

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS BLHS 100

Course Description

Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. We study ethics to ask fundamental questions about the good life. By studying ethics we engage human values, rules and justifications. Ethics and morality are intimately connected; however, a distinction exists between the two. Whereas morality concerns itself with rules of conduct, ethics focuses on why certain actions are judged to be right, while others are wrong.

This course is an introductory course in ethics. We will begin by asking the basic question -- what is ethics, and move on to look at the connection between ethics and religion, the history of ethics, and attempt to answer questions about the "good life." The major concepts, theories and approaches to the academic study of ethics will be examined. Our survey will use classic texts from ancient, medieval and modern writers, secular and religious.

The second half of the course will attempt to place theory into practice, as we look at several contemporary ethical/moral issues confronting the world. By design the course is interdisciplinary, as various themes will enter into our discussion from ethical, philosophical and religious paradigms, as we attempt to compare/contrast traditional views with contemporary issues.

Students will have the opportunity to select either a major ethicist or contemporary ethical issue to research and prepare an oral presentation for the class.

Instructor

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Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30 – 3:00 PM, 3307 M St, NW, Second Floor

Course Goals

To provide an intellectual framework and analytical tools for students to discuss, reflect upon, understand, and propose solutions to a variety of ethical and moral issues confronting society today. By examining the foundations of Western ethical tradition, students will be able to better evaluate questions of virtue and moral character.

Course Requirements

1. Reading assignments
2. Three take-home essays. Questions will be distributed one week in advance.
3. 10-15 minute class presentation on a major ethicist or contemporary issue
4. Class participation

Evaluation

Students are expected to attend lectures, read assigned texts, submit three take-home essays, deliver a 10-15 minute oral presentation, participate in discussions, as well display an ability to absorb, comprehend, and analyze the course material.

Final grades will be based on the following:

- Class Participation 10%
- Take Home Essays 60% (20 X 3)
- Oral Presentation 30%

Disabilities Statement

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Levey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at www.georgetown.edu/honor, and in particular have read the following documents: *Honor Council Pamphlet*, "What is Plagiarism?", "Sanctioning Guidelines", and "Expedited Sanctioning Process."

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Readings Assignments

Required readings for each class are listed below, and should be completed before the class period. All others are highly recommended, and may be referred to in class. Power-Point slide, shorter articles and important documents will be uploaded to Blackboard. Additional websites will be announced, and official documents will be made available in class.

Oral Class Presentation

Students will have an opportunity to select from a list of contemporary ethicist (Wittgenstein, Hick, Moore, Spencer *et al.*), or a contemporary ethical issue, for their class presentation. Depending on class size, there will usually be four 10-15 minute presentations each class period, beginning week 10. Since only one presentation may be given for each ethicist/issue, students must obtain approval from the instructor for their selection.

Study Groups

Depending on class size, the class will be divided into study groups to prepare for a 10-15 minute group presentation on a contemporary ethical issue. Each group will be free to select a topic of their own choice and utilize audio/visual aids. Group presentations are separate from individual student presentations.

Texts

Required

Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). ISBN-13:978-0-268-01759-0.

James Rachels, Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Sixth Ed (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007). ISBN-13:978-0-07-338671-3.

Robert C. Solomon, Clancy W. Martin, *Morality and the Good Life*, Fourth Ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004). ISBN:0-07-283192-8.

Recommended

Steven M. Cahn, Peter Markie, *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). ISBN: 0195178408.

Shorter articles and relevant documents will be uploaded to Blackboard.

Electronic Devices

The use of audio/video recording devices in the classroom is strictly prohibited. Laptop computers may be used for note-taking, without internet surfing. Text messaging and/or cell phone use, except in emergency situations, is not permitted.

Course Syllabus

Week 1

Introduction to the Course

The Elements of Moral Philosophy

Ethical Questions: What is the Good Life? Why Be Good? Why Be Rational?

Readings:

James Rachels, Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007), Sixth Edition, 1-13.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). 1-13.

Week 2

Ethical Concepts, Theories and Approaches

Readings:

Robert C. Solomon, Clancy W. Martin, *Morality and the Good Life* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004). 1-67.

Blackboard postings

Week 3

The Challenge of Cultural Relativism

Readings:

Rachels, 14-31.

MacIntyre, 14-25.

Blackboard postings

Week 4

Subjectivism in Ethics; Does Morality Depend on Religion?

Readings:

Plato, *Euthyphro*, in Steven M. Cahn & Peter Markie, *Ethics: History Theory and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5-16.

Rachels, 32-47.

MacIntyre, 110-120.

Blackboard postings

First Take Home Exercise Distributed

Week 5

Ethical Egoism

Readings:

Rachels, 62-79.

MacIntyre, 33-50.

Plato, *Crito*, in Solomon-Martin, 68-80; *Republic*, Bks 1, 2 & 4, *Ibid.*, 81-99; Bk 7, *Ibid.*, 99-104

Blackboard postings

First Take Home Exercise Due

Week 6

Utilitarianism

Readings:

Rachels, 97-123

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* in Solomon-Martin, 318-352.

John Rawls, "Classic Utilitarianism," from *A Theory of Justice*, in Steven M. Cahn & Peter Markie, *Ethics*, 499-509.

Blackboard postings

Week 7

The Ethics of Virtue. Do Absolute Moral Rules Exist? What is the Good Life?

Readings:

Rachels, 124-135; 158-172

MacIntyre, 57-83.

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 1 in Solomon-Martin, 106-122; Bk 2, *Ibid.*, 122-136.

Second Take Home Exercise Distributed

Week 8**Normative Ethics; Rational Absolutism; Human Dignity, Punishment and Retributivism**Readings:

Rachels, 136-145.

MacIntyre, 190-198

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in Solomon-Martin, 259-281.

Passages from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* will be distributed

Week 9**Normative Ethics; Rational Absolutism; Human Dignity, Punishment and Retributivism**Readings:

Rachels, 130-140.

MacIntyre, 190-198

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in Solomon-Martin, 259-281.

Passages from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* will be distributed

Second Take Home Exercise Due

Week 10**A Social Contract**

Oral Presentations

Readings:

Rachels, 80-96.

MacIntyre, 130-140.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* in Solomon-Martin, 181-202

David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, in Solomon-Martin, 206-222; *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*, in Steven M. Cahn & Peter Markie, *Ethics*, 244-269.

Week 11**Natural Law**

Oral Presentations

Readings:

MacIntyre, 110-120.

Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, in Solomon-Martin, 148-178

Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Question 94, Articles 2, 3, 4; Question 95, Articles 2, 3; 1265-1272, will be distributed.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (excerpts), in Solomon-Martin, 380-397; and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *Ibid.*, 397-402.

Third Take Home Exercise Distributed

Week 12**Modern Ethical Theories**

Oral Presentations

Readings:

MacIntyre, 249-269.

Bertrand Russell, *Ethics and Objectivity*, in Solomon-Martin, 430-437.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (excerpts), in Solomon-Martin, 411-419; and *Being and Nothingness* (excerpts) *ibid.*, 419-429.

Third Take Home Exercise Due

Week 13

Contemporary Ethical Issues: War on Terror; Religious Wars

Oral Presentations

Readings:

David R. Smock, Ed., *Religious Perspectives on War* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2002)

Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/religion.htm>

Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on freedom of religion or belief. <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/religion/index.htm>

UNCHR Annual Report on Religious Intolerance.

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/religion/annual.htm>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr>

International Religious Freedom Report, US Dept. of State.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/>

The Oslo Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/oslo_declaration.html.<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/>

Final Papers/Projects and Presentations Due Today

Additional Contemporary Ethical Issues: Bioethics

Readings:

National Human Genome Research Institute, <http://www.genome.gov/10002335>

Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, 1987, Vatican.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html

Instruction Dignitas Personae on Certain Bioethical Questions, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, news release available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/12/AR2008121200774.html>

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences. *Excerpts of Scripta Varia 10*, "Why the Concept of Brain Death is Valid as a Definition of Death," Vatican, 2008.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdsaien/2008/excerpt_signs_of_death.pdf

LeRoy Walters & Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr, Eds., *Bibliography of Bioethics*, Vol. 33 (Washington, DC: Kennedy Institute of Bioethics, 2007). Good resource/reference

Additional Contemporary Ethical Issues: Right to life; Abortion; Euthanasia, Sexual Ethics, Capital Punishment, Social Justice

Readings:

<http://stemcells.nih.gov/>; <http://stemcellresearch.org/>; <http://www.abortionfacts.com/>

Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, Vatican,

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html

Humanae Vitae, Pope Paul VI, Vatican, 1968

James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia," in Steven M. Cahn & Peter Markie, *Ethics*, 779-783.

Mary Ann Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," *Ibid.*, 744-754.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Letters and Papers from Prison," will be distributed.

John Stuart Mill, "Speech in Favor of Capital Punishment," April 21, 1868.

Eighth Amendment, United States Constitution

Declaration of the Holy See to the First World Congress on the Death Penalty, Vatican, 2001.

Stephenson Nathanson, "An Eye for an Eye: The Morality of Punishing by Death," in Steven M. Cahn & Peter Markie, *Ethics*, 834-843.

May 5, 2010 is the absolute final day to have all course requirements fulfilled.

End of Course. This syllabus may be updated during the course.

Suggested Reading List

The following titles are highly recommended for further reading in the field of ethics and moral philosophy. Although not required for the course, some of the ideas presented by these authors may be discussed in class.

- Ernest Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Susan K. Allard-Nelson, *An Aristotelian Approach to Ethical Theory – The Norms of Virtue* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2004).
- Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*. John A. Oesterle, Trans. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).
- Maria Baghramian, *Relativism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Simon Blackburn, *Being Good: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Richard Brandt, *Ethical Theory: The Problem of Normative and Critical Ethics* (Temecula, CA: Textbook Publishers, 2003).
- Claudia Card, Ed., *Feminist Ethics* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991).
- Troels Engberg-Pederson, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Paul Guyer, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- W.F.R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1968).
- Clyde Kluckhohn, "Ethical Relativity: Sic et Non," *Journal of Philosophy* 52b(1955): 663-666.
- Carlos Santiago Nino, *The Ethics of Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- Robert William Shaver, *Rational Egoism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Eleanor Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).