

ETHICS

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

SEMESTER:

Summer I (2019)

COURSE:

PHIL 2306-004 (CRN: 34197)

TIME AND LOCATION:

Blackboard Online

INSTRUCTOR:

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INSTRUCTOR'S EMAIL:

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Banksy. *Stop and Search*. 2007

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?).

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.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

1. Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Fourth Edition. Oxford University Press, 2018.

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*. Fourth Edition. Oxford University Press, 2018.

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 daily video lectures.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) **Participation (15%)**: Students will be required to participate in a Discussion Board throughout the semester. In order to achieve maximum points for participation, every student will be required to post a minimum of three questions per week on the readings and/or lecture, and a minimum of three responses per week to questions raised by other students. 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) **Weekly Blackboard Exams (65%)**: There will be four Blackboard exams, one for each week of the course. Each exam will be available on Friday and due on Sunday. Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions on topics that we have discussed that week. 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). Note: The exams may cover the assigned reading material and/or class lecture. Each exam will be given on Blackboard and will have a time limit. Here is the exam schedule:

Exam #1 (15%): Available June 14th at 9:00am. Due June 16th by 11:59pm.

Exam #2 (15%): Available June 21st at 9:00am. Due June 23rd by 11:59pm.

Exam #3 (15%): Available June 28th at 9:00am. Due June 30th by 11:59pm.

Exam #4 (20%): Available July 5th at 9:00am. Due July 7th by 11:59pm.

Note: Late exams will not be accepted.

3) **Essay Assignment (20%)**: You will write a 1250-1500 word essay on a topic selected from a list of topics. Essay topics will be available on June 21st. The essay will be due on the last day of class.

COURSE POLICIES

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 instructor will remove the offending student from the course, and the offending student will be subject to disciplinary action on the part of the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism: Students who engage in scholastic dishonesty will be subject to disciplinary action as stated in the UTEP policy: <http://www.utep.edu/dos/acadintg.htm>.

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

Email: All class email correspondences will be conducted exclusively through the email address that you have listed with the university.

Blackboard: We will be using the Blackboard shell 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.

Disability Accommodation: 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
Voice Fax: (915) 747-8712
Email: cass@utep.edu

READING SCHEDULE

[Note: *FE* means *The Fundamentals of Ethics* and *EL* means *The Ethical Life*.]

Week 1: Metaethics

June 10: Syllabus: Introduction to the course

June 11: "Introduction" (*FE*)

June 12: "Ethical Relativism" (Ch.19 *FE*); "Anthropology and the Abnormal" by Ruth Benedict [on Blackboard]

June 13: "The Subjectivity of Values" by J. L. Mackie (*EL*); "Moral Nihilism" (Ch.20 *FE*)

June 14: "On Trying Out One's New Sword" by Mary Midgley [on Blackboard]; "Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity" (Ch. 21 *FE*)

Week 2: Value Theory and Normative Ethics

June 17: "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*)

June 18: "Getting What You Want" (Ch.3 *FE*); "Problems for the Desire Theory" (Ch.4 *FE*), "Necessities" by Jean Kazez [on Blackboard]

June 19: "Morality and Religion" (Ch.5 *FE*); "Natural Law" (Ch.6 *FE*)

June 20: "Psychological Egoism (Ch.7 *FE*); "Ethical Egoism (Ch.8 *FE*)

June 21: "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions" (Ch.9 *FE*); "Consequentialism: Its Difficulties" (Ch.10 *FE*)

Week 3: Normative Ethics

June 24: “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*)

June 25: “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*)

June 26: “Ethical Pluralism and Absolute Moral Rules” (Ch.15 *FE*); “Ethical Pluralism: Prima Facie Duties” (Ch.16 *FE*)

June 27: “Nicomachean Ethics” by Aristotle (*EL*); “Virtue Ethics” (Ch.17 *FE*); “Natural Goodness” by Philippa Foot [on Blackboard]

June 28: “Feminist Ethics” (Ch. 18 *FE*); “What Is Feminist Ethics?” by Hilde Lindemann

Week 4: Applied Ethics

July 1: “Why Abortion is Immoral” by Don Marquis (*EL*); “A Defence of Abortion” by Judith Jarvis Thomson (*EL*)

July 2: “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” by Peter Singer (*EL*); “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases” by Alastair Norcross (*EL*)

July 3: “An Eye for an Eye?” by Stephen Nathanson (*EL*); “America’s Unjust Drug War” by Michael Huemer (*EL*)

July 4: UNIVERSITY CLOSED

July 5: “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]