

Introduction to Ethics

First-year undergraduate/non-major

Sample syllabus

CONTACT DETAILS AND OFFICE HOURS HERE

1 Course description

This course is divided into three parts. In the short first part, we'll cover the basics of philosophy: arguments, reasons, and how to read a paper. In the second, we'll examine three questions in normative ethics bearing on the question of what it means to be a morally responsible person. In the third, after the mid-term break, we'll address three topics in applied ethics: consent, our duties to the less fortunate, and the responsibilities of the poor. By introducing you to philosophical ethics, the course will also introduce you to philosophy more generally.

2 Readings and topics schedule

Date(s)	Reading
Getting started	
Jan 11	Course intro (no reading).
Jan 13	what are arguments? (no reading).
Jan 18	How to argue (Rawls on baseball).
Jan 20	how to read philosophy: Brown, "Blame".
Moral thinking	
Jan 23, 25, 27	Gill, "Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism".
Jan 30, Feb 1, 3	Wolf, "Moral Saints".
Feb 6, 8, 10	Foot, "Morality as a System of Categorical Imperatives".
Free will	
Feb 13, 15, 17	Levy and McKenna, "Recent Work on Free Will and Responsibility".
Feb 20, 22, 24	Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment".
Moral luck	
Feb 27, Mar 1, 3	Williams, "Moral Luck".
9 Mar 6, 8, 10	Card, "Responsibility and Moral Luck".
Spring Break	
Consent	
Mar 20, 22, 24	Pineau, "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis".
Mar 27, 30, 31	Dougherty, "Sex, Lies and Consent".
Famine and poverty	
Apr 3, 5, 7	Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality".
Apr 10, 12, 14	Narveson, "Is World Poverty a Moral Problem for the Wealthy?".
Justice and deviance	
Apr 17, 19, 21	Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto".
Apr 24, 26, 28	Threadcraft, "Intimate Injustice, Political Obligation . . .".
Final exam period	
May 1-5	

3 Grading and assessment

The assessment for this course is designed to give you the maximum opportunity to develop philosophical skills of discussion and argumentation, without unduly burdening you outside of class time. You grasp philosophy best by discussing it and writing about it. The University also insists that you have a final exam. Your assessment will thus comprise the following:

Arguments assignment (10%)

Your first assignment will allow you to practice skills of presenting and summarizing arguments, developed in the first part of the course (“getting started”). It will be due on January 27th. I will distribute instructions and rubric well in advance of this date.

In-class peer-graded writing assignments (6x10%)

The 13 weeks from January 23rd to April 28th are split so we cover six different topics, the first three (before Spring Break) in normative ethics, and the second three in applied ethics. In the Friday class time at the end of each period dedicated to a particular topic, you will write a short answer to a prompt. You will do this on Canvas; you will not need to come to the classroom to write the assignment. You will then grade (anonymously) two other students’ answers on a scale of 1–4. I will moderate the grading of a sample of the papers for each assignment. You will receive one point for completing each of your peer reviews, and your paper will be graded by two of your peers, so the total possible mark for each short answer is 10%. I will distribute guidance on answering the prompts and grading the answers, and we will practice this in class time before the first writing assignment.

Discussion board contributions (10x2%)

For each of those 13 weeks, there will be a discussion board on Canvas for talking about the reading for that week. You must make a contribution to a discussion in 10 of those weeks (you can make more contributions if you like, in which case your grade will be for the best one in a given week). Each contribution will be marked out of two, with one being a cursory contribution and 2 being a substantial contribution (I will explain well in advance what this means). The discussion boards will close each week at midday on Tuesday, and their contents will shape class content for the rest of the week.

Final exam (10%)

Your final exam will be a comprehensive test of your grasp of the key concepts and ideas from the semester. It will mostly be multiple choice questions, and will be administered through the VLE.

Your final grade will be determined by a conversion of your percentage score into a letter grade on the usual university scale.

4 Course objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- demonstrate sound knowledge of some issues in normative and applied ethics;
- demonstrate a conceptual understanding of those issues which enables the development and sustaining of an argument;
- deploy capacities for critical explication and presentation of arguments;
- describe and comment on particular aspects of recent research and/or scholarship;
- appreciate the uncertainty, ambiguity and limitations of knowledge in the discipline.

5 Policies

POLICIES GO HERE, E.G. DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION, ACADEMIC HONESTY, ELECTRONIC DEVICES