

Introduction to Ethics (PHIL 151)

Syllabus, Fall 2019

August 25, 2019

“ Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.” ~ Potter Stewart

Instructor: Charles A Barclay
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Tu&Th 1:30-2:45 pm (Krug Hall, room 5)

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Course Schedule: August 27th - December 5th

Course Description

This course will survey important topics in ethics, including abortion, animal suffering, and the death penalty, just to name a few. We will be thinking about the reasons people hold different views on these matters. If someone disagrees with us about any of these matters, can we give reasons for our position? Should our reasons persuade someone else? When should we be persuaded by someone else's reasons?

By the end of this course, students can expect to be able to:

- Improve understanding of the reasoning behind certain moral issues
- Become a more informed citizen
- Become more open--minded and empathetic
- Learn to judge more effectively the quality and consistency of ethical reasoning
- Learn to read arguments and understand the reasons for the authors' conclusions

- Improve ability to form convincing arguments
- Improve ability to present complex ideas clearly and simply

Course Text:

The text I will use in this course is *Disputed Moral Issues*, 4th ed., edited by Mark Timmons, ISBN 9780199946792. Other readings, when appropriate, will be available as PDF files on the website for the course. (Login at <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu>) Scheduled readings might change as the course progresses. Changes will be announced.

Requirements:

Three exams, one paper, three quizzes, and ten discussion posts

Assignments	Topics	Percentage	Due Date
Exam 1	Moral Theories	15%	September 19th
Exam 2	Allocation of Scarce Resources & Charity	15%	October 29th
Final Exam	Ethical Treatment of Animals & Abortion	20%	December 17th
Optional Paper	“Do the Right Thing”	+ 10%	October 25th
Quizzes	Various topics	15%	various dates
Presentations	Various topics	15%	various dates
Discussion posts	Various topics	20%	various dates

Exams

There are three exams. The first exam is a combination of multiple choice questions. The remaining two exams are essay format. Approximately 5 days before Exam 2 and the final, I will electronically provide a list of questions to help you prepare for the essay questions. The questions require you to summarize, compare, and criticize central ethical arguments or positions defended in readings for the particular part of the course the exam addresses (e.g., the questions handed out for the final exam cover readings on abortion). The actual exam consists of a subset of the questions from the list. Students have the entire time to take the exam.

Optional (i.e., Extra Credit) Paper

There is one (optional) term paper for extra credit. (Note this will likely be the only opportunity for extra credit) Students must watch the film “Do the Right Thing” and provide a lengthy answer to the paper prompt. Both the film and the prompt will be made available on September 19th. The paper should be between 500 - 1000 words. It is due on October 25th at 5:00 pm. Submit your paper on Canvas.

Quizzes

To ensure that students are doing the required readings and understanding the material, there are three electronic quizzes scheduled for the semester via Blackboard. Nevertheless, I reserve the right to give additional unannounced, in-class quizzes throughout the semester. The electronic quizzes account for 15 percent of the overall grade. Each quiz consists of a combination of multiple choice and or true or false questions. Students have 50 minutes to take the quiz, with a 5-minute grace period. Students may retake each quiz. However, both the first and second attempts must be completed on the same day.

Presentations

At some point in the semester, students will be divided into groups of no more than 5 students. Each group will work on a project focused on one part (and only one part) of the course. Each group will give a presentation regarding one of the areas explored in the course. In particular:

- Presentation regarding Part 1 (allocation of scarce, life-saving resources) must propose, explain, and justify a significant departure from Persad, Wertheimer, and Emanuel’s “Principles for Allocation of Scarce Medical Interventions.” Alternatively, you may choose to propose, explain, and justify a significant departure from Working Group on Incentives for Living Donation
- Presentations regarding Part 3 (ethical treatment of animals) must propose, explain, and justify a significant departure from any of the protections stated in the Animal Welfare Act. Alternatively, you may choose to propose, explain, and justify a significant departure from PETA’s view on the treatment of animals in a circus.
- Presentation regarding Part 4 (abortion) must propose, explain, and justify a significant departure from Georgia’s new heartbeat bill. Alternatively, you may choose to propose, explain, and justify a significant departure from Maryland’s statute on abortion.

- In addition to readings from the course, groups must use at least two additional sources (e.g., professional codes of conduct or articles from medical or bioethics journals) in their presentations/papers.

Each group will give a 15-minute PowerPoint-style presentation during a designated time in class. Other students will pose questions regarding the presentation.

Discussion posts

You are responsible for a combination of 10 comments/response posts on the discussion board via Canvas. For each lecture, I will provide a question based on the reading the lecture covers. You will *be responsible for providing an answer to at least 5* questions. The guidelines for the posts answering lecture questions are as follows:

1. At least one post each month barring December.
2. No more than two posts per month.

Additionally, you *must provide a response to at least 5* posts offered by a classmate. The guidelines for the responses are as follows:

1. At least one post each month barring December.
2. No more than two posts per month.

Grading

Your final grade will depend on the percentage you earn of the total points possible in the class: A+: 97-100; A: 94-96; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-89; B: 84-86; B-: 80-83; C+: 77-79; C: 74-76; C-: 70-73; D+: 67-69; D: 64-66; D-: 60-63. Failure to complete an assignment will result in your receiving no points (a zero) for that assignment.

Copyright Notice

Class lectures and other materials are copyrighted. They may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission from the instructor. Copyright infringements may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

This syllabus is subject to change

Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc.

Religious Observances

You will not be penalized for a missed assignment that results from religious observance. However, it is your responsibility to notify the instructor within the first two days of the start of the semester regarding any religious observance absence(s) for the entire semester.

Disability Support

Students with a documented disability should inform the instructors within the add-drop period if academic accommodations will be needed. Please note that you are expected to provide a copy of the Accommodations Letter and to obtain your instructor's signature on the Acknowledgement of Student Request form. You and your instructor will plan together how accommodations will be implemented throughout the semester. To obtain the required Accommodation Letter, please contact Disability Services at 703-993-2474.

How to Succeed in This Class

Philosophy readings almost always take longer than readings for other courses. Be sure you allot plenty of time, even if there are only ten or twenty pages of reading. The first time you read through an assignment, don't worry if it's complete word salad. You don't have to understand a word of it. Just push through. Then take a break. Then read again. Only when you read it the second time, read more slowly and try to understand it. Don't move past a paragraph unless you know what the author is saying and why that paragraph was included.

Most students in introductory ethics courses haven't taken philosophy before, or maybe one course. Most high schools don't offer it, and so most students begin the class feeling at sea. This is totally normal. Students often think that if they don't understand a subject right away, that it means they are not good at it and should avoid it. This is nonsense.

Please look through the syllabus at the topics we will cover, and be forewarned we will be discussing arguments for and against these topics. This likely means we will be taking seriously an idea that you find immoral.

Academic Integrity

The Honor Code takes a very strong stance against plagiarism (see: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>). As a university employee, I am obligated to report when I even suspect plagiarism. Note that this includes any written work, including discussion board postings. The following section is a definition of plagiarism that comes, with minor alterations, from the Yale Center for Teaching and Learning website: Plagiarism is the use of another’s work, words, or ideas without attribution. The word “plagiarism” comes from the Latin word for “kidnapper” and is considered a form of theft, a breach of honesty in the academic community. (See the following address for a fuller explanation of the honor code: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>) Plagiarizers suffer serious consequences in Mason—including suspension or expulsion from school.

But beyond the risk of penalties, there are urgent moral and intellectual reasons to avoid plagiarism. When you write for an academic audience, you’re joining an ongoing conversation. When you plagiarize, you join that conversation on false grounds, representing yourself as someone you are not. What is more, the act of stealing another’s words or ideas erases your voice. It may be difficult to think of yourself as making an original contribution in the context of a class taught by an expert. But every assignment is an invitation to add something new to the conversation sparked by the course. You cannot make an original contribution if you are not the owner of the words and ideas that you present. Plagiarism takes many forms, but it falls into three main categories: using a source’s language without quoting, using information from a source without attribution, and paraphrasing a source in a form that stays too close to the original. There are variations on these categories that you may not be familiar with, so see the Warning section for a fuller discussion of the rules and see the Fair Paraphrase section for a discussion of how to use a source’s idea in your own argument.

You must always make clear in your written work where you have borrowed from others—whether data, opinions, questions, ideas, or specific language. This obligation holds whether the sources are published or unpublished and whether they are in print or on the Internet. When in doubt, be sure to check with your instructor about how to acknowledge sources in your papers, especially since every academic discipline has its own conventions.

Responsible Employee

I am a responsible university employee, who is required to report to the university's Title IX Coordinator all relevant details (obtained directly or indirectly) about an incident of prohibited conduct that involves any student as a complainant, respondent, and/or witness, including dates, times, locations, and names of parties and witnesses. Consequently, if you do not wish for me to report about an incident or prohibited conduct you share, then please think twice about divulging it to me (or your classmates).

Electronics policy

After reviewing several influential studies,¹ I do not permit cell phones, laptops, tablets, or other such devices to be used in the classroom unless specifically told otherwise.

Schedule of Topics

¹See: <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-08-17-digital-devices-in-the-classroom-can-hinder-long-term-retention>; <https://news.miami.edu/stories/2018/02/electronic-devices-in-classroom-help-or-hindrance.html>,

Week	Due Date or Date Available	Topic (video or pdf)	Author/ (where to to find the reading and or assignment)
1	August 27th	Intro to class	
	August 29th	Intro to Logic	
2	September 3rd	What are moral theories Cultural Relativism	(Timmons, pages 1-5) James Rachels: <i>The Challenge of Cultural Relativism</i> (under week 2)
	September 5th	Utilitarianism Act v Rule	(Timmons, pages 7-8)
3	September 10th	Problems with Utilitarianism	(under week 3)
	September 12th	Kantian Moral Theory	(Timmons, pages 15-19)
	September 13th	(online) Quiz 1	
4	September 17th	Social Contract Theory	(Timmons, pages 29-31)
	September 19th	(in-class) Exam 1 Materials for Extra Credit Paper pdfs and videos are available	Available under week 4
5	September 24th	Allocation of scarce resources pt 1	Shana Alexander: <i>They decide who lives</i> (under week 5)
	September 26th	Allocation of scarce resources pt 2	“radio lab”
		Natural Law Theory	

6	October 1st	QALYs pt 1	Bognar and Hirose: <i>The Ethics of Health Care Rationing</i> (under week 6)
	October 3rd	QALYs pt 2	John Harris: <i>QALYifying the value of life</i> (under week 7)
7	October 8th	Complete Lives System	Persad, Wertheimer, and Emanuel: <i>Principles for allocation of scarce medical interventions</i> (under week 7)
	October 10th	Presentation	
	October 11th	(online) Quiz 2	
8	October 15th	Fall Break: No class	
	October 17th	Poverty and World Hunger 1B	Peter Singer: <i>The Life You Can Save</i> (Timmons, pages 648 - 661) <i>The Life You Can Save</i>
9	October 22nd	Povety and World Hunger pt 2	Garrett Hardin: <i>Lifeboat Ethics</i> (Timmons, pages 642 - 647)
	October 22nd	Poverty and World Hunger pt 2	John Arthur: <i>World Hunger and Moral Obligation</i> (Timmons, pages 662 - 670)
	October 24th	Exam 2 Review	
	October 25th	Extra Credit Paper Due	
10	October 29th	(in-class) Exam 2	
	October 31st	Ethical Treatment of Animals	Gaverick Matheny: <i>Utilitarianism and Animals</i> (under week 7)

11	November 5th	Ethical Treatment of Animals pt 2	Carl Cohen: <i>Do Animals Have Rights?</i> (Timmons, pages 389 - 396)
	November 7th	Ethical Treatment of Animals pt 2B	Peter Singer: <i>All Animals are Equal</i> (Timmons, pages 380 - 388)
12	November 12th	Ethical Treatment of Animals pt 3	Peter Carruthers: <i>Against the Moral Standing of Animals</i> (Timmons, pages 397 - 406)
	November 14th	Presentation	
	November 15th	(online) Quiz 3	
13	November 19th	Abortion pt 2	Mary Anne Warren: <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i> (Timmons, pages 428 - 434)
	November 21st	Abortion pt 3	Don Marquis: <i>Why Abortion is immoral?</i> (Timmons, 465 - 469)
		Abortion pt 4	Mark T. Brown <i>The Morality of Abortion And The Deprivation of Futures</i> (under week 11)
14	November 26th	Abortion pt 5	Judith Jarvis Thomson: <i>A defense of Abortion</i> (Timmons, pages 435-443)
	November 28th	Thanksgiving: no class	
15	December 3rd	Presentation	
	December 5th	Final Exam Review	
16	December 17 1:30 - 2:45	Final	