

# INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

SEMESTER

Days, Time, Room

## INSTRUCTOR

Jonathan Spelman

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to some ethical questions and identifies some potential answers to them. We consider specific questions like whether we have a moral obligation to donate money to poverty relief or to enact affirmative action policies as well as whether we are morally permitted to buy and eat factory-farmed meat or to view pornography. We also consider more general questions like what makes our lives go well, whether there are any moral rules, and, if so, what they are. Along the way, this course helps students develop the philosophical skills they need to answer these questions. In particular, it helps students to construct and evaluate arguments, devise thought experiments and counterexamples, and develop intellectual courage, empathy, and humility.

## OFFICE HOURS

I will hold office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:00-2:50 in Hellems 15. I will also be available by appointment.

## COURSE TEXTS

Most readings will come from the required texts listed below and the course pack.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Exploring Ethics*: Cahn, Steven M. *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- *CP*: Course Pack

## TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Studies show that students who write their notes retain more information than those who type their notes (see, for example, <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>). In light of that, I ask that you not use your laptops during class. Of course, if you have a compelling reason for using your laptop during class, please let me know. I am willing to make exceptions to this rule in certain cases.

## GRADES

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the university's uniform grading policy. "A" grades are exceptional and are reserved for those students who demonstrate both a comprehensive understanding of the material and competence with all the philosophical skills we work on over the course of the semester. "B-/C+" grades are average.

## **GRADED ELEMENTS**

### *CLASS PREPARATION AND ATTENDANCE*

You are expected to prepare for each class period by reading and flagging the assigned text and reflecting on its content. You are also expected to attend class regularly. After your fifth absence, each additional absence will result in a 2.5% reduction in your final grade.

### *PARTICIPATION*

You are expected to be an active participant in all small group activities and discussions and to contribute regularly to large group discussions. This is good, not only for you, but also for your classmates and me. We will all benefit from your contributions. It is particularly important that you participate in peer review and homework activities, that you be ready to present any material you are asked to prepare, and that you participate in two large-group debates. Your class participation grade will account for 10% of your final grade.

### *JOURNAL*

You are expected to keep a journal in which you'll write down your reflections on the topics we discuss. Each journal entry should be at least 150 words. It should be a clear and thoughtful, and it should answer the prompt for that topic. Your journal entries will typically be due on Fridays. Your journal grade accounts for 15% of your final grade.

### *HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS*

Homework will be assigned on Fridays and will be due on Mondays. Although you should complete each homework assignment on your own, you will be able to rework #1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8 in small groups of your peers. Of these six grades, your lowest grade will be dropped. Each of the remaining grades will account for 2% of your final grade. You will not be able to rework homework assignments #3, 6, or 9. Each of these homework assignments will account for 5% of your final grade. Combined, your homework assignments will account for 25% of your final grade.

### *MISCELLANEOUS ASSIGNMENTS*

You will be asked to complete a number of miscellaneous assignments throughout the semester. These will receive either a passing or a failing grade. Assignments that receive a failing grade can be redone. Your miscellaneous assignments will account for 10% of your final grade.

### *PAPERS*

During the semester, you will write two 3-4 page (900-1200 word) papers. We will talk more about the paper requirements during the writing workshop. A hard copy of your first paper will be due in class on Monday of Week 7. An electronic copy of your second paper will be due by 11:59 pm on the day of your final exam. Each paper will account for 20% of your final grade.

<u>GRADED ELEMENT</u>	<u>%</u>
Participation	10
Journal	15
Homework	25
Miscellaneous Assignments	10
<u>Papers</u>	<u>40</u>
Total	100

## ASSIGNED READINGS

### *Week 1 – Introduction to Ethics*

Mon Blanda, "[The Other Side Is Not Dumb](#)"

Wed CP: How to Read Philosophy

**Redo summary of passage from Mill's *On Liberty***

Fri CP: Pojman and Vaughn, excerpt from *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*

### *Week 2 – World Poverty*

Mon **No Class (Labor Day/Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)**

Wed CP: Reconstructing and Evaluating Arguments

**Homework #1**

Fri CP: Thought Experiments and Counterexamples

*Exploring Ethics*: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

### *Week 3 – World Poverty*

Mon **Homework #2**

Wed *Exploring Ethics*: Travis Timmerman, "A Reply to Singer"

Fri **Debate #1: World Poverty**

### *Week 4 – Factory-Farmed Meat*

Mon CP: How to Write a Précis

CP: Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases"

**Précis of "Puppies, Pigs, and People"**

Wed **Redo précis of "Puppies, Pigs, and People"**

Fri **Devise counterexamples to the main argument in "Puppies, Pigs, and People"**

### *Week 5 – Writing Workshop*

Mon **Quiz on "Puppies, Pigs, and People"**

Wed Writing Workshop

Fri Writing Workshop

### *Week 6 – Writing Workshop*

Mon Writing Workshop

Wed Writing Workshop

Fri Writing Workshop

### *Week 7 – Absolutism*

Mon **Paper #1**

*The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 15, Ethical Pluralism and Absolute Moral Rules

Wed CP: Philippa Foot, "Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect"

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"

### *Week 8 – Consequentialism*

Mon **Homework #3**

Wed *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 9, Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions

*Exploring Ethics*: John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism"

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Louis P. Pojman, "Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism"

*Week 9 – Hedonism*

Mon **Homework #4**

Wed *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 1, Hedonism: Its Powerful Appeal

Fri *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 2, Is Happiness All That Matters?  
CP: Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

*Week 10 – Meaning in Life*

Mon **Homework #5**

Wed *Exploring Ethics*: Susan Wolf, “Meaning in Life”

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Christine Vitrano, “Meaningful Lives?”

*Week 11 – Deontology*

Mon **Homework #6**

Wed *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 12, The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Onora O’Neill, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics”

*Week 12 – Virtue Ethics*

Mon **Homework #7**

Wed *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 17, Virtue Ethics

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Aristotle, “The Nature of Virtue”

*Exploring Ethics*: Julia Driver, “Virtue Ethics”

*Week 13 – The Ethics of Care*

Mon **Homework #8**

Wed *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: Chapter 18, Feminist Ethics

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Virginia Held, “The Ethics of Care”

*Exploring Ethics*: Cheshire Calhoun, “Gender Bias”

*Week 14 – Pornography*

Mon **Homework #9**

Wed *Exploring Ethics*: Helen E. Longino, “Pornography, Oppression, and Freedom”

CP: Michael Rea, “What Is Pornography?”

Fri *Exploring Ethics*: Joel Feinberg, “The Case Against Pornography: An Assessment”

*Week 15 – Affirmative Action*

Mon *Exploring Ethics*: Steven M. Cahn, “Two Concepts of Affirmative Action”

Wed *Exploring Ethics*: Karen Hanson, “Facing Facts and Responsibilities”

*Exploring Ethics*: Laurence Thomas, “What Good Am I?”

Fri CP: Daniel M. Hausman, “Affirmative Action: Bad Arguments and Some Good Ones”

*Final Exam: Debate #2 and Paper #2*