

Philosophy 355: Theories of Ethics

George Mason University
Fall 2022

Instructor: Wesley Buckwalter

Email: jbuckwal@gmu.edu

Course Location: Planetary Hall 127

Class Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays
12:00 - 1:15 PM

Student Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays
11:00 - 11:50 AM in Horizon Hall 6273;
or email to set up a private appointment
in person or on Zoom

Course Description

This course is all about morality: what it means for something to be moral, what makes an action we are considering right or wrong, and what we should do in the real-life situations that we face in private and public life.

In the first part of the course, we'll analyze the origins of morality. We'll discuss whether morality is only a matter of personal opinion, whether it depends on God, or varies by culture. The second part of the course introduces and evaluates several theories that philosophers have developed for identifying morally correct actions. We'll discuss whether the ends justify the means, weigh the dignity and respect for individuals against the greater good, and consider the role of interpersonal relationships in ethics.

In the last part of the course, we'll survey applied moral debates about important practical issues. We'll debate whether it is morally right or wrong to take money for sex, buy designer products while the world starves, or ask your doctor to help end a life, among many others. These subjects—often considered to be some of the most controversial on the planet—will be approached through careful reflection, rational argument, and respectful but open-minded debate.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to describe several approaches to philosophical ethics and apply those frameworks to new cases.
- Students will be able to accurately represent and critically analyze arguments for ethical views that they disagree with.

- Students will develop critical thinking skills by subjecting ethical views they agree with to critical scrutiny.
- Students will be able to communicate their knowledge about sensitive subjects orally and in writing, to a variety of audiences with different viewpoints.

Attendance Policy and Classroom Format

This course will be a mix of lecture and discussion. The aim of our discussion is to analyze arguments for ethical matters, evaluate their strength and weaknesses, and explore their applications for research, society, public policy, and in our lives.

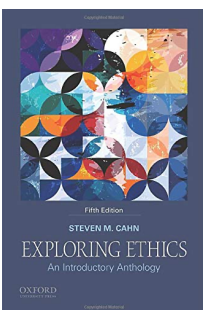
Students are required to attend regularly and participate in class discussion. Reading the articles on the course schedule is mandatory and participation in class discussion is expected. To do well in this course you must come to class prepared to critically discuss the material. Attendance will be recorded using **the Qwickly Attendance Tool** in the course Blackboard site. Students will mark themselves present at the beginning of each class period.

Communication Policy

The best way to contact me is by email. I will respond to emails within two working days, and often much faster than that. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions about the course that you cannot find the answers to on the syllabus or course Blackboard site, suggestions for improvement, or to request a one-on-one meeting with me over Zoom. Remember, students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I am unable to respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

Required Text

Students are required to acquire the course textbook *Exploring Ethics*. All other materials will be made available through Blackboard.



Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology

5th Edition

By Steven M. Cahn

ISBN-13: 978-0190887902

<https://global.oup.com/ushe/product/exploring-ethics-9780190887902>

Course Assessment:

1. Participation (20% of Course Grade)

You will be asked to provide thoughtful and civil contributions to class discussions. This might involve explaining what an author means, raising objections, drawing connections, or responding to other students in our class who may or may not share your views.

2. 6 Short Papers (5% x 6 shorties = 30% of Course Grade)

You will be asked to write 6 short critical or constructive responses to one or more of the assigned readings. Each Short Paper is 5% of the final grade. Length 300-500 words. Due by midnight in Blackboard the date they are assigned on the course schedule. Late Short Papers are not accepted without a documented valid excuse.

The purpose of this assignment is to offer an argument for or against an aspect of the readings that you found most interesting. You can select any reading assigned before the Short Paper is due and that was assigned after the last Short Paper was due. Do not simply summarize the reading; share your take on it.

3. 2 Long Papers (25% x 2 longies = 50% of Course Grade)

You will be asked to write 2 long position papers (minimum 1500 words). Each Long Paper is 25% of the final grade.

Papers must be uploaded through the course Blackboard site to be accepted. A list of suggested topics and instructions will be given for the papers. You may also propose your own topic on anything we have talked about in this course, but you must clear it with me first. In Long Papers, you will be asked to take a position on an ethical issue that we have discussed in class and to defend it with arguments and reasons. Additional instructions, grading criteria, citation guidelines, and writing tips will be shared through the course Blackboard site.

Long Paper 1 will be due on October 12 at 11:59 PM. The date of your paper submission will be taken from the date you upload your paper to the course Blackboard site. Papers that are handed in late with a documented legitimate excuse will be accepted without penalty. Without a legitimate excuse, it will be penalized each day late.

Long Paper 2 will be due on December 12 11:59 PM. No late submissions can be accepted. It will be marked as "0" if it is not received by 11:59 PM on December 12, unless you have requested a grade of IN.

Anonymous grading is currently turned on for Long Paper assignments in Blackboard. To remain anonymous, do not include your name or other identifying information in your assignment submission. Submissions will be automatically screened using SafeAssign.

Grading Scale

Grades are given on the 10 points scale. 97-100=A+, 94-96=A, 90-93=A-, 87-89=B+, 84-86=B, 80-83=B-, 77-79=C+, 74-76=C, 70-73=C-. 60-69=D, 59 or below is F.

Incompletes Policy

University policy specifies that instructors are to assign an IN incomplete grade only if the student has completed a significant portion of the assessment and there is a non-academic reason that prevents them from completing the work within the semester. Incomplete grades will only be assigned in the case of exceptional, unforeseen circumstances that occur within the last six weeks of the semester.

Flexible Syllabus Policy

Some parts of the syllabus are subject to change with advance notice. Both the Course Schedule and the Required Readings are works in progress. It is possible that they will be revised as we discover what people in the course are interested in and how much time it takes to cover each topic. Suggestions on revising the topics and the readings are most welcome. If there is a reading relevant to our topics that you would like included, please share it!

Basic Course Technology Requirements

Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc., with a consistent 1.5 Mbps [megabits per second] download speed or higher. Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use Blackboard.

Course Materials and Student Privacy

All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course site are private to this class; and by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.

Academic Integrity

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using the appropriate format for this class. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me or review the Honor Code: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>.

Disability Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500; ods@gmu.edu; (703) 993-2474.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Interpersonal Violence

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students and employees who believe that they have been sexually harassed, sexually assaulted or subjected to sexual or interpersonal misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct speaks to the specifics of Mason's process, the resources, and the options available to students and employees.

As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Non-Confidential Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, complicity, and retaliation to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please

contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

Course Schedule (EE stands for "Exploring Ethics", Fifth Edition)

<u>Date of Class</u>	<u>Topic of Class</u>	<u>Readings Required Before Class</u>	<u>Reminders</u>
August 23	Course Introduction	Read Course Syllabus EE 1-26 Morality and Moral Philosophy, William K. Frankena & Plato's Crito & Phaedo	
Unit 1: Challenges to Morality [Metaethics]			
August 25	Objectivity and Simple Subjectivism	EE 28-30: Subjectivism, Julia Driver Against Moral Subjectivism: Morality Isn't Just a Matter of Personal Opinion https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_9rt_lrgQ	
August 30	God and Morality	EE 31-34: God and Morality, Steven M. Cahn Walter Sinnott-Armstrong on Morality Without God https://philosophybites.com/2009/08/walter-sinnottarmstrong-on-morality-without-god.html	
September 1	Cultural Relativism	EE 35-47: The Challenge of Cultural Relativism, James Rachels	Short Paper 1 Due by Midnight in Blackboard
September 6	Egoism and Altruism	EE 52-63: Egoism and Moral Skepticism, James Rachels	

		Feinberg, J. (199) "Moral Motivation and Human Nature" in J. Feinberg and R. Shafer-Landau (eds.) Reason and Responsibility (Belmont: Wadsworth), Pages 494-501. https://web.mit.edu/holton/www/courses/moralpsych/feinberg.pdf	
September 8	Happy Immoralism	EE 64-70: Happiness and Immorality, Steven M. Cahn and Jeffrie G. Murphy Pleasure, suffering and the Good Life, Paul Bloom https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YbBtql0qCU	
September 13	Ethical Disagreement	EE 71-81: The Nature of Ethical Disagreement, Charles L. Stevenson & The Rationality of Moral Action, Philippa Foot	
Unit 2: Moral Theories [Normative Ethics]			
September 15	Deontology	EE 83-97: The Categorical Imperative, Immanuel Kant & A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics, Onora O'Neill Kant & Categorical Imperatives https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8blys6JoEDw	
September 20	Utilitarianism	EE 98-114: Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill & Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism, Louis P. Pojman	Short Paper 2 Due by Midnight in Blackboard
September 22	Virtue Ethics	EE 115-123 The Nature of Virtue, Aristotle & Virtue Ethics, Julia Driver	

September 27	Care Ethics	EE 124-129: The Ethics of Care, Virginia Held		
September 29	Social Contract Theory	EE 130-137: The Social Contract, Thomas Hobbes		
October 4	Theory of Justice	EE 138-143: A Theory of Justice, John Rawls		
October 6	Feminist Epistemology	EE 144-148: Gender Bias, Cheshire Calhoun Oppression, Marilyn Frye https://www.filosoficas.unam.mx/docs/327/files/Marilyn%20Frye,%20Oppression.pdf Cassandra Among the Creeps https://harpers.org/archive/2014/10/cassandra-among-the-creeps/	Short Paper 3 Due by Midnight in Blackboard	
October 11	No Class – Winter Break			
October 12	Long Paper 1 Due by Midnight in Blackboard			
Unit 3: Moral Problems [Applied Ethics]				
October 13	World Hunger	EE 151-165: Famine, Affluence, and Morality, Peter Singer & A Reply to Singer, Travis Timmerman The why and how of effective altruism, Peter Singer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Div3XZQXyc		
October 18	Immigration	EE 167-193: Immigration: The Case for Limits, David Miller & Is There a Right to Immigrate? Michael Huemer		

October 20	Injustice	EE 195-208: Racisms, Kwame Anthony Appiah & Sexism, Ann E. Cudd and Leslie E. Jones Racism: Its Core Meaning, Lawrence Blum https://www-jstor-org.mutex.gmu.edu/stable/10.7591/j.ctvh4zddp.4#metadata_info_tab_contents	
October 25	Prostitution	EE 210-231: Value and the Gift of Sexuality, Elizabeth Anderson & Taking Money for Bodily Services, Martha C. Nussbaum & Markets in Women's Sexual Labor, Debra Satz	
October 27	Porn	EE 233-249: Pornography, Oppression, and Freedom, Helen E. Longino & The Case Against Pornography: An Assessment, Joel Feinberg	
November 1	Animal Rights	EE 251-271: Equality for Animals, Peter Singer & Speciesism and the Idea of Equality, Bonnie Steinbock Consider the Lobster, David Foster Wallace http://www.columbia.edu/~col8/lobsterarticle.pdf	Short Paper 4 Due by Midnight in Blackboard
November 3	Animal Rights	EE 272-285: Getting Animals in View, Christine Korsgaard & Speaking of Animal Rights, Mary Anne Warren	
November 8	The Environment	EE 287-305: Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism, Elliott Sober & Ethics and Global Change, Dale Jamieson	

November 10	Abortion	EE 307-339: A Defense of Abortion, Judith Jarvis Thomson & On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion, Mary Anne Warren	
November 15	Abortion	EE 340-359: Why Abortion is Immoral, Don Marquis & Virtue Theory and Abortion, Rosalind Hursthouse	Short Paper 5 Due by Midnight in Blackboard
November 17	Euthanasia	EE 361-377: Active and Passive Euthanasia, James Rachels & The Intentional Termination of Life, Bonnie Steinbock	
November 22	Death	EE 379-398: Death, Thomas Nagel & The Badness of Death, Shelly Kagan Check out the Death Course with Kagan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2J7wSuFRI8&list=PLEA18FAF1AD9047B0	
November 24	No Class – Thanksgiving Break		
November 29	Meaning of life	EE 400-419: The Meaning of Life, Richard Taylor & Meaning in Life, Susan Wolf & Meaningful Lives, Christine Vitrano	Short Paper 6 Due by Midnight in Blackboard
December 1	Course Conclusion		
December 12	Long Paper 2 Due by Midnight in Blackboard		