and bring the materials covered for that day. Please note that attendance does not count as participation. For this class to work, your active engagement with the materials, questions and comments are essential. Participation is 10% of the course grade.

Paper: You will be responsible for 1 paper which will analyze readings and class discussions. Specific instructions and questions will be forthcoming. Please note on the schedule when this is due. Lateness will result in 10% a day reduction in credit.

Exams: The midterm and final exams will each consist of essay and short answer type questions. They will look for thoughtfulness in addition to an ability to present material clearly and accurately.

Technology: Obviously, no cell phones in class. You will also not need to use a laptop, so you will do your note taking on paper.

Grade Breakdown:

Grades will be assigned as such:	Paper	20%
	Participation	15%
	Midterm	25%
	Final Exam	25%
	Quizzes	15%

Course Texts:

Ethics in a Nutshell, Matt Deaton. Notaed Press (January 23, 2017).

SCHEDULE:

Week 1 **What is Morality?** Definitions, intuitions and introduction
Nihilism

Week 1 Cultural Relativism, Subjectivism --> Moral Relativism

Week 2 Ethical & Psychological Egoism --> Moral Skepticism

Week 2 Religion and Ethics --> Plato's *Euthyphro*

Week 3 & 4 Utilitarianism --> What is it? variations on a theme

Utilitarianism: the debate: pro and con
Singer

Midterm

Week 5 & 6 Moral Absolutism: Kant
The moral imperative and Respect for persons

Week 6 Social Contract Theory & Professional Ethics
Hobbes and Rousseau

Week 7 Virtue Ethics
Aristotle and the Virtue of the Mean

Week 7 Feminism and Ethics

Week 8 Existentialist Ethics
Nietzsche from *Beyond Good and Evil**

Week 9 Issues in Medical Ethics*
Animal Rights*
Euthanasia*

Week 13 **Final Exam**