



Banksy. *Game Changer*. 2020

# ETHICS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY – COLLEGE OF  
LIBERAL ARTS – UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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**Semester:** Spring 2021

**Course:** PHIL 2306-009 (CRN: 34144)

**Time and Location:** Asynchronous Blackboard Online

**Instructor:** Aleksandar (“Aleks”) Pjevalica

**Instructor’s Email:** [apjevalica@utep.edu](mailto:apjevalica@utep.edu)

**Office Hours:** Virtually via Blackboard Collaborate

Tuesdays 12:00-2:00

**Teaching Assistants:**

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## Course Description

A person’s life can turn out better or worse depending upon the particular actions they choose to perform. Should I go to college? Should I become a parent? What career should I pursue? For whom should I vote in the next election? Should I use my expendable income to buy myself the new iPhone or should I donate that money to famine relief in East Africa? Before we can decide what actions to take, we need to reflect upon (or theorize about) the kind of life that we want to live and the kind of person that we want to become. Ethics (or moral philosophy) is, in its most general form, the branch of philosophy devoted to the study of what constitutes the good life. This is a big topic that involves many different kinds of questions and concerns. In order to systematize the inquiry, philosophers typically divide ethics into the following four subfields:

- i) Metaethics** is the study of the meaning of moral concepts and judgments: What do the words right and wrong mean? Are moral judgments relative to a culture or are they universal? Is a person’s standard of what is right or good simply a matter of opinion or are there objective facts that determine what is right or good?
  
- ii) Value theory** is the study of the values that ought guide our actions. Value theory attempts to discover principles according to which something is classified as good (or bad). For example, should I do something that makes me (and those around me) happy or are

there values other than happiness (e.g., truth, beauty, justice) that I should also take into consideration when deciding how to act?

**iii) Normative ethics** is the study of the principles (i.e. norms) according to which an action is determined to be right (or wrong). Normative ethics does not attempt to describe actual moral behaviour (that is the job of sciences like psychology, sociology and anthropology), rather normative ethics attempts to prescribe fundamental principles for moral behaviour. Here is an example of a famous principle that normative ethicists have attempted to justify: An action is right if and only if it would, if performed, bring about at least as much overall happiness as would any available alternative action.

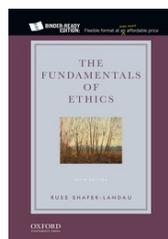
**iv) Applied ethics** is the application of ethical theory to the analysis of moral problems that arise in particular spheres of human life. Subfields in applied ethics include: medical ethics (e.g. Is abortion morally permissible?), environmental ethics (e.g., Is the destruction of the rainforest in Borneo for the commercial production of palm oil morally permissible?), and business ethics (e.g., Should the government subsidize failing financial institutions with emergency loans?).

## Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, we should **1)** have a working understanding of the major figures in the history of ethics, including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Kant and Mill; **2)** understand the main problems and methods that define metaethics, value theory, normative ethics and applied ethics; and **3)** what's most important, have learned to use ethical theory to critically examine and shape our own lives. [Note: This course satisfies a Core Curriculum "Language, Philosophy and Culture" requirement.]

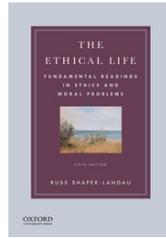
## Required Texts and Materials

**1)** Shafer-Landau, Russ. The Fundamentals of Ethics. Fifth Edition. Oxford University Press, 2020.  
ISBN: 9780190058333



Student Resources: <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780190631390/studres/>

2) Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Ethical Life: Fundamental Readings in Ethics and Moral Problems*. Fifth Edition. Oxford University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780190058241



Student Resources: <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780190631314/resources/>

3) Additional readings posted on Blackboard under “Readings.”

4) PowerPoint lecture slides are available on Blackboard. You may download and print these to use for taking notes as you follow along with the video lectures.

## Course Assignments

**1) Discussion Board (15%):** Students will have the opportunity to participate in a Discussion Board throughout the semester. In order to achieve maximum points for participation, you will be required to post a minimum of **one** question per week on the readings and/or lecture, and a minimum of **one** response per week to a question raised by a fellow student. Complete guidelines for this requirement are available on Blackboard under “Discussion Board.” The goal of this requirement is to encourage collaborative learning. By asking questions and answering each other’s questions, students will have the opportunity to help each other understand the material and, as a result, be better prepared for the weekly exams.

**2) Blackboard Exams (60%):** There will be five Blackboard exams. In order to prepare for these exams, you must get in the habit of reading and re-reading the assigned texts carefully and take the practice quizzes on the readings that are available on the Oxford University Press website (see Required Texts above for the links). The exams will cover the assigned reading material and/or the video lectures. Each exam will be given on Blackboard under “Exams” and will have a time limit. You may choose to take each exam twice. If you do so, you will receive the higher score of the two attempts. Here is the exam schedule (all times are MDT):

- Exam #1 (10%) will be available Jan. 29 (9:00am) and due by Jan. 31 (11:59pm). It will cover material from weeks 1 and 2.
- Exam #2 (10%) will be available Feb. 19 (9:00am) and due by Feb. 21 (11:59pm). It will cover material from weeks 3 – 5.
- Exam #3 (10%) will be available Mar. 12 (9:00am) and due by Mar. 14 (11:59pm). It will cover material from weeks 6 – 8.
- Exam #4 (10%) will be available Apr. 9 (9:00am) and due by Apr. 11 (11:59pm). It will cover material from weeks 10 – 12.
- Exam #5 (20%) will be available May 7 (9:00am) and due by May 14 (11:59pm). It will cover material from weeks 1 – 16.

Note: Late exams will not be accepted.

**3) Essay Assignment (25%):** You will write a 1250-1500 word essay on a topic selected from a list of topics. Essay topics, detailed instructions, and grading criteria will be available on Blackboard on March 5. The essay will be due by May 7 (11:59pm MDT).

## **Final Letter Grade Scale**

A: 90-100%  
B: 80-89%  
C: 70-79%  
D: 60-69%  
F: 0-59%

## **Course Policies and Requirements**

**Online Classroom Conduct Code:** Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect between students, and between the instructor and their students. Both instructor and students should not be subjected to any student's behavior that is in any way disruptive, rude or disrespectful. A student should not feel intimidated or demeaned by their fellow students. Should a student behave in a disrespectful or disruptive way, the offending student will be subject to disciplinary action on the part of the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. Please see the full list of "netiquette" rules on Blackboard.

**Scholastic Integrity:** Students who engage in scholastic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism) will be subject to disciplinary action as stated in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures:  
<https://www.utep.edu/hoop/>

Note: The Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution will adjudicate all scholastic dishonesty cases.

**Technology Requirements and Blackboard:** We will be using the Blackboard Learning Management System for our class throughout the semester. If you have not done so already, you should familiarize yourself with accessing Blackboard. I will be using Blackboard to post course materials, including the syllabus and quizzes. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the Web. You may use any of the primary Web browsers—Explorer, Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, etc.—to access Blackboard. If you have technical difficulties, try switching to another browser. If that does not work, please contact the Help Desk: <https://www.utep.edu/technologysupport/>

**Email:** All class email correspondences will be conducted exclusively through the email address that you have listed with the university. I will try to respond to your questions within 24-48 hours.

**Accommodations:** UTEP seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities. This university will adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required affording equal educational opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to register with The Center for Accommodations and Support Services within the first two weeks of classes and inform the faculty member to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS)  
Union East Building Room 106  
Phone: (915) 747-5148  
Fax: (915) 747-8712  
Email: [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu)

## Reading Schedule

[Readings Key: FE = The Fundamentals of Ethics; EL = The Ethical Life]

### Week 1 (Jan. 19 – 22): Introduction and Metaethics

- Syllabus: Introduction to the course
- “Introduction” [FE]
- “Ethical Relativism” [Ch.19 FE]
- “Anthropology and the Abnormal” by Ruth Benedict [on Blackboard]

### Week 2 (Jan. 25 – 29): Metaethics

- “The Subjectivity of Values” by J. L. Mackie [EL]
- “Moral Nihilism” [Ch.20 FE]
- “On Trying Out One’s New Sword” by Mary Midgley [on Blackboard]
- “Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” [Ch. 21 FE]

### Week 3 (Feb. 1 – 5): Value Theory

- “Hedonism: Its Powerful Appeal” [Ch.1 FE]
- “Hedonism” by John Stuart Mill [EL]
- “The Experience Machine” by Robert Nozick [EL]
- “Is Happiness All That Matters?” [Ch.2 FE]

### Week 4 (Feb. 8 – 12): Value Theory

- “Getting What You Want” [Ch.3 FE]
- “Problems for the Desire Theory” [Ch.4 FE]
- “Necessities” by Jean Kazez [on Blackboard]

### Week 5 (Feb. 15 – 19): Normative Ethics

- “Morality and Religion” [Ch.5 FE]

- “Natural Law” [Ch.6 FE]

**Week 6 (Feb. 22 – 26): Normative Ethics**

- “Psychological Egoism [Ch.7 FE]
- “Ethical Egoism [Ch.8 FE]

**Week 7 (Mar. 1 – 5): Normative Ethics**

- “Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions” [Ch.9 FE]
- “Consequentialism: Its Difficulties” [Ch.10 FE]

**Week 8 (Mar. 8 – 12): Normative Ethics**

- “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative” by Immanuel Kant [EL]
- “The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice” [Ch.11 FE]
- “The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect” [Ch.12 FE]

**Week 9 (Mar. 15 – 19): Spring Break**

**Week 10 (Mar. 22 – 26): Normative Ethics**

- “Leviathan” by Thomas Hobbes [EL]
- “The Social Contract Tradition: The Theory and Its Attractions” [Ch.13 FE]
- “The Social Contract Tradition: Problems and Prospects” [Ch.14 FE]

**Week 11 (Mar. 29 – Apr. 2): Normative Ethics**

- “Ethical Pluralism and Absolute Moral Rules” [Ch.15 FE]
- “Ethical Pluralism: Prima Facie Duties” [Ch.16 FE]

**Week 12 (Apr. 5 – 9): Normative Ethics**

- “Nicomachean Ethics” by Aristotle [EL]
- “Virtue Ethics” [Ch.17 FE]
- “Feminist Ethics” [Ch. 18 FE]
- “What Is Feminist Ethics?” by Hilde Lindemann [EL]

**Week 13 (Apr. 12 – 16): Applied Ethics**

- “Why Abortion is Immoral” by Don Marquis [EL]
- “A Defence of Abortion” by Judith Jarvis Thomson [EL]

**Week 14 (Apr. 19 – 23): Applied Ethics**

- “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” by Peter Singer [EL]
- “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases” by Alastair Norcross [EL]

**Week 15 (Apr. 26 – 30): Applied Ethics**

- “An Eye for an Eye?” by Stephen Nathanson [EL]
- “America’s Unjust Drug War” by Michael Huemer [EL]

**Week 16 (May 3 – 7): Applied Ethics**

- “Affirmative Action: Bad Arguments and Some Good Ones” by Daniel M. Hausman [EL]
- “Genetic Interventions and the Ethics of Enhancement of Human Beings” by Julian Savulescu  
[on Blackboard]