

Contemporary Ethical Issues

Baylor University

MEETING

INFORMATION Instructor: Chris Tweedt
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Phil 1308, sec 1
Tues & Thurs 9:30–10:45
Morrison 107

TEXTBOOK

There is no textbook for this course. Readings are hyperlinked on this syllabus. Please come to class prepared to answer the questions for each day.

SYNOPSIS

This class is divided into **five sections**.

1. First, I will introduce you to philosophy, how ethics is a discipline of philosophy, and how philosophers throughout history have thought through ethics and its importance for living a good life.
2. Second, we'll discuss whether we can make ethical decisions at all, and, if we can, how we make them. We'll address the view that ethical statements are just opinions that can be neither true nor false, that ethical statements depend on standards we or our culture can create, that we are not in control of our actions and so not responsible, and that all of our supposedly good actions are the result of luck. We'll then discuss how to approach tough ethical decisions, even when we know the outcome will turn out poorly.
3. Third, we'll discuss what makes an action right. Good consequences? Rule-following? Becoming a better person? Or a combination?
4. Fourth, we'll talk about how to put what we've learned into practice. We'll discuss what are we responsible for doing or thinking and whether we are responsible for following our conscience. Then we'll analyze how these ethical principles apply in specific cases: abortion, treatment of animals, giving to others, and the responsibility of a business.
5. Last, we'll discuss God's relationship to morality.

SCHEDULE

Jan 10 **Introduction 1:** What is philosophy? What is ethics?

Jan 12 **Introduction 2:** Metaethics, Normative, Applied, & Assumptions

Jan 17 **A brief history 1:** Socrates to Aquinas
Selections from Plato's *Phaedo*

Jan 19 **A brief history2:** Descartes to present

Special problems and issues in ethics

Jan 24 **Emotivism:** The fact/value distinction
Selection from A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*

Jan 26 **Moral Relativism:** Arguments and replies

Jan 31 **Moral Relativism:** Objections

Feb 2 **Free will and moral responsibility**

Galen Strawson's "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility"

Feb 7 **Moral luck**

Thomas Nagel's "Moral Luck"

Feb 9 **Moral dilemmas**

Feb 14 **Double effect**

Feb 16 **Review/Overflow**

Feb 21 **Test #1**

What makes an action right?

Feb 23 **Utilitarianism 1**

Selections from John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*: chapter 2 (the whole thing), then the first 4 paragraphs of chapter 4.

Feb 28 **Utilitarianism 2**

Mar 2 **Deontology**

Selection from Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: Section I (pages 45–56)

Mar 14 **Virtue Ethics 1:** Happiness and ends

Selections from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: Book I, chapters 1–5, 7–10; Book II (the whole thing)

Mar 16 **Virtue Ethics 2:** Virtues and means

Selections from Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles*: Book III, ch. 2, 3

Mar 21 **Virtue Ethics 3:** Virtue ethics and natural law

Selections from Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles*: Book III, ch. 25–37

Mar 23 **Review/Overflow**

Mar 28 **Test #2**

Applied ethics

Mar 30 **The Role of Conscience in Moral Judgments, Abortion 1**

Giubilini and Minerva's "After-birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?" (To prepare for the next class)

Apr 4 **No class:** Diadeloso

Apr 6 **Abortion 2**

Judith Jarvis Thomson's "In Defense of Abortion"

Apr 11 **Ethical treatment of animals, Charitable giving**

Alastair Norcross' "Puppies, Pigs, and People"

Peter Singer's "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Apr 13 **Business Ethics**

No reading

Metaethics

Apr 18 **God and morality**

Book I, chapters 1 and 2 from C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*

Apr 20 **The problem of suffering**

William Rowe's "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism"

Apr 25 **Review/Overflow**

No reading

Apr 27 **No Class: Conference**

Draft of paper due by 11:59 pm

May 6 **Test #3:** 4:30–6:30 pm

Final paper due by 5 pm

GRADING

100 points **5 unannounced quizzes**

5 questions each quiz, 4 points for each question

Short answer questions covering that day's readings and last class

Given at the beginning of class, picked up 10 minutes later

You can make up a quiz only if you have a really good excuse.

300 points **3 tests**

10 questions each test, 10 points for each question

Short answer questions covering that part of the semester

Test dates are on the schedule.

100 points **1 paper**

50 points for the draft, 50 points for the final paper

This is a thesis defense paper with a clear and concise argument.

1000 words at most for each draft

I'll comment on your draft within 72 hours of when you email it to me.

You get an automatic 0/100 if you plagiarize or turn in your draft late.

Due dates are on the schedule.

+/- **Participation**

If you participate in class discussion and you're really close to getting a higher grade, I'll give you the higher grade at the end of the term.

POLICIES

Each student is expected to read, understand, and abide by the university's honor code. If you have a condition that interferes with your ability to participate in this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please contact the Office of Access and Learning Accommodation.