

Ethics & Values (PHIL 220.002)
Morgan State University Fall 2022
MWF 3-3:50 PM COMM 118

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Office Hours: W 4-5 pm and by appt.

Course Description

Catalogue Description

This course explores contemporary moral issues stemming from business, science and technology, law, international affairs, the environment, public policy, interpersonal relations, etc., against the background of cultural values as illuminated by various ethical theories.

Learning Objectives

The purpose of this course is to expose students to a variety of topics from across moral philosophy. This course is a survey of moral philosophy from Aristotle to contemporary times. Some questions we'll discuss include: What makes an action good or right? What does happiness amount to? Do we have duties to one another? Is abortion immoral? Is genetic enhancement permissible? No previous coursework in philosophy is required.

My intention is not to impose my personal moral code on students. Rather, students are encouraged to develop their own individual moral code so that they can defend it from criticism. To that end, we will read pieces that support and criticize each view presented. We will also have four group debates in the first half of the course to get students ready to deal with full-fledged criticism.

Course Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will have had an introduction to moral philosophy. They will be able to correctly state and assess the claims made by the three most popular normative ethical theories as well as three kinds of moral anti-realism. Doing so will strengthen their critical thinking skills in all disciplines and even outside of academic life.

Course Requirements & Grading

There will be one 3-page paper (worth 25% of the final grade), one 5-page paper (worth 35%), and one in-class group presentation (worth 30%). Participation and attendance will account for the final 10%. The due dates are as follows:

Paper One: Due by 11:59 pm 9/30

Paper Two: Due by 11:59 pm 11/4

Presentations: Weeks Thirteen through Sixteen

Paper One

A word document should be uploaded to canvas by 11:59 PM on September 30th. It should be double-spaced, have one-inch margins, be 12-point font, and be at least three pages long. Your third page has to have at least one line of text on it, not including bibliographical information.

Choose THREE of the following questions (borrowed from icebreakerideas.com/moral-dilemma-questions) and answer them without referencing any texts/readings. I want to know what your knee-jerk/gut reaction/intuition tells you to do in these circumstances. You will have a chance in the 5-page paper to support your ideas with readings from the course.

1. You see your married friend out with someone who is not their spouse. The two are being very affectionate. They leave without seeing you. Do you say nothing, tell your friend's spouse that you saw them and try to convince them to confess, or tell your friend what you saw?

2. You are on a cruise and the ship encounters an unexpected storm. The storm continues to rage and eventually you and the other passengers are told you must head to the lifeboats and abandon ship. As people begin to line up, you realize some lines have fewer people, some have families, and some seem to have younger, single people. You know you are strong and capable. Do you choose to help a group composed of three families with a few young children, a group of seniors who obviously could use your help, or go with the young, strong people, with whom you might have a better chance of survival?

3. Your neighbor leaves their dog out in all kinds of weather. The poor animal frequently looks like it is miserable. Sometimes it is out of water and seems to be fed rarely. Do you report what you think is happening or stay quiet?

4. Your lunch keeps missing at work. You are pretty sure you know who is taking it each day. Do you confront them, report it to your supervisor or HR, get them back by making a cat food sandwich, or just keep quiet?

Paper Two

A word document should be uploaded to canvas by 11:59 PM on November 4th. It should be double-spaced, have one-inch margins, be 12-point font, and be at least five pages long. Your fifth page has to have at least one line of text on it, not including bibliographical information.

You are to rewrite paper one with an eye toward defending from at least one criticism. However, this time you must use at least one reading from the course. You can use the reading to support your view or you can use it as a criticism from which you defend your view. Keep as much of paper one as you like. If you have changed your mind after my comments, then change the paper. If you have not, then you need only make minor changes.

Presentation

At the beginning of the semester, I will break you up into eight groups. You will rank the applied ethics topics found at the end of the syllabus. I will then assign each group a presentation date sometime in the final four weeks of the semester.

You will have the entire class period to present the assigned reading for that day. You should work together to have at least one visual aid: a handout, a PowerPoint, or an outline of the main arguments written on the board. You should also come up with at least three discussion questions for the rest of the class to discuss in small groups. I will be asking you questions at the end to assess how much you have prepared for the presentation.

Participation

You are allowed two unexcused absences before they will begin to affect your grade. Not counting the first week, we have 33 scheduled meetings. Your grade will be determined by dividing the number of times that you are in class (not counting the first week) by 31 (maximum 100%).

Grading Scale

A: 90-100 B: 80-89.9 C: 70-79.9 D: 60-69.9 F: 0-59.9

In extraordinary circumstances an incomplete grade can be granted. You have to have completed at least one assignment in order to receive an incomplete. All incompletes must be removed by the end of the next semester of enrollment following the granting of an incomplete (“I”) grade.

Course Policies

Use of Electronics

In this course you will be allowed to use your laptop or tablet to take notes or view the readings on canvas. Using an electronic device for anything outside of this will result in being marked absent for the day.

Late Work

Late assignments are penalized at a rate of three points per day late (e.g., a 90 becomes an 84 on a 2-day-late paper), up to one week. Assignments that are more than a week late will receive a zero. Deadline extensions are granted only in exceptional, documented circumstances, and at the discretion of the instructor.

Academic Integrity

Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade on the assignment. In addition, all such instances may be reported to the student’s Dean, some of whom have indicated that they will suspend any student who commits academic dishonesty. Examples of significant academic dishonesty include non-incidental plagiarism, which is deliberately using the writings or ideas of others without proper citation, having someone other than a student complete an assignment, copying the work of another person, and cheating on a test. Students are encouraged to read the official university policy regarding academic integrity which can be found in their student handbook.

Students with Disabilities

The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) provides and coordinates services to students with disabilities. The SSD program is designed to help ensure that students with

disabilities have equal access to university programs and to help provide an environment in which they can be successful while enrolled at Morgan.

Morgan State University is committed to providing barrier-free education to individuals with disabilities and actively works to have its facilities and programs in full compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Action of 1973. Prospective or currently enrolled students who have learning, mental or physical disabilities should contact the SSD Coordinator before registering for classes. Accommodations, which may include special registration, reader services, specialized equipment, note takers, sign language interpreters, or other arrangements to aid in removing or circumventing architectural, social, or procedural barriers, may be available to assist students with disabilities.

It is the responsibility of students in need of accommodation to request an accommodation from SDSS before or at the beginning of the semester. Persons with questions may contact SDSS@morgan.edu.

Graduating Seniors

Graduating seniors must complete all of the requirements for the course and are responsible for all readings. Graduating seniors must identify themselves to the instructor well in advance of the end of the course.

Reading Schedule

All readings are either linked below or available on canvas.

Week Four: Course Introduction

9/12: Argument Clinic (No Assigned Reading)

9/14: How to Write a Philosophy Paper (No Assigned Reading)

9/16: What is a Moral Theory? (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-theory/>)

Week Five: Ethical Theories (Utilitarianism)

9/19: "Letter to Menoeceus", Epicurus

9/21: *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 2 only), John Stuart Mill

9/23: Selections from *Principia Ethica*, G.E. Moore

Week Six: Ethical Theories (Utilitarianism)

9/26: "Alienation, Consequentialism, & the Demands of Morality" (Section I-III only), Peter Railton

9/28: "Classical Utilitarianism", John Rawls

9/30: Group Debate on Utilitarianism

Week Seven: Ethical Theories (Deontology)

10/3: Selections from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant

10/5: Selections from *Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant

10/7: Selections from *The Right and the Good*, W.D. Ross

Week Eight: Ethical Theories (Deontology)

10/10: “The Trolley Problem”, Judith Jarvis Thomson

10/12: Section 4 “The Weaknesses of Deontological Theories”
(<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/#WeaDeoThe>)

10/14: Group debate on Deontology

Week Nine: Ethical Theories (Virtue Ethics)

10/17: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, Aristotle

10/19: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II, Aristotle

10/21: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI, Aristotle

Week Ten: Ethical Theories (Virtue Ethics)

10/24: “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology”, Gilbert Harman

10/26: Section 4 “Objections to Virtue Ethics” (<https://iep.utm.edu/virtue/#H4>)

10/28: Group Debate on Virtue Ethics

Week Eleven: Meta-Ethics (Moral Anti-Realism)

10/31: "Expressivism and Moore's Paradox", Jack Woods

11/2: “The Error in Error Theory” (Sections I-II only), Stephen Finlay

11/4: “In Defense of Moral Error Theory”, Jonas Olson

Week Twelve: Meta-Ethics (Moral Anti-Realism)

11/7: “A Defense of Ethical Relativism”, Ruth Benedict

11/9: “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”, James Rachels

11/11: Group Debate on Realism vs Anti-Realism

Week Thirteen: Applied Ethics (Abortion)

11/14: Guest Speaker Shodekeh Talifero

11/16: “Why Abortion is Immoral”, Don Marquis

11/18: “A Defense of Abortion”, Judith Jarvis Thomson

Week Fourteen: Applied Ethics (Selective Abortion)

11/21: “Why Members of the Disability Community Oppose Prenatal Diagnosis and Selective Abortion”, Marsha Saxton

11/23: **NO CLASS. Happy Thanksgiving!**

11/25: **NO CLASS. Happy Thanksgiving!**

Week Fifteen: Applied Ethics (Genetic Enhancement)

11/28: “Why I Had Amniocentesis”, Mary Ann Baily

11/30: “The Case against Perfection”, Michael Sandel

12/2: “Genetic Interventions and the Ethics of Enhancement of Human Beings”, Julian Savulescu

Week Sixteen: Applied Ethics (TBD)

12/5: TBD by class vote (Please submit topic(s) by 11:59 pm on Friday September 16th https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeUvuGi8OSuejckhas7Nbe_SU5J42IP25u7oSAqWibtrrDkKw/viewform?usp=sf_link)

12/7: TBD by class vote