

ETHICS
TTh, 2:00-3:15
NH-4

Course Information & Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. David Shoemaker (Dave)
Office Hours: TTh, 1-2, Th, 3:15-4:45 (and I'll be available at many other times: just let me know and we can work out a time to meet); 113 Newcomb Hall
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REQUIRED TEXTS:

The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy, 6th Edition (by Rachels and Rachels)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

This course is intended to be a critical introduction to alternative theories of the good life, virtue and vice, right and wrong, and their application to perennial and contemporary moral problems. Specifically, we will study philosophical reasoning and argumentation (especially as it pertains to values), major highlights in the history of ethical theorizing (i.e., accounts of the conditions that make acts right or wrong, characters virtuous or vicious), and some difficult issues in applied ethics (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, animal rights, drug legalization, sex and alcohol, and/or terrorism). We will aim throughout to identify the specific arguments at work and to learn how to critically evaluate them. The basic idea of the course is to train you to become a budding moral philosopher, able to wield the powerful tools of critical analysis and evaluation as you think about hard ethical issues and engage in moral discussion with your friends, family, and fellow citizens in daily life.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES:

Ethics (Phil 1030) will introduce you to both the central questions in moral philosophy and some of the most influential answers to those questions in the history of philosophy. Your classroom activities as well as your written work are designed to cultivate focal philosophical skills of clarity of analysis and reasoned argument, as well as to encourage you to approach moral problems in an imaginative and informed manner.

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students become acquainted with a range of thinkers, topics, and methods.
2. In both classroom discussion and written work, students should demonstrate the ability to analyze ideas and present them clearly, providing arguments and evidence for their claims.

SPECIFIC COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. To gain an understanding of the general process and methods of philosophical reasoning and argumentation.
2. To come to an appreciation of the sorts of philosophical arguments advanced in both the history of ethical theory and a variety of controversial contemporary moral problems.
3. To learn how to analyze and critically evaluate these philosophical arguments.
4. To discuss, think, and write critically about each of the problems and to reach (and be able to support) your *own* conclusions on the issues involved.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance and Participation: In philosophy it is not enough that you've read the required texts; you really need some further guidance in order to understand what is sometimes extremely difficult material. That's where our in-class discussions come in. You thus very likely won't do that well if you are not in class for nearly every session, participating actively in the discussion and taking clear and copious notes. If you do participate regularly, I will add up to two points extra on your *overall* grade tally. So, for example, if you've averaged an 88 with all your other work (a B+), but you've contributed regularly to the discussion, I'll gladly kick your grade up to an A- (90). (Failing to participate, however, or staring at me with a surly expression the whole time, will not result in a lower score, although perhaps it should.)

As for attendance, if you miss more than FOUR classes, no matter the reason, I may deduct 2 points off your course grade for every class missed from there on out. I will be taking attendance every day, so make sure you're here on time to sign in. Showing up late (more than 10 minutes) will count as ½ of a class's absence.

If you miss class, there's no need to email me to ask me if you missed anything important. You did, as I don't waste class time going over unimportant material. Get your missing notes from a fellow student. I suggest that you find a couple of other students in the class who would be willing to exchange email addresses and give you a copy of their notes when you're absent in exchange for your returning the favor when they're absent. (Note that I do not have any notes to give you, nor do I distribute my PowerPoints (see below). So you either find some fellow student willing to give you their notes or you go without.) If you will need to miss several days for an important medical excuse, please discuss it with me and we will work something out. I am not a monster.

I use PowerPoint presentations during class. Redacted versions of these PowerPoint presentations are available in Blackboard under "Course Documents." These lecture outlines are made available to you to facilitate your note-taking. Print them out and take notes on them during class. Note, though, that the lecture outlines are redacted—that is, certain crucial words, phrases, and examples are missing. The parts that should be filled in for them will be in the PowerPoint presentations themselves. You should do more than just fill in the redacted portions of the outlines, though. The PowerPoint presentations are, after all, only *outlines*. You should take notes on our entire discussion, using these outlines as organizational guides. I do not distribute un-redacted versions of my PowerPoint presentations to students under any circumstances. If you missed class and need to fill in the redacted parts of the lecture outlines, you'll need to get notes from a fellow student.

2. Exams: There will be THREE exams given during the semester. Each exam will cover only the material discussed in the previous segment, so none of them will be comprehensive. If you miss an exam without giving me a reasonable excuse *beforehand*, you will receive a low F (50) for it. If, however, you do let me know beforehand (at least 24 hours in advance, or as soon as is feasible) that you will be unable to take a scheduled exam (with a documented and reasonable excuse), I will arrange a way for you to complete an assignment that will substitute for your exam. Avoid this if at all possible, however, for it may be *extremely* difficult. Each exam will count for **28%** of your overall grade. The (tentative) dates of each exam are on the syllabus. The exam questions will make reference to specific information from the lectures *and* the readings, so keep abreast of both.
3. Reading Questions: In order to ensure that you are reading the required material, I will regularly assign Reading Questions, which will simply ask for short answers on some issue(s) in the assigned readings. These are due *at the beginning of class* on the due date. If you come in late, just drop it off on your way in, and if you can't make it to class, e-mail it to me prior to the start of class. No papers will be accepted after class, simply because we'll usually cover the answers to them in class the day they're due. Altogether, your scores on these will constitute **16%** of your overall course grade. If you simply keep up with these, you should get an A for this portion of the course. Here is how they work. You will be asked to type up a paragraph or two (**in your own words**) in answer to the question given about the reading. The idea is that these questions should be easy to answer *if you've actually read the entire selection* (which will generally be pretty short). Each one will be graded according to the following evaluative schema:

Check-plus – reserved for those answers that have nothing wrong and reveal a genuine understanding of/insight into the material (worth 3 points);

Check – reserved for those answers that get the general idea of what’s going on and don’t include anything significantly mistaken (most of you will get this score most of the time) (worth 2 points);

Check-minus – reserved for those answers that (a) have at least one significant mistake, (b) are utter bullshit, or (c) are too short/incomplete in an important way (i.e., they don’t address an important aspect of the question given) (worth one point);

Zero – reserved for those answers that (a) are completely, utterly wrong (or fail to answer any part of the question adequately), (b) are plagiarized, i.e., they are not written in your own words, or (c) are simply not turned in on time or at all (worth no points).

At the end of the semester, all your points will be added up and the following translation schema will be used to map them onto a 100 point scale: 22+ = 100; 21 = 96; 20 = 92; 19 = 88; 18 = 84; 17 = 80; 16 = 76; 15 = 72; 14 = 68; 13 = 64; 12 = 60; 11 = 56; 10 = 52; 9 = 48; 8 = 44; 7 = 40; 6 = 36; 5 = 32; 4 = 28; 3 = 24; 2 = 20; 1 = 16; and 0 = 0. Obviously, if you just get checks across the board on eleven reading questions, you’ll get a 100 for this portion of the course, but on the other hand, if you don’t turn any in (or turn very few in) it will *significantly* lower your overall course grade.

4. Academic Honesty & Respect: There are very few things I will not tolerate, but here’s the list:

(a) **Plagiarism** is number one on my hit list. Plagiarism is theft, the presentation of someone else’s ideas as your own (unquoted or uncited). This includes appropriating more than three unattributed words or synonyms in a row from someone else’s work. This also includes drawing from independent (e.g., web) resources to help you with your reading questions, which are to be done **entirely on your own**. Philosophical victories in understanding are hard-won, and the only way you learn is if you *struggle* with the primary text alone. If I judge that you have plagiarized in any aspect of the course—no matter how small—I will report you to the Honor Board, as required of me. But I personally also take it very seriously—DO NOT DO IT!

(b) **Cheating or being involved in a conspiracy to cheat**. This gets you an F, either for the assignment or the course, depending on the nature of the violation, and gets you an Honor Board referral. This should be obvious, but there are two things worth pointing out regarding the conspiracy aspect of the policy. First, if you’ve worked out a plan to cheat and intend to carry out the plan, that’s sufficient to constitute cheating, *even if you don’t in fact carry out the plan or fail in your execution of the plan*. Second, conspiracy to cheat here includes making your own ideas for an assignment *available to someone else* for him/her to plagiarize it. (Please note the Honor Code violations of “cheating” and “plagiarism” here: <http://tulane.edu/college/code.cfm>)

(c) **Failing to respect either your classmates or me**. If you are disruptive, insulting, or engaging in any kind of harassment of others, I will do what I can to get you kicked out of the class, and, depending on the degree of the offense, out of the university. There’s no way learning can take place when someone engages in this kind of behavior.

(d) **Cell phones/texting/laptops**. Unfortunately, ridiculously egregious conduct by prior students has forced me to put in place a rather draconian policy: all mobile phones, iPads, laptops, homing pigeons, or any other technology enabling texting, messaging, e-mailing, websurfing or the like are not allowed in the classroom. Obviously, you can have them with you in your bags, but they are to appear nowhere near your desk or hands during class time. The reason is simple: it is an incredible distraction to me and your classmates. Even if you think you’re being discrete with your tiny little cell phone, texting away under the desktop, *I can see you trying not to be seen*, and it is one giant distraction. Apparently, this rule needs to be enforced with an iron hand, so here’s the deal: the first time I see you violate the policy, I’ll call you out publicly on it and deduct 1 point from your overall course grade. Every time it happens thereafter, you will be asked to leave the classroom, and I will deduct 5 points—fully ½ a letter grade—from your overall grade. As you might be able to tell, this is a genuine source of irritation.

5. Extra Credit: While there may be various extra credit opportunities throughout the semester (e.g., a philosophy or psychology public lecture), there is definitely one source of extra credit always available: simply get a letter to the editor of a real (local or national) newspaper published—on-line or in print—during the course of the

semester (or get an e-mail from them promising to publish it), showing why someone’s public argument was problematic. You’ll be replying to one of four original sources: an editorial, a columnist’s article, a news article with someone’s argument laid out, or a previous letter to the editor. (Comments on a blog post don’t count.) Getting a letter published (e.g., to the *Times-Picayune*) will be worth 3 points, tacked onto your *overall* grade tally (so it’s significant). Getting one published in the *NY Times* will be worth 5 points. In other words, if you’ve got an 85 (mid-B) average after all your other assignments are tallied, and you publish a letter somewhere, you could get a B+ (88) for the course as a whole (or a 90/A- if you publish in the *NY Times*).

IMPORTANT DATES:

- Last day to register/add: September 4
- Last day to drop without record: September 25
- Last day to drop: November 2

PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS
(Any changes will be announced in class)

<u>DATES</u>	<u>TOPICS</u>	<u>READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS</u>
Week 1 (8/25-8/27)	- Introduction to the Topics of the Course - Philosophical Argumentation	“Some Basic Points about Arguments” (19-21)
Week 2 (9/1-9/3)	- Ethics by Authority: - Relativism - Divine Command Theory - Aristotelian Virtue Ethics	“A Short Introduction...” (1-4), and “Some Basic Points...” (21-27) “A Short Introduction...” (5-8), and Aristotle, “The Virtues” (63-69)
Week 3 (9/8-9/10)	- Virtue Ethics and Natural Law Theory - Utilitarianism	“A Short Introduction...” (11-16), and Mill, “Utilitarianism” (28-38)
Week 4 (9/15) <i>No class 9/17</i>	- Objections to Utilitarianism	Williams, “Utilitarianism and Integrity” (39-43), and Nozick, “The Experience Machine” (44-46)
Week 5 (9/22-9/24)	- Kantianism and objections	“A Short Introduction” (16-18), and Kant, “The Categorical Imperative” (59-62)
Week 6 (9/29-10/1)	- Kantianism concluded, and exam review EXAM #1: ARGUMENTATION AND ETHICAL THEORY, 10/1	
Week 7 (10/6-10/8)	- Introduction to Abortion - An Argument for the Impermissibility of Abortion	Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” (<i>read full article on Blackboard</i>)
Week 8 (10/13; <i>no class on 10/15 for Fall Break</i>)	- Marquis concluded	
Week 9 (10/20-10/22)	- An Argument for the Permissibility of Abortion	Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (88-104)
Week 10	- Euthanasia: For and Against	Rachels, “Active and Passive

Page numbers in parentheses refer to pages in the Rachels textbook.

<u>DATES</u>	<u>TOPICS</u>	<u>READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS</u>
(10/27-10/29)		Euthanasia” (on Blackboard), and “The Morality of Euthanasia” (312-316); Gay-Williams, “The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia” (317-321)
Week 11 (11/3-11/5)	- Terrorism and the Doctrine of Double Effect EXAM #2: ABORTION, EUTHANASIA, TERRORISM, 11/5	Nagel, “What is Wrong with Terrorism?” (209-211)
Week 12 (11/10-11/12)	- Drugs - Sex vs. Rape	Huemer, “America’s Unjust Drug War” (226-239) Dixon, “Alcohol and Rape” (267-277)
Week 13 (11/17; <i>no class 11/19</i>)	- Speciesism and the Case for Animal Rights	Singer, “All Animals Are Equal” (116-125)
Week 14 (11/24) <i>No class 11/26 for Thanksgiving break</i>	- <i>Film: “To Love or Kill: Man vs. Animal”</i>	
Week 15 (12/1-12/3)	- Against Animal Rights - The Death Penalty: For and Against EXAM #3: DRUGS, SEX, ANIMALS, AND THE DEATH PENALTY, (Scheduled Final Exam Time, Sat., 12/12, 1-5 p.m.)	Machan, “Do Animals Have Rights?” (134-146) Pojman, “A Defense of the Death Penalty” (154-161); Bright, “Why the US Will Join the Rest of the World...” (162-173)