

PHIL 310
Introduction to Ethics
Cosumnes River College
Spring 2020
Tues/Thurs, 12:00 – 1:20 pm, BSS 129

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Course description: We live in a society increasingly divided on questions of morality, politics, culture, and religion. This course addresses the application of theories developed by traditional and contemporary moral philosophy to the ethical problems, dilemmas, and issues of today. The course is divided into three parts. First, we will examine the ethical philosophies of Aristotle, Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. Second, we will explore the psychology of morality from a philosophical standpoint and consider whether anything constructive can be achieved in light of moral disagreement. Finally, we will use these philosophical and psychological insights to discuss the moral problems of abortion, the moral status of animals, world poverty and hunger, racism, gun control, and moral progress. While it is human nature to disagree about these topics, as President Lincoln said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Therefore, even if we cannot live in perfect harmony under one roof, my hope is that students learn something about what it might take to keep the house standing.

Required Texts:

Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Ethical Life* (Oxford University Press, 2016, 4th edition)
ISBN: 978-0190631314

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (Vintage Books, 2012)
ISBN: 978-0307455772

All other required texts will be supplied electronically in pdf format.

Course Learning Outcomes and Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- SLO #1: identify important questions and conceptions within Ethics, distinguish from among divergent interpretations those that are better supported and those that are less well supported, construct well supported interpretations of diverse viewpoints and reason well about written and oral discourse.
- Objective 1a: evaluate information concerning central issues within Ethics for quality, validity and bias to determine if it is objective and reliable.
- Objective 1b: evaluate the relationship of language to logic and analyze, criticize and rationally justify points of view concerning ethical issues.

- SLO #2: reason inductively and deductively concerning ethical issues, reach conclusions about ethical issues based on sound or cogent inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge of belief.
- Objective 2a: distinguish fact from non-factual judgment concerning ethical issues, belief from knowledge and fallacious (invalid or weak) reasoning from correct reasoning concerning ethical issues.
- Objective 2b: apply ethical reasoning skills to ethical issues and work toward a personal resolution of ethical issues.
- SLO #3 (PSLO #3): demonstrate the ability to engage unethical reasoning necessary to exercise responsibility as an ethical individual, professional, local, and global citizen.
- Objective 3a: show an appreciation of ethical principles as applied to personal and civic choices.

Assessment:

25% – Study Questions

I will collect written answers to Study Questions distributed prior to that day's assigned readings. Answers will be graded as Check (15)/Check-Plus (20)/Check-Minus (10), depending on thoroughness and accuracy. You must be present for the duration of a class meeting to receive credit for the study questions due on the occasion of that class meeting.

25% – Course Engagement

You cannot learn if you do not participate and take ownership of your own success. Course engagement (plus attendance) will be partly accounted by your in-class submission of the study questions. Three absences will be allowed without penalty, but after three absences, 1% per absence will be deducted from your course engagement grade. I also expect you to engage in class discussion based on your pre-class preparation, either voluntarily or when called on. I will do my best to make this fun and stress-free.

25% – Midterm Exam

The midterm will be on the material from Parts One and Two of the course. It will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and long response questions.

25% – Final Paper

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a final argumentative paper (750-1250 words) defending a position on a moral issue chosen from amongst those addressed by the course. This will be due on the scheduled final exam day, May 19th.

Grading Schema:

A = 93-100%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 84-86%, B- = 80-83%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 74-76%, C- = 70-73%, D+ = 67-69%, D = 60-66%, F = 0-59%

I will, as a matter of policy, round up grades to the next letter grade if you are within 1% (e.g. 79.1 to 80%, but *not* 78.9 to 80%)

Late work policy: As a rule, work will not be accepted late except in cases of documented emergency or illness. You may make a written petition for an exception if you feel you have a compelling reason, but these requests must be made in advance.

Course conduct: You are expected to be respectful toward your fellow students and toward me. This course covers some controversial and emotionally charged issues. You are expected to discuss these issues in a rational, thoughtful, and respectful way. Additionally, please refrain from using your phones (e.g. texting, email, YouTube videos, listening to music, etc.), and otherwise acting in an inappropriate or distracting way (e.g. chronic lateness, talking, sleeping, playing games, etc.). Responsible use of laptops/tablets is permitted provided it does not degenerate into any of the above. Failure to abide by the above will result in forfeiting the course engagement portion of the grade and you may be asked to leave class.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a violation of college policy and seriously undermines your integrity as a student. If you are suspected of plagiarizing or cheating, and proven to have done so, you will receive a zero for the assigned work and be required to go through standard college procedure, which may include additional penalties. It is your responsibility to understand the college's plagiarism policy as indicated in the *Cosumnes River College Catalog* (p.40):

Cosumnes River College values academic integrity (honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility). It recognizes that individuals can achieve their maximum potential and contribute appropriately to the well-being of the larger community only if they recognize the ethical dimensions of decisions and actions. The college assumes all members of the academic community will exhibit academic integrity supporting student access, academic quality, academic rigor, innovation and collegiality... Current [college] policies prohibit dishonesty, such as cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the college...In situations where cheating or plagiarism has occurred [or is reasonably believed to have occurred] the faculty notifies the dean of the pertinent division, and the student that a "Referral for Student Code of Conduct Violation" will be filed through the area dean to the Office of the Vice President for Student Services.

Reasonable Accommodation: Should any student need accommodation because of a disability, please let me know to discuss options.

Subject to change proviso: Information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade, late work and course conduct policy, may be subject to change with advanced notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Course Schedule:

See below for a comprehensive overview of readings, assignments, and due dates for the semester. Please note that readings (excepting the first day) are to be completed *before* the class for which they are listed.

Week One – Introduction to the Course

January 21 (Tues): Syllabus Overview

January 23 (Thurs): Why Ethics? Coles, "The Disparity between Intellect and Character" (PDF)

PART ONE – Ethical Theory

Week Two – Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics

January 28 (Tues): *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Ethical Life*, pp. 143-8

January 30 (Thurs): cont., pp. 148-154

Week Three – Aquinas’ Natural Law Ethics

February 4 (Tues): “Natural Law”, in *The Ethical Life*, pp. 84-89

February 6 (Thurs): cont., pp. 89-96

Week Four – John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarian Ethics

February 11 (Tues): “Utilitarianism”, in *The Ethical Life*, pp. 97-99

February 13 (Thurs): cont., pp. 99-106

Week Five – Immanuel Kant’s Ethics of Duty

February 18 (Tues): “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative,” in *The Ethical Life*, pp. 107-112

February 20 (Thurs): cont., pp. 112-119

PART TWO – The Psychology of Moral Disagreement

Week Six – Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part I*

February 25 (Tues): “Introduction” & Ch. 1, “Where Does Morality Come From?”, pp. 3-16

February 27 (Thurs): Ch. 1, cont., pp. 16-31

Week Seven – Cont.

March 3 (Tues): Ch. 2, “The Intuitive Dog and Its Rational Tail”, pp. 32-48

March 5 (Thurs): cont., pp. 48-60

Week Eight – Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part II*

March 10 (Tues): Ch. 5, “Beyond WEIRD Morality”, pp. 111-130

March 12 (Thurs): Ch. 6, “Taste Buds of the Righteous Mind”, pp. 131-149

Week Nine – Cont.

March 17 (Tues): Ch. 7, “The Moral Foundations of Politics”, pp. 150-164

March 19 (Thurs): cont., pp. 164-179

Week Ten – Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part III*

March 24 (Tues): Ch. 12, “Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively?”, pp. 319-366

March 26 (Thurs): Midterm Exam

PART THREE – Contemporary Moral Issues

Week Eleven – Abortion

March 31 (Tues): Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”, in *The Ethical Life*, pp. 333-345

April 2 (Thurs): Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” (PDF)

April 6-12 – SPRING BREAK

Week Twelve – *The Moral Status of Animals*

April 14 (Tues): Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases”, pp. 267-282

April 16 (Thurs): Frey, “Moral Standing, the Value of Lives, and Speciesism”, pp. 283-300

Week Thirteen – *Poverty and Hunger*

April 21 (Tues): Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”, pp. 230-237

April 23 (Thurs): Narveson, “Feeding the Hungry”, pp. 238-251

Week Fourteen – *Racism*

April 28 (Tues): Lebron, “Time for a New Black Radicalism”, pp. 411-416

April 30 (Thurs): Anderson, “The Future of Racial Integration”, pp. 446-465

Week Fifteen – *Gun Control*

May 5 (Tues): Huemer, “Is There a Right to Own a Gun?”, pp. 396-410

May 7 (Thurs): McMahan, “Why Gun ‘Control’ is Not Enough”, pp. 390-5

Week Sixteen – *Moral Progress*

May 12 (Tues): Appiah, “What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For?”, pp. 225-229

Final Exam Week

May 19 (Tues), 12:45-2:45 pm

****Final Paper Due****