

Spring 2013
TTh 11:00-12:15
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Mark Phillips
Office: LA 391
Hours: by appointment

Social Ethics

(Philosophy 1200, Section 001)

Course Description

Ethics is the study of right and wrong action, of what makes some ways of acting good or bad, moral or immoral. Social Ethics is the study of specific issues whose “morality” is especially important to human society. In an Ethics course our attention is focused more on the theoretical aspect of moral decision making, while in Social Ethics the emphasis is on particular moral issues which affect the public at large. In this course, we will be looking at a number of moral theories, not in order to determine which (if any) of them is the one true approach, but as a means of addressing the ethical problems facing society today.

Course Objectives

Our primary objective in the course will be to gain an understanding of ethical theory, and its relevance to a variety of societal issues. For that reason, our readings will be divided into two parts: the first meant to acquaint students with the necessary terminology, and the second to examine particular issues in order to figure out ways in which certain ethical theories might be helpful. Throughout the course, our attention will be divided between the theoretical nature of ethical theories and their potential value for contemporary society. We will also try to determine whether ethical claims are restricted to a particular time or culture, or whether they pertain to all people in all times and places.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, the student will have a better understanding of the nature of ethical theory, as well the relation between claims about a particular subject, arguments constructed to support them, and the beliefs underlying such arguments. Specifically, students will be able to: 1) identify certain important theories in the history of Ethics, 2) define key terms in philosophical thought generally and ethical thought in particular, 3) have a clear sense of the

applicability of those theories to contemporary issues, and 4) be better at assessing the strengths and weakness of the arguments used to support or refute specific ethical claims relevant to issues which might very well affect their own life and future.

Course Requirements

Students will be expected to keep up on the weekly reading assignments for the course, to have read the material *prior* to class, and to come to class with relevant questions about, and/or criticisms of, those readings.

There will be 3 in-class examinations on material from the reading and class lectures, and there will be no make-up exams.

Each student will also be required to write a term paper of not less than 2,000 words on a philosophical subject of his or her choice. The paper is due on or before the last day of class, and will not be accepted late.

Students will also be requested to pay close attention to current news issues (both in order to determine the relevance of philosophy to our present concerns, and to generate a variety of possible paper topics).

Attendance

Regular *attendance* is also required, and will count toward the final grade. Missing more than 5 days of class will result in the loss of one letter grade (e.g. A + 3 days of absence = B). *And use of objects external to the course (e.g. cell phones, novels, calculators, etc.) equals absence, as does unconsciousness.*

Grading

Each test will count for 25% of the overall score, and the term paper the remaining 25% – (3 x test = 75%) + (1 x paper = 25%) = 100%. An overall score of 360 = A; 320 = B; 280 = C; 240 = D; anything less = F. Failing all tests will necessarily result in an F. And in-class attendance will decide all borderline cases.

Required Text

Lewis Vaughn, Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning & Contemporary Issues (3rd ed.), Norton, 2013.

Also Recommended:

Hugo Bedau - Thinking and Writing about Philosophy and/or
Zachary Seech - Writing Philosophy Papers

Additional readings will vary according to each student's chosen paper topic (for example, four to six essays or articles - or - a book and two reviews or commentaries).

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and to evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the UNO Judicial Code for further information. The Code is available online:

http://www.uno.edu/~stlf/Policy%20Manual/judicial_code_pt2.htm

Class Conduct & Sexual Harassment

Students will be expected to conduct themselves in a way conducive with the policies of UNO (including those regarding sexual harassment). If anyone feels they are subject to such harassment, please notify either myself or another member of the UNO faculty or administration.

Disability Accommodations:

UNO is committed to providing for the needs of students who have disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Students who qualify for services will receive academic modifications to which they are legally entitled. It is the responsibility of students who may require such services or modifications to register each semester with the Office of Disability Services (University Center 260) and follow its procedures for obtaining assistance.

Tentative Reading Schedule

January	15	Introduction
	17	Sample Paper Topics
	22	Chapter One: Ethics & The Examined Life
	24	Chapter Two: Subjectivism, Relativism & Emotivism
	29	"
	31	Chapter Three: Evaluating Moral Arguments
February	5	Chapter Four: The Power of Moral Theories
	7	"

	12	<i>Mardi Gras – We Got No Class</i>
	14	Chapter Five: Ethical Egoism
	19	Chapter Six: Nonconsequentialist Theories
	21	“
	26	Chapter Seven: Virtue Ethics
	28	“
March	5	Review
	7	<i>First Exam – Chapters 1-7</i>
	12	Chapter Eight: Abortion
	14	Chapter Nine: Altering Genes & Human Cloning
	19	Chapter Ten: Euthanasia & Physician-Assisted Suicide
	21	Chapter Eleven: Capital Punishment
	26	<i>Spring Break – Again We Got No Class</i>
	28*	“
April	2	Chapter Twelve: Sexual Morality
	4	Chapter Thirteen: Same-Sex Marriage
	9	Review
	11	<i>Second Exam – Chapters 8-13</i>
	16	Chapter Fourteen: Environmental Ethics
	18	Chapter Fifteen: Animal Rights
	23	Chapter Sixteen: Political Violence
	25	Chapter Seventeen: Global Economic Justice
	30	Review
May	2	Submit Term Papers
	9	<i>Final (12:30 pm)</i>
	*	Final date to drop courses or resign from the University: 4/1