

Introduction to Ethics

80-130, Spring 2006

Course Information

Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 12:00–1:20 PM

Room: Baker Hall, A53

Instructor

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30–3:00 PM

Teaching Assistants

Name: Chris Punj

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Course Objectives

Ethics is a fundamental branch of philosophy seeking to determine the proper course of action for people. It attempts to provide an answer to the question, “What ought I to do?” Speaking of ethics, the philosopher Socrates said: *what we are talking about is how one should live*. Ethics, then, is a requirement for human life, helping us determine what sort of person each of us should strive to be.

This course is broken into three parts. We will begin with a whirlwind tour of the history of ethics, discussing several major moral philosophers. This should comprise about half of the course. Then, we will use this knowledge to understand the general breakdown of and the relationships between major ethical theories. The remainder of the course will involve the application of all this theory to difficult real world scenarios in the area of biomedical ethics. Here interactive multimedia modules on euthanasia and abortion will be used to stimulate moral reflection and reasoning on these challenging issues.

By the end of this term, I expect that you will be able to

- Describe key figures in ethics along with their basic ideas,
- Compare and contrast differing ethical theories and their application to real life,
- Evaluate and provide arguments within the moral decision-making process, and

- Reflect on how the above expands the understanding of hard choices and moral dilemmas.

Requirements

Pop Quizzes	= 20%
Analyses	= 50% (5@10% each)
Final Take-Home Exam	= 30%

Ethics is a full-contact sport. However, we will wrestle with arguments and moral positions, not attack those advocating them. In order that you seriously digest the material, **attendance is required** and I will encourage class participation. You are allowed 2 absences, no questions asked. Also note that I have **cancelled class** on March 18, 2006, so that we may all enjoy carnival, so you ultimately get 3 absences for free. Each additional absence results in 2 points deducted from your final grade.

Text

Minogue, Brendan. *Bioethics: An Ethics Committee Approach*. Boston, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 1996.

A course packet and handouts will comprise the bulk of the remaining reading material.

Course Outline

Part I, History of Ethics [Weeks I – VIII]

Preface: The Life of Socrates

Section 1: Greek Moral Philosophy: Plato and Aristotle

Section 2: Hellenistic and Roman Ethics: Epicurean and Stoic Thought

Section 3: Early Christian Ethics: Augustine and Aquinas

Section 4: Modern Moral Philosophy: Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Bentham, Mill, and Nietzsche

Section 5: Recent Moral Philosophy: John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas

Part II, Concepts and Problems of Ethics [Weeks VIII – XI]

Preface: Meta-ethics, Normative Ethics, and Applied Ethics

Section 1: Ethical Relativism

Section 2: Ethical Egoism

Section 3: Utilitarian Theories

Section 4: Deontological Theories

Section 5: Character Ethics

Section 6: Case-based Moral Reasoning

Part III, Applied Ethics [Weeks XI – XV]

Preface: The Field of Applied Ethics

Section 1: The Topic of Euthanasia

Multimedia Module: A Right to Die?

Section 2: The Topic of Abortion

Multimedia Module: The Issue of Abortion in America

Postscript: Conflict Resolution

Plagiarism – The Short Note

plagiarism (plā'jě-rîz'ëm) *n* 1: a piece of writing that has been copied from someone else and is presented as being your own work. 2: the act of plagiarizing; taking someone's words or ideas as if they were your own.

Plagiarism is bad. Do not do it. It amounts to lying, cheating, and stealing. Anyone caught doing it can fairly assume that they will not pass this course, as it is an affront to the very spirit of a course on *ETHICS*.

To discourage plagiarism, turnitin.com will be used to check each of your assignments for their “plagiarism factor”. A separate handout on this process will be provided.

Plagiarism – The Long Note

The straightforward disclosure of the sources used in completing course work is essential to the integrity of the educational process. In that way one acknowledges the ideas of others and helps to highlight what is distinctive of one's own contribution to a topic. It also enables instructors to be more effective teachers by providing an accurate sense of the student's grasp of course material.

Students are expected to use proper methods for citing sources; such methods can be found in style guides like the Chicago Manual of Style, or the most recent MLA Handbook. In general, an acceptable method of citation provides enough information to allow a reader to track down the original sources. You should consult your professor, if you have any questions about which method to use, or which kinds of collaboration or assistance to disclose.

Failure to acknowledge the ideas of others is a serious violation of intellectual integrity and community standards. It is the individual student's responsibility to be aware of the university policy on cheating and plagiarism. This is available online at: <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html> and in the section on "University Policies" of The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook. Students who plagiarize face serious sanctions at both the course level, and the university level. At the course level, faculty members have significant discretion to determine the sanctions that are appropriate to individual cases of cheating and plagiarism.

Within the Philosophy Department, it is customary for professors to give plagiarized assignments a failing grade and, when appropriate, fail students for the course.

Additionally, a letter may be sent to the Dean of Students indicating that the student in question has submitted plagiarized material and received a course-level sanction. Plagiarism is also a violation of the community standards of Carnegie Mellon University. As such, allegations of plagiarism may be brought before a University Academic Review Board, which will determine whether community standards have been violated and level additional sanctions, if appropriate. Although this body also has significant discretion over the sanctions that it levels, plagiarism can result in academic probation, suspension, and even expulsion.