Ethics Bowl-Centric Ethics Class

*Course Syllabus*

Courtesy [EthicsinaNutshell.org](http://ethicsinanutshell.org/index.html)

Core Curriculum

* [*Ethics in a Nutshell: The Philosopher’s Approach to Morality in 100 Pages*](https://www.amazon.com/Ethics-Nutshell-Philosophers-Approach-Morality/dp/0989254240/ref%3Dasap_bc?ie=UTF8)by Matt Deaton
* [*Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?*](https://www.amazon.com/Justice-Whats-Right-Thing-Do/dp/0374532508/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1496671894&sr=1-1&keywords=sandel+justice) by Michael Sandel

Course Schedule

1. Discuss 3-5 cases from the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) case pool (available at NHSEB.unc.edu)
2. Read and discuss *Ethics in a Nutshell: An Intro for Ethics Bowlers*
3. Read and discuss Harvard Professor Michael Sandel’s *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* using the online video lectures as guides and supplements
4. Conduct an intra-class (or intra-school) Ethics Bowl in preparation
5. **Read and Discuss 3-5 Cases from the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) Case Pool (2-3 days)**

Visit nhseb.unc.edu, and click “[Rules and Resources](http://nhseb.unc.edu/resources/)” to download the most recent case pool, and scroll down to access case pools from past seasons.

**Suggested approach**: Read each case aloud to the class, ask the students to spend the first 3-5 minutes silently reflecting and recording their thoughts before discussing, then use the study questions in the case pool to guide thoughtful, respectful discussion. Remember that ethics bowl isn’t a debate, and that the class should work together in a cooperative effort to figure out which view makes the most sense, rather than each student independently attempting to prove that their view is superior. If they’re not great at this initially, that’s OK. By the time they work their way through *Nutshell* and *Justice,* they’ll be in a better position to think through the case pool both carefully and respectfully.

1. **Read and Discuss *Ethics in a Nutshell***

**Suggested approach**: Have the students read the book one chapter at a time at home, and use class time to review and discuss key concepts along the way. If a student objects to anything in the book, good! It means they’re thinking. Your job is to help them think more carefully and clearly, not to steer them to a particular conclusion. So if someone rejects the arguments supporting Utilitarianism, or argues that moral intuitions have no place in ethical reasoning, or doesn’t buy the refutation or moral subjectivism, help the class think through the ideas in a respectful, supportive manner, encouraging everyone to separate their egos from their positions, and to consider the arguments in a dispassionate, objective fashion. Lead by example – set a rational respectful tone and the class will eventually follow. ***For sample exam/quiz questions and essay/reflection/discussion prompts, visit EthicsinaNutshell.org. For video lectures by the author on each of the chapters, visit*** [www.EthicsinaNutshell.org](http://www.EthicsinaNutshell.org)***.***

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 1: Introduction & Chapter 2: What’s Ethics? (1-2 days)

*Philosophical ethics is the reason-based attempt to decide what we morally ought to do. These first two chapters distinguish the discipline, preview the rest of the book, and explain why the philosopher’s approach to moral decision-making can be complementary to a religious approach, as well as facilitate productive deliberation amongst persons from a variety of backgrounds and committed to a variety of doctrines.*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 3: Why Ethics Isn’t Ice Cream (2-3 days)

*Contrary to popular belief, we have good reason to think ethics is an objective subject, and not a mere matter of personal opinion. This chapter lays out simple but powerful arguments that attempt to dispel the allure of subjectivism.*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 4: Three Key Distinctions (1-2 days)

*As the title implies, this chapter makes three key distinctions. 1. When doing ethics “ought” and “should” are usually used in a prescriptive, rather than a predictive, sense. 2. Ethics concerns what people should do, apart from what they’re psychologically likely to do. 3. Morality and legality are related but distinct concepts that aren’t always linked. (Good law tracks morality, but not all things that are legal are moral, and not all things that are illegal are immoral.)*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 5: The Four Dominant Ethical Theories (4-5 days)

*This chapter provides an overview of the content of and arguments for the four dominant ethical theories: Kantianism, Consequentialism/Utilitarianism, Feminist Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics. Kantianism entails two main rules: always treat persons with respect (and never as mere tools), and only do things you could rationally “universalize.” Consequentialism/Utilitarianism mandates that we maximize net pleasure. Feminist Care Ethics emphasizes obligations that arise from our relationships with loved ones. Virtue Ethics recommends that we follow the established virtues, and avoid the established vices – or simply behave as a moral exemplar would behave.*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 6: All-Things-Considered (2-3 days)

*While the four dominant ethical theories sometimes recommend competing courses of action, we can apply them simultaneously and arrive at an “All-Things-Considered” view by reflecting on how powerfully each theory mandates certain actions, and choosing the option that enjoys the greatest net support.*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 7: Argument by Analogy (1-2 days)

*We can decide moral questions in an unfamiliar area by reflecting on relevantly similar cases in familiar areas and applying similar reasoning to the former. This chapter explains that process.*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 8: Moral Intuitions and Coherence (1-2 days)

*This chapter notes how our fundamental moral intuitions are necessary input into the ethical theorizing process, and explains that arriving at a coherent set of ethical beliefs is one goal of philosophical ethics.*

Ethics in a Nutshell Chapter 9: Conclusion (1 day)

*This final chapter recaps the book, drawing the reader’s attention to its central elements.*

1. **Read and Discuss Sandel’s *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?***

**Suggested approach**: Same as *Nutshell* – have the students read the book one chapter at a time at home, and use class time to review and discuss key concepts along the way. Note that *Justice* is more dense and pitched at a higher level than *Nutshell,* but I’ve used it with both university and high school students without issue. The below “episode” links are to video lectures featuring Professor Sandel himself. But if you find that an overview of the material might be helpful, I’ve included my own video lectures for most of the chapters as well. For sample quiz/exam and reflection/essay question, visit EthicsinaNutshell.org. ***For sample essay/reflection/discussion prompts watch the end of most of Deaton’s videos.***

**Justice Chapter 1: Doing the Right Thing (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/03/episode-01/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton (1 of 2): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRYyh4ku52s&t=32s>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton (2 of 2): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMqS5qoours>

**Justice Chapter 2: The Greatest Happiness Principle – Utilitarianism (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-two/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AfHFKjYJ-w>

**Justice 3: Do We Own Ourselves? – Libertarianism (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-three/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lVOnI5D8AO4>

**Justice Chapter 4: Hired Help – Markets and Morals (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episodes: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-04/#watch> and <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-05/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfXN_uj2dho>

**Justice Chapter 5: What Matters is the Motive – Immanuel Kant (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-06/#watch> (also part 1 of episode #7 – see below)

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0W6vLqzAZ8>

**Justice Chapter 6: The Case for Equality – John Rawls (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-07/#watch> (part 1 of this episode concerns Kant) and <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-08/#watch>

 (the 2nd half of this episode fits with chapter 8, on Aristotle)

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=021H2vWXMpU>

**Justice Chapter 7: Arguing Affirmative Action (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-09/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: (NA – haven’t made one yet – sorry!)

**Justice Chapter 8: Who Deserves What? – Aristotle (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-08/#watch> (part 2 of this episode) and <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-10/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlpdllVnOd8&t=55s>

**Justice Chapter 9: What Do We Owe One Another? – Dilemmas of Loyalty (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-11/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgDL4P0Rpss&t=7s>

**Justice Chapter 10: Justice and the Common Good (3-5 days)**

Accompanying Episode: <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-11/#watch> and <http://www.justiceharvard.org/2011/02/episode-12/#watch>

Accompanying Video Lecture by Deaton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMPkEi0xl-8&t=841s>

1. **Prepare for and Execute an Intra-Class (or Intra-School) Ethics Bowl (5-10 days)**

After a semester of preparation, having studied various moral reasoning techniques, political philosophies and social issues, now the students can finally form teams, hone their positions, and showcase all they’ve learned.

If you’ll be running a small intra-class bowl, consider using “Ethics Bowl for the Classroom” and the affiliated moderator’s script [here](https://nhseb.unc.edu/files/2014/06/Ethics-Bowl-for-the-Classroom.pdf) and [here](https://nhseb.unc.edu/files/2014/06/Ethics-Bowl-for-the-Classroom-Moderator-Script.pdf).

Be sure to remind students that even though a winner will be declared, ethics bowls are intended and designed to be more cooperative than competitive (the organizer of a bowl in Michigan recently called ethics bowl “anti-debate”). Teams are expected to model the behavior of wise and humble citizens – persons who do their research, rigorously apply logic and reasoning, listen carefully to all points of view, and are always willing to change their view if given good reason to do so.

To hold an intra-school (or intra-class) ethics bowl you will need:

1. At least two teams (preferably comprised of 3-5 students each)
2. Judges (preferably 3)
3. At least one moderator (to oversee the event, read the cases and questions, announce the winner, etc.)

The rules and procedures for the National High School Ethics Bowl can be found at [nhseb.unc.edu](http://nhseb.unc.edu). Depending on your class size, time constraints and other factors, you may choose to modify the process such that, for example, teams speak for shorter or longer periods of time, the students have access to the questions (in addition to the cases) before the competition, more than two teams simultaneously compete in the same room, etc.

Helpful Resources

* *National High School Ethics Bowl Regional Bowl Case Pool, updated annually, available at NHSEB.UNC.edu*
* *National High School Ethics Bowl Rules and Procedures, Judges Score Sheets, etc. available at NHSEB.UNC.edu*

***Postscript***

Discussing cases from the NHSEB case pool first will a) pique students’ interest in doing ethics, b) show them that it can be challenging, and c) help them recognize and articulate their pre-course views on moral reasoning. Then covering *Ethics in a Nutshell* will equip the students with powerful tools for deeper and more meaningful ethical analysis, and *Justice* and the accompanying videos will take their understanding to an entirely new level. Finally, returning to the cases to prepare for and execute an intra-school ethics bowl will allow the students to apply all they have learned, and knowing the course will end with a competition will give them an additional incentive to master the material.

This format is only a suggestion and should be adjusted based on class length, size, student interest and ease in grasping and applying the concepts. For example, to the right of each reading you will find a suggested number of days to devote to the topic. If you find that the students quickly understand the criticisms of moral subjectivism found in *Ethics in a Nutshell* Chapter Three: “Why Ethics Isn’t Ice Cream,” that chapter may only warrant 1 day of coverage rather than 4-5. On the other hand, if the class struggles to distinguish between Utilitarianism and egoism after a week discussing *Justice* Chapter Two: “The Greatest Happiness Principle,” it may warrant 2 weeks rather than 1.