

Syllabus for Philosophy 160: Introductory Ethics

Summer Session, 2015

Course Description:

In this course, you will learn about the philosophical study of morality (a.k.a., ethics), while developing philosophical skills of analysis and argumentation. We begin by investigating the *status* of morality, i.e. whether morality is relative, objective or perhaps altogether nonexistent. Proceeding on the assumption that morality is objective, we will evaluate different approaches to the question “What makes actions right or wrong?”, an issue in *normative ethics*. Finally, we will study several contemporary ethical issues including abortion, animal welfare, poverty, and racism.

Questions we will discuss include:

1. Does morality depend on your religion or culture?
2. Does morality exist at all?
3. What makes morally right actions right and morally wrong actions wrong?
4. When, if ever, is abortion morally permissible? What does a feminist perspective imply about this issue?
5. Is factory farming and/or killing animals for the sake of science and/or humans’ gustatory pleasure morally permissible? If so, what is the moral difference between humans and non-human animals?
6. What are our duties to the poor?
7. What is racism? What makes it morally wrong?

Contact Information:

Instructor: Josh DiPaolo

Online Office Hours: T/Th 11-Noon CST & By appointment

E-mail: jdipaolo@philos.umass.edu OR Course Website Email Tool

Technical Support: 24/7 UMass Online Help Desk and Technical Support

- Phone: 1-888-300-6407
- Email: amherstsupport@umassonline.net
- Click on “Live Text Support” on the login page to text chat with support staff

In this class, students will:

- Think critically about foundational and contemporary ethical issues.
- Learn how philosophers approach philosophical issues.
- Learn how to analyze and evaluate arguments.
- Practice formalizing and evaluating arguments.
- Develop a disposition for finding the philosophical in the familiar.
- Develop a disposition for being a critical, reflective citizen.

To help students achieve these goals, the instructor will:

- Explain course material clearly, in an interesting way.

- Design assignments that allow students to develop these skills and manifest these dispositions.
- Provide respectful, forward-looking feedback, in a timely manner.
- Adapt to students' individual needs.

Required Texts:

Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, **SECOND EDITION**
(ISBN: 0199773556)

Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Ethical Life*, **SECOND EDITION**
(ISBN: 0199773521)

Course Assignments:

3 Discussion Pieces	10%
Current Event Papers	10%
Reading Responses	10%
Exam 1	18%
Exam 2	22%
Exam 3	30%

Comments on these Assignments

Discussion Pieces: You will complete three discussion posts. The first is an introductory post. Directions for how to complete the introductory post will be available during preview week.

The second and third fall into what I call the “Philosophy in Life” posts. See the *Guidelines for Philosophy in Life Posts* in the Introductory Material Folder.

Current Event Papers: You will write 3 (one-paged, single-spaced) current event papers. In these papers, you will find a news article related to an ethical issue, provide the instructor with access to the article (either scan and email it, or include a link at the end of your paper), summarize the article very briefly (in about 1 paragraph), and critically engage with the issue. You will offer your opinion on the issue, providing your **reasons** for believing what you do—these reasons should be convincing to someone who has not made up their mind about the issue. If applicable, you should explain why you disagree with the author—again, explaining why the author’s reasons are unpersuasive.

The first will be a “practice” paper, worth no points. The purpose of this practice paper is for you to get feedback from me on how to complete these assignments, without any cost to your grade. The other two will be assessed on how well you incorporate my previous feedback. So, not only will they be graded based on their individual quality, but also in terms of their **improvement**.

Reading Responses: For each unit, you will pick three of the assigned readings. For each reading, you will do three things: First, write a comprehension question on the

reading—a question to which someone who fully understood the reading should know the answer. Second, write a critical thinking question—a question that asks someone to engage with one of the arguments of the reading. Third, answer each of these questions. These assignments will be due two days before the exams are due. They are meant to give you incentive to keep up with the reading, and to help you engage with the readings.

Exams: At the end of each unit, you will take an exam. Exams increase in grade percentage because they are **cumulative**. Although students tend to dislike cumulative exams, they actually **benefit** students and **promote learning**. Cumulative exams allow students (1) to learn from their mistakes, (2) to demonstrate improvement in understanding, and (3) to be rewarded for this improvement. Memorization is static and discrete; learning is dynamic and continuous. Cumulative exams assess and reward learning rather than mere memorization.

Exams will be available by the beginning of the Catch-Up day. Completed exams must be submitted by 11:59pm on the following day.

Course Policies

Online Office Hours/Reaching Me: I will be on the course website accepting chat messages Tuesday and Thursday 11-Noon CST. You can ask me any questions you have during this time. (I will more than likely be on the course website more often than this and if you see me online you can feel free to message me. But officially T & Th 11-Noon.) If these times don't work for you and you'd like to "meet" with me to chat, we can figure out a time that we can both log-on and chat then. Also, I will check my email regularly throughout the day. So I should be easily reachable. Please let me know at any time if you feel like you need more contact with me. I will do anything I can to oblige.

Lectures: Each topic of the course will have corresponding lectures posted on the course website. You should consult these lectures in addition to doing the assigned reading. Exams will be based on BOTH readings and lectures.

Readings: The schedule below lists the readings for the relevant days of the course. Readings marked:

- "FE" can be found in *The Fundamentals of Ethics*
- "EL" can be found in *The Ethical Life*
- "CW" can be found in the Readings Folder on the Course Website
- One reading is a blog post on the Internet. It is marked as such.

Scheduling, Late, & Make-up Work: Notice that, besides the final exam, I have scheduled nothing for any weekend day. (This is to allow you to enjoy your weekends!) As I view our timeline, there are 29 days in the course (Monday through Friday, from 5/18-6/26, and one holiday) spread over 6 weeks. This means that

each of our weeks counts for about 2 weeks of a regular semester course. Accordingly, late work will be accepted only in the most severe of circumstances. As the instructor, I will have final word on which circumstances are severe.

Assignment Due Dates:

Unit 1

- 5/20 Discussion 1
- 5/22 Reading Responses
- 5/27 Exam 1

Unit 2

- 6/1 Current Event Paper 1
- 6/4 Discussion 2
- 6/8 Reading Responses
- 6/10 Exam 2

Unit 3

- 6/12 Current Event Paper 2
- 6/22 Current Event Paper 3
- 6/24 Reading Responses
- 6/25 Discussion 3
- 6/27 Exam 3

Disabilities: Please let me know immediately if you have any disabilities that may affect your progress in this course. I will do my best to accommodate.

Cheating: DON'T CHEAT. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism and copying another student's exam. All of the relevant information for the course will be easily accessed on the course website or in the assigned readings. There will be absolutely no reason to cheat. If I find out that you've cheated in some way, you will fail the course and I will report you to the dean.

Date	Readings	Assignments Due
UNIT 1 Metaethics		
Day One (5/18) Course introduction, logic and arguments	Handouts (Download from course website) Introduction (FE)	
Day Two (5/19) Morality and Religion	Chapter 5 (FE)	
Day Three (5/20) Ethical relativism and Ethical	Chapter 19 (FE)	Discussion 1 Due

subjectivism		
Day Four (5/21) Ethical nihilism	Chapter 20 (FE)	
Day Five (5/22) Ethical objectivism	Chapter 21 (FE)	Reading Responses Due
(5/25)	Holiday: Memorial Day	
Day Six (5/26)	Catch-Up	
Day Seven (5/27)		Exam 1 Due
UNIT 2 Normative Ethics		
Day Eight (5/28) Consequentialism	Chapters 9 and 10 (FE)	
Day Nine (5/29) Consequentialism (cont'd)		
Day Ten (6/1) Deontology	Chapters 11 and 12 (FE)	Current Event Paper 1 Due
Day Eleven (6/2) Deontology (cont'd)		
Day Twelve (6/3) Virtue Ethics	Chapter 17 (FE) Aristotle, excerpt from <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (EL)	
Day Thirteen (6/4) Virtue Ethics (cont'd)		Discussion 2 Due
Day Fourteen (6/5) Feminist Ethics	Chapter 18 (FE) Lindemann, "What is Feminist Ethics?"	
Day Fifteen (6/8) Feminist Ethics (cont'd)		Reading Responses Due
Day Sixteen (6/9)	Catch-Up	
Day Seventeen (6/10)		Exam 2 Due
UNIT 3 Applied Ethics		
Day Eighteen	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (EL)	

(6/11) Abortion	Saul, "Abortion" (CW) Schouten, "What Do We Owe to the Violinist?" On the Philosop-her blog.	
Day Nineteen (6/12) Abortion (cont'd)		Current Event Paper 2 Due
Day Twenty (6/15) Abortion (cont'd)		
Day Twenty One (6/16) Animal Welfare	Martin, "A Critique of Moral Vegetarianism" (CW) Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs and People: Meat Eating and Marginal Cases" (EL)	
Day Twenty Two (6/17) Animal Welfare (cont'd)		
Day Twenty Three (6/18) Poverty and Duties to the Poor	Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" (EL) Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" (CW) Sen, "Property and Hunger" (CW)	
Day Twenty Four (6/19) Poverty (cont'd)		
Day Twenty Five (6/22) Poverty (cont'd)		Current Event Paper 3 Due
Day Twenty Six (6/23) Racism	Anderson, "Segregation, Racial Stigma, and Discrimination" (CW) Kelly & Roedder, "Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias" (CW)	
Day Twenty Seven (6/24) Racism (cont'd)		Reading Responses Due
Day Twenty Eight (6/25) Racism (cont'd)		Discussion 3 Due
Day Twenty Nine (6/26)	Catch-Up	
(6/27)		Exam 3 Due

If I find that making changes to this schedule will foster students' learning, I will make them.