

Introduction to Ethics
PHIL 151-001
Spring 2024 Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Shannon Fyfe
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Class Meetings: TR 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm
Planetary Hall 126

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30 am – 1 pm (in person, Horizon Hall 6253)
By appointment (via Zoom)

Course Description:

What is right and what is wrong? What should we do? Who should we be?
Are we responsible for what we do and who we are?

In this course, we will look at how we should ask these questions and how we should answer them. We begin the course by considering the possibility of systematic morality, before looking at three main types of moral theories: deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. We will then turn to various debates in applied ethics. We conclude the course by discussing moral responsibility. You will be evaluated based on your ability to articulate and critique arguments from the readings, through participation in-class discussion, three response papers, one critical essay, and performance on midterm and final exams.

Learning Outcomes:

- By the end of the course, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the three primary theories in contemporary ethics: deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics
- Students will be able to apply theories of morality to various contemporary debates in applied ethics, as well as other real-world scenarios
- Students will improve critical thinking abilities by analyzing complex problems, evaluating arguments, and constructing their own modest critiques
- Students will improve reading, writing, and oral communication skills

Texts:

- Steven M. Cahn, *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*, 2020 (5th Ed.)
- Excerpted Readings
- PowerPoints/Handouts

Grades:

Participation:	10%
Response Papers (3, 5% each):	15%
Midterm Exam (multiple choice):	25%
Critical Essay:	20%
Final Exam (multiple choice):	30%

Grading Scale:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	D = 60-66
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	F = 0-59
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

School in the Time of a Pandemic:

Given our global and individual circumstances, I want to encourage everyone to:

1. Be patient and kind with yourself and with each other. This includes respecting all policies that will ensure you and your classmates avoid feeling unnecessary anxiety and/or getting sick.
2. Communicate openly and clearly about expectations, concerns, and goals. Tell me what you need, as soon as you can, and I'll tell you how I can help.
3. Be flexible, as circumstances may change over the course of the semester.

Communication:

As noted throughout the rest of the syllabus, please *communicate* with me (via email – do not send me messages via Blackboard) if you are experiencing circumstances that are preventing you from meeting any of the course requirements. I do not need to know details about your life, but I cannot accommodate you if I don't know that you need accommodations.

Advice for this class (and your future careers):

1. Please check the syllabus and Blackboard to make sure that your question hasn't already been answered before you send an email.
2. Emails are not text messages. Please do not send emails that do not contain your name.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory and necessary for performing well in this course. Here are some reasons why:

1. Your participation grade (10% of your final grade) will be negatively impacted by excessive unexcused absences, or failure to participate in in-class discussions, assignments, and activities.
2. If you miss class, you will not benefit from the ideas of your colleagues or your instructor.

Response Papers:

The response papers each contribute 5% to your final grade. You may choose any reading assigned on or prior to the deadlines (February 1, February 15, and March 14) and write a two-page critique of the argument (one page of exegesis/explanation and one page of criticism). The response paper must be turned in on Blackboard by the start of class on the day for which the reading has been assigned. So: if you decide to do a response paper on a reading assigned for February 1, it is due at 1:30 PM on February 1. Please only respond to ONE reading per response paper. I will provide a handout with instructions on how to write a good response paper and I will provide feedback as well. Please keep track of the deadlines.

Critical Essay:

The critical essay contributes 20% to your final grade (15% for the final essay and 5% for the thesis submission). You may choose any reading assigned prior to the deadline (April 21) for your critical essay, and you will write a 4-6 page essay responding to the course reading.

You are first required to submit your thesis for your critical essay (via Blackboard) by 10 PM on April 9. This will count for 5% of your final grade. I will provide prompt feedback on your thesis.

The critical essay is due at 10 PM and should be submitted via Blackboard. This is an extended version of the response papers, containing exegesis and careful critique. You may engage with other course readings in your paper, but you must respond to the argument in *one* of the course texts. You may not write a critical essay and a response paper about the same text. I will provide a handout with instructions and a rubric for the critical essay. It is important that you include the specific sections outlined on the handout in your critical essay.

Midterm and Final Exam:

If you read the assignments, come to class, and study the handouts (PowerPoints), you will be prepared to take the exams. While the writing assignments will test your skills, the exams will ensure that you have gained sufficient grasp over the course content. Both the midterm and the final exam will be multiple choice, and the final exam will be 50% questions from the midterm exam. While I will not try to trick you, the exams will require you to understand *precise* definitions and explanations. Why? Because you can only do philosophy well through clear thinking, and you can only demonstrate clear thinking with precise language. You should ask questions in class or during office hours if anything is unclear.

Late Policy:

In the interest of impartiality, I do not accept late papers or give make-up exams without prior approval except in extenuating circumstances. Please keep track of the course deadlines and plan accordingly.

Agreement for Articles:

Selections of certain works will be supplied to each student on Blackboard, but students remain subject to all the rights and restrictions of the publisher, and students are to honor those. Each student's copy of these works is to be used solely for purposes of this class; they are not to be distributed, sold, or employed for any other commercial purpose. Each student's participation in the class will indicate his or her explicit agreement to be bound by these limitations.

Commitment to Diversity:

The Philosophy Department seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across differences. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

This does not mean not being critical: respecting others' views means taking them seriously, and taking them seriously means thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, asking questions, and offering constructive criticisms or alternative viewpoints where appropriate. It also means thinking about where

the views of others challenge our own, and being open to what they have to teach us. Valuing diversity is not just an attitude – it is a matter of developing an active practice. Amongst other things, this practice involves:

- learning to listen to other perspectives;
- being open to criticism of one's own views;
- being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one's views, but being willing to change one's mind;
- not rushing to judgment;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another person (or text or theory) as one can manage;
- *and* being willing to accept that there will always be things one cannot see or understand;
- learning to express criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices.

Never be afraid to ask a question or to risk saying something that might be wrong – that is how we learn. But equally, never be afraid to listen to the questions and answers of others, and to let their views challenge and change how you think.

Academic Honesty:

George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. See honorcode.gmu.edu for more detailed information.

Any attempt to pass AI-generated text as your own work in the submission of any assignments will be considered a violation of academic integrity and the Honor Code.

Student Support:

Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu/>

Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me within the first 2 weeks of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to ensure you receive the required support: 703-993-2472. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS: <http://ods.gmu.edu/>

University Libraries: <http://library.gmu.edu/>

Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence:

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination, and we are committed to 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 who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual

misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202 Sexual Harassment and Misconduct (<http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/>) speaks to the specifics of our process, our resources, and the options available to you.

Confidential student resources are available on campus at the Student Support and Advocacy Center (<http://ssac.gmu.edu/>), Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://caps.gmu.edu/>), and Student Health Services (<http://shs.gmu.edu/>).

All other members of the University community (including faculty, except those noted above) are **not** considered confidential resources and are **required** to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator. For a full list of resources, support opportunities, and reporting options, contact Dr. Jennifer Hammat, Title IX Coordinator, at <http://diversity.gmu.edu/title-ix>, at 703-993-8730, or in the Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics office in the Aquia Building, Suite 373.

ASSIGNMENTS (subject to change)

You should do the assigned reading before class. Everything other than the readings from *Exploring Ethics* (EE) I will put on Blackboard (BB). Some of the readings are contained in an abridged version in the textbook, but you will need to read a longer version found on Blackboard. Be sure to check the syllabus for the readings and the source of the reading.

Date	UNIT ONE: CHALLENGES TO MORALITY
WEEK 1/ January 16	Syllabus; Introduction; Arguments
January 18	NO CLASS TODAY Reading (we will discuss these next week): Frankena, “Morality and Moral Philosophy” (EE); Plato, <i>Crito</i> (EE)
WEEK 2/ January 23	Reading: Cahn, “God and Morality” (EE); Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” (EE)
	UNIT TWO: CONSEQUENTIALISM
January 25	Reading: Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter 2 (BB)
WEEK 3/ January 30	Reading: Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter 4 (BB)
February 1	Reading: Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism” (BB) * First Response Paper Due *

WEEK 4/ February 6	Reading: Nozick, “Experience Machine” (BB); Rawls, “Classical Utilitarianism” (BB); Williams “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (BB)
February 8	Applied Case: World Hunger Reading: Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (EE); Timmerman “A Reply to Singer” (EE)
	UNIT THREE: DEONTOLOGY
WEEK 5/ February 13	Reading: Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> , Second Section, 4: 406-424 (BB)
February 15	Reading: Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> , Second Section, 4: 425-445 (BB) * Second Response Paper Due *
WEEK 6/ February 20	Reading: O’Neill, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics” (EE); Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty” (skim) (BB)
February 22	Reading: Sinnott-Armstrong, “How Strong Is This Obligation” (BB); Wolf, “Moral Saints” (EE)
WEEK 7/ February 27	Applied Case: Torture Reading: Allhoff, “Ticking Time-Bombs and Torture” (BB); Brecher, “Torture and its Apologists” (BB)
February 29	MIDTERM EXAM (Multiple Choice, Closed-Book) The exam will be during class, but it will be online so you may take it wherever you like. You will need to use Lockdown Browser but not the creepy spy version.
WEEK 8/ March 4-10	NO CLASS (Spring Break)
	UNIT FOUR: VIRTUE ETHICS
WEEK 9/ March 12	Reading: Aristotle, Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I (BB)
March 14	Reading: Aristotle, Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II, VI.1-2,5; X.7 (BB) * Third Response Paper Due *
WEEK 10/ March 19	Reading: Driver, “The Virtues of Ignorance” (BB)

March 21	<p>Applied Case: Abortion</p> <p>Reading: Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” (EE); Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral” (EE); Optional: Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (EE)</p>
	UNIT FIVE: MORAL PROBLEMS
WEEK 11/ March 26	<p>Immigration</p> <p>Reading: Miller, “Immigration: The Case for Limits” (EE); Huemer, “Is There a Right to Migrate” (EE)</p>
March 28	<p>Injustice</p> <p>Reading: Appiah, “Racisms” (EE); Cudd and Jones, “Sexism” (EE)</p>
WEEK 12/ April 2	<p>Capital Punishment</p> <p>Reading: Pojman, “A Defense of the Death Penalty” (BB); Nathanson, “Why We Should Put the Death Penalty to Rest” (BB)</p>
April 4	<p>Animals</p> <p>Reading: Singer, “Equality for Animals” (EE); Steinbock, “Speciesism and the Idea of Equality” (EE); Warren, “Speaking of Animal Rights” (EE)</p>
WEEK 13/ April 9	<p>The Environment</p> <p>Reading: Sober, “Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism” (EE); Jamieson, “Ethics and Global Change” (EE)</p> <p>*Critical Essay Thesis Due 10 PM*</p>
April 11	<p>Affirmative Action</p> <p>Reading: Mosley, “A Defense of Affirmative Action” (BB); Wolf-Devine, “Preferential Policies Have Become Toxic” (BB)</p>
WEEK 14/ April 16	<p>Euthanasia</p> <p>Reading: Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (EE); Steinbock, “The Intentional Termination of Life” (EE)</p>
	UNIT SIX: MORAL RESPONSIBILITY
April 18	<p>The (Im)Possibility of Moral Responsibility</p> <p>Reading: Strawson, P., “Freedom and Resentment” (selection) (BB); Strawson, G., “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility” (selection) (BB)</p>
April 21	* Critical Essay Due 10 PM*

WEEK 15/ April 23	Moral Luck Reading: Nagel, “Moral Luck” (BB)
April 25	Wrap-Up/Review
Tuesday, May 7 1:30 – 4:15 pm	FINAL EXAM (Cumulative, Multiple Choice, Closed-Book) The exam will be online so you may take it wherever you like. You will need to use Lockdown Browser but not the creepy spy version.