

ETHICS

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

SEMESTER: Spring 2020

COURSE: PHIL 2306-003 (CRN: 22998)

TIME AND LOCATION: M/W 1:30-2:50 in UGLC 116

INSTRUCTOR: Aleksandar ("Aleks") Pjevalica
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INSTRUCTOR'S EMAIL: apjevalica@utep.edu

INSTRUCTOR'S OFFICE HOURS: M/W 10:00-11:30 in
Worrell Hall 111

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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 a local charity that fights poverty? 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 objective? 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 actions may be classified as right (or wrong). We all believe

that happiness, for example, is valuable and therefore actions that produce happiness are good. But what else is valuable besides happiness? What about truth, autonomy and justice? And what is the relationship between these values?

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: <https://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: <https://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 during lectures.

5. Paper and pen for in-class writing assignments.

6. Green Scantron forms for in-class quizzes (available at the University Bookstore).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) **Surprise In-Class Reading Quizzes (10%)**: Each quiz will consist of several multiple-choice questions. Each quiz will be based on the reading material that is due on the day the quiz is given. In order to prepare for these quizzes, you must get in the habit of reading the assigned texts carefully twice before you come to class. Each quiz is worth 2% of your final grade.

2) **Blackboard Exams (60%)**: There will be five Blackboard exams. Each exam will be available on Friday and due on Sunday. In order to prepare for these exams, you must 1) get in the habit of reading and re-reading the assigned texts carefully before you come to class, 2) take the practice quizzes that are available on our textbook publisher's website, and 3) participate regularly in class discussion. The exams may cover the assigned reading material (whether or not we discuss it in class) and/or class lecture and discussion (whether or not what we discuss in class appears in the assigned readings). Each exam will be given on Blackboard and will have a time limit. Here is the exam schedule:

Exam #1 (10%): Available Feb. 6. Due Feb. 9. On material from weeks 1-3.

Exam #2 (10%): Available Feb. 27. Due Mar. 1. On material from weeks 4-6.

Exam #3 (10%): Available Mar. 26. Due Mar. 29. On material from weeks 7-10.

Exam #4 (10%): Available Apr. 16. Due Apr. 19. On material from weeks 11-13.

Exam #5 (20%): Available May 7. Due May 14. On material from weeks 1-16.

Note: Late exams will not be accepted.

3) **In-Class Writing Assignments (10%)**: Periodically throughout the semester I will ask you to write short in-class assignments, which you will turn in at the end of the class session. The assignments will be graded on a Credit/No Credit basis.

Note: If you fail to submit your assignment during class or if you are absent from class, you will receive no credit for the assignment.

4) **Essay Assignment (20%)**: You will write a 1250-1500 word essay on a topic selected from a list of topics. Topics and detailed instructions will be available on Mar. 12, and the essay will be due on May 6.

COURSE POLICIES

Classroom Conduct Code:

- The use of electronic devices (laptops, cell phones, audio recorders, etc.) is strictly forbidden.
- Arrive to class on time.
- Do not chat with fellow classmates during the lecture/discussion.
- I expect you to participate in class discussion on a regular basis. If you have a question or comment, raise your hand (and I will call on you).
- Treat your fellow classmates with respect at all times, including during class discussion.

Note: If you violate the Classroom Conduct Code, you will be asked to leave the class.

Attendance Check-In: Please check in before the start of class with your UTEP Miner Gold ID Cards. There are multiple readers outside of our classroom. To check in just swipe your ID card against the reader. The system will beep and the light on the reader will change color temporarily (red to green for less than a second) if you successfully check in. The card reader's color will not change to "green", the color will only flash green for less than a second and the system will beep. You can check in no earlier than 15 minutes before the start of class.

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.

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 class 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

SCHEDULE

Readings Key: *FE = The Fundamentals of Ethics*

EL = The Ethical Life

Week 1: Introduction

Jan. 22: Syllabus and Introduction to the Course

Week 2: Metaethics

Jan. 27: “Introduction” (*FE*)

Jan. 29: “Anthropology and the Abnormal” by Ruth Benedict [on Blackboard]; “Ethical Relativism” (Ch.19 *FE*)

Week 3: Metaethics

Feb. 3: “The Subjectivity of Values” by J. L. Mackie (*EL*); “Moral Nihilism” (Ch.20 *FE*)

Feb. 5: “Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” (Ch. 21 *FE*)

Week 4: Value Theory

Feb. 10: “Hedonism: Its Powerful Appeal” (Ch.1 *FE*); “Hedonism” by John Stuart Mill (*EL*)

Feb. 12: “The Experience Machine” by Robert Nozick (*EL*); “Is Happiness All That Matters?” (Ch.2 *FE*)

Week 5: Value Theory

Feb. 17: “Getting What You Want” (Ch.3 *FE*); “Problems for the Desire Theory” (Ch.4 *FE*)

Feb. 19: “Necessities” by Jean Kazez [on Blackboard]

Week 6: Normative Ethics

Feb. 24: “Morality and Religion” (Ch.5 *FE*)

Feb. 26: “Natural Goodness” by Philippa Foot [on Blackboard]; “Natural Law” (Ch.6 *FE*)

Week 7: Normative Ethics

Mar. 2: “Psychological Egoism (Ch.7 *FE*)

Mar. 4: “Ethical Egoism (Ch.8 *FE*)

Week 8: Normative Ethics

Mar. 9: “Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions” (Ch.9 *FE*)

Mar. 11: “Consequentialism: Its Difficulties” (Ch.10 *FE*)

Week 9: Spring Break

Mar. 16-20: No Classes

Week 10: Normative Ethics

Mar. 23: “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative” by Immanuel Kant (*EL*)

Mar. 25: “The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice” (Ch.11 *FE*); “The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect” (Ch.12 *FE*)

Week 11: Normative Ethics

Mar. 30: “Leviathan” by Thomas Hobbes (*EL*)

Apr. 1: “The Social Contract Tradition: The Theory and Its Attractions” (Ch.13 *FE*); “The Social Contract Tradition: Problems and Prospects” (Ch.14 *FE*)

Week 12: Normative Ethics

Apr. 6: “Ethical Pluralism and Absolute Moral Rules” (Ch.15 *FE*)

Apr. 8: “Ethical Pluralism: Prima Facie Duties” (Ch.16 *FE*)

Week 13: Normative Ethics

Apr. 13: “Nicomachean Ethics” by Aristotle (*EL*); “Virtue Ethics” (Ch.17 *FE*)

Apr. 15: “Feminist Ethics” (Ch. 18 *FE*); “What Is Feminist Ethics?” by Hilde Lindemann (*EL*)

Week 14: Applied Ethics

Apr. 20: “Why Abortion is Immoral” by Don Marquis (*EL*)

Apr. 22: “A Defence of Abortion” by Judith Jarvis Thomson (*EL*)

Week 15: Applied Ethics

Apr. 27: “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” by Peter Singer (*EL*)

Apr. 29: “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases” by Alastair Norcross (*EL*)

Week 16: Applied Ethics

May 4: “An Eye for an Eye?” by Stephen Nathanson (*EL*)

May 6: “America’s Unjust Drug War” by Michael Huemer (*EL*)