University Ethics Intro

*Course Syllabus*

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

Required Readings (in the order we’ll read them)

* [*Ethics in a Nutshell*](https://www.amazon.com/Ethics-Nutshell-Philosophers-Approach-Morality/dp/0989254240/ref%3Dla_B01DPM73RM_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1496698107&sr=1-2)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=1496698133&sr=1-1&keywords=justice+sandel) by Michael Sandel
* Various philosophical articles, all of which will be posted to the course site in PDF for download

Catalog Course Description

A study of moral theory and ethical decision-making including a critical analysis of practical and professional cases

Prerequisites/Co-requisites

None

Course Outcomes

1. Explain and critique the ethical theories of the world’s most influential philosophers.

2. Apply various ethical theories to contemporary moral problems.

3. Assess philosophical arguments with the tools of logic.

4. Demonstrate competent writing skills in an argumentative and philosophical essay.

5. Demonstrate competent oral communication skills in a class presentation.

6. Describe how theories of morality apply to the self.

Reading and Assignments Schedule

*In most cases Organized by Thursdays, when new lecture videos and notes will be posted, through* ***Wednesdays, when reflection posts will be due by midnight*** *unless otherwise noted (look for underlined and bolded dates in the list below for deviations from that norm).*

***T*** Jan 17 – W Jan 18: Ethics in a Nutshell **Chapter 1**: Introduction and **Chapter 2**: What’s Ethics?

R Jan 19 – W Jan 25: Ethics in a Nutshell **Chapter 3**: Why Ethics Isn’t Ice Cream and **Chapter 4**: Three Key Distinctions

R Jan 26 – W Feb 1: Ethics in a Nutshell **Chapter 5**: The Four Dominant Ethical Theories

R Feb 2 – W Feb 8: Ethics in a Nutshell **Chapter 6**: All-Things-Considered, **Chapter 7**: Argument by Analogy, **Chapter 8**: Moral Intuitions and Coherence, and **Chapter 9**: Conclusion

***Sun Feb 12: EXAM ONE DUE BY MIDNIGHT (will be available M Feb 6 – Sun Feb 12)***

R Feb 9 – W Feb 15: Justice **Chapter 1**: Doing the Right Thing

R Feb 16 – W Feb 22: Justice **Chapter 2**: The Greatest Happiness Principle – Utilitarianism

R Feb 23 – W Mar 1: Justice Chapter 3: Do We Own Ourselves? – Libertarianism

R Mar 2 – W Mar 8: Justice **Chapter 5:** What Matters is the Motive – Immanuel Kant

***M*** Mar 13 – ***Sat*** Mar 18: NO CLASS – ENJOY SPRING BREAK

***M*** Mar 20 – W Mar 22: Justice **Chapter 6**: The Case for Equality – John Rawls

R Mar 23 – W Mar 29: Justice **Chapter 10**: Justice and the Common Good

***Sun Apr 2: EXAM TWO DUE BY MIDNIGHT (will be available M Mar 27 – Sun Apr 2)***

R Mar 30 – W Apr 5: The “Rate That Abortion” worksheet, John T. Noonan’s “An Almost Absolute Value in Human History” (aka “Abortion is Morally Wrong”), and Judith Jarvis Thompson’s “A Defense of Abortion”

R Apr 6 – W Apr 12: Margaret Olivia Little’s “The Moral Permissibility of Abortion” and Callahan’s “A Case for Pro-Life Feminism”

R Apr 13 – W Apr 19: Rosalind Hursthouse’s “Virtue Theory and Abortion” and Edward A. Langerak’s “Abortion: Listening to the Middle”

R Apr 20 – W Apr 26: Singer and Wells’s “Ectogenesis” and Sander-Staudt’s “Of Machine Born? A Feminist Assessment of Ectogenesis and Artificial Wombs”

***Sun Apr 30: EXAM THREE DUE BY MIDNIGHT (will be available M Apr 24 – Sun Apr 30)***

***W May 3: COURSE PROJECT DUE BY MIDNIGHT***

Grading Scale Percentages

A = 90-100% B = 80-89.99% C = 70-79.99% D = 60-69.99% F = 59.99% or below

Grade Distribution

Weekly Video/Written Reflection Posts: 30% Final grade

Exam One: 20% Final Grade

Exam Two: 20% Final Grade

Exam Three: 20% Final Grade

Course Project: 10% Final Grade

Assignments

**Video/Written Reflection Responses**

Each week I’ll post a video and lecture notes overviewing the assigned reading(s) and asking you to respond to at least one question – in some cases two questions. You can answer the assigned question(s) in one of two ways: 1) via a link to a YouTube (or Vimeo or whatever) video of **2-5 minutes (I’ll post instructions on how to do this in an announcement)**, or 2) via a written post of **200-500 words**. Staying within the minute/word requirements allows me to both better plan my grading and compare the quality of comparable submissions – thank you for planning and editing your videos and/or posts such that they’re between 2 and 5 minutes or 200-500 words. ***These weekly posts will be due each week by midnight Wednesday unless otherwise noted in the schedule or on the course website in writing.***

So long as your video or your post indicates you **read, reflected on and seriously engaged** the assigned reading(s), **you fully answer the prompt(s),** **and it falls within the minute or word count requirements** above, you will receive full credit – 10/10. I’m not asking for perfection, just thought and honest reflection – meaning it’s obvious from your post that you read the assigned material and thought a bit about the assigned question before replying. Demonstrate that, and you’ll get 10/10. (The mid-term, final, and course project are another story!)

**\* Bonus opportunity:** Since it takes a little more work to post a video than a written submission, and I appreciate being able to see you (and so too do your classmates), videos that meet the above criteria (obvious you read, reflected on and seriously engaged the reading(s), you fully answered the prompt(s), and it’s between 2 and 5 minutes) will receive two bonus points, **for a total of 12/10**. This can significantly offset poor exam grades, so take advantage – it’s likely the only extra credit opportunity that will be offered.

\*\* I’ll drop your lowest reflection post grade, so you can strategically skip a week if you like ☺ Just be ready for the mid-term/final.

**Exams**

You’ll take three exams **per the schedule in this syllabus**. Each will build on the previous, such that all will be cumulative, but expect the majority of the questions on any given exam to concern the most recent readings (for Exam One, *Ethics in a Nutshell,* for Exam Two, *Justice,* and for Exam Three, the Abortion articles). Unless I announce otherwise, the exams will be made up of multiple choice and true/false questions. Though I’m not a tough grader on the weekly reflection posts, expect the exams to be difficult. Prepare as you would for any in-person test. Note that while you may consult your notes, the course texts, my notes, etc. during the exam, you may not consult with one another, or any other person – the point is to judge your mastery of the material, and yours alone. The exams will also be timed, so bring your A game.

**Course Project**

After covering *Ethics in a Nutshell* and *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* we’ll close out the semester by reviewing several philosophical readings on the ethics of abortion. You’ll no doubt enter the class with some sort of view on whether abortion is permissible or impermissible, in which cases, and what details make a difference. My aim isn’t to convince you to adopt a predetermined conclusion, but to enrich your understanding of the complexity of considerations thoughtful people take into account when examining an issue such as this, and to prepare and encourage you to take similar care when thinking through other issues.

The course project will entail further analyzing the arguments we’ll consider, as well as formulating and presenting your own philosophical argument on abortion.

Note that the arguments politicians typically employ when discussing abortion are shamefully simplistic. By the end of the course project my goal is that you will possess and demonstrate a much more sophisticated understanding of the issue, key philosophical arguments surrounding it, as well as what you yourself rationally believe makes the most sense. Please keep this expectation in mind when completing the course project – simply asserting and defending a “right to life” or a “right to control one’s body” without applying the methods and concepts we’ll cover throughout the course, as well as covering and engaging the issue-specific readings will result in a poor grade – additional details on the course project will be made available on the course Blackboard site by the time you take Exam Two.

**\*\*\* Plagiarism Warning\*\*\***

“Plagiarism” is passing off someone else’s work as your own. This includes the work of your classmates, as well as ideas you might find in books or on the Internet. Consulting outside sources is admirable. **Copying and pasting language from outside sources without noting them as a source and/or failing to place direct quotes within “quote marks” is not admirable, and will earn you a zero for the assignment, and/or an F for the course.**

Philosophy isn’t the easiest thing to do when you’re new at it. But it’s not super hard, either, and therefore completely within your reach. If you’re having difficulty coming up with what you consider a quality submission for this or any other assignment, email or call me – promise I can help – don’t resort to plagiarism. Your dignity is worth more than 10 silly points, and your professor is here to help you – take advantage.