

SYLLABUS FOR THE ETHICS ONLINE CLASS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines some of the foundational ethical theories of Western Philosophy. We will examine various ethical perspectives as to their effectiveness, implications, and consequences when they are applied to contemporary ethical issues. The purpose of the class is not to reach a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” but to enlighten us as to the basis upon which we, and our society, make ethical decisions and judgments. I strongly encourage you to question accepted as well as unaccepted ethical standards and to initiate and participate in class discussions.

I find that we learn best from each other. Consequently, this is a discussion based class. Every assignment except for the final assignment requires that you post an idea or response to a question and respond to some of your classmates’ posts (at least 2 per assignment).

Unlike some online courses, this is not a self-paced course. Each assignment has a time frame during which it should be completed (**approximately 10 days per chapter**). The goal of each assignment, and the entire class experience for that matter, is for us to engage in an ongoing dialogue about ethics. Although I keep with the discussions, I do my best to refrain from interjecting too much. I have found that left with each other, students do a fabulous job with little input from me.

Each chapter contains a summary of the chapter, two discussion board assignments, and an open discussion board. The course also requires that you complete a research assignment and a final assignment. The discussion assignments, research assignment and final assignment are explained below in the Course Requirements section. As for the chapter summaries, I have compiled a brief explanation of each theory we will be studying based on the notes I give to my face-to-face students and the questions those students have asked over the years. I have provided an audio as well as a text version of each chapter summary. Please take the time to read or listen to these summaries. They will help you focus on the key concepts of each chapter.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

It is my hope that this course will enable you to address ethical issues with a greater understanding, scope, and confidence. Fundamental to this objective is a need to understand the ethical philosophies which, to a greater or lesser extent, influence contemporary ethical standards. Such an understanding requires an analysis and evaluation of the standards in light of their workability, implications, and consequences. Therefore, it is essential that you be able to apply various ethical theories to contemporary issues and scenarios and critically analyze those applications. Hopefully, this will give you a better understanding of and appreciation for ethical arguments with which you do not agree as well as those with which you do agree. Additionally, I hope you will view this as an opportunity to explore, evaluate, and rediscover your own personal code of ethics.

In an attempt to meet the above objectives, we will be working together on achieving the following:

- a working knowledge of some of the major ethical theories of western philosophy
- critically analyzing those theories as to their workability, implications, and consequences
- applying ethical theory to specific issues and scenarios
- an understanding of and appreciation for various ethical perspectives, whether or not we agree with them
- analyzing the ethical perspectives of some contemporary ethical issues
- an exploration, evaluation, and possible rediscovery of our own personal code of ethics

READINGS

Textbook: This course is organized around the chapters presented in the text. Each chapter is set up according to philosophical theory. Each chapter contains an explanation of a particular ethical philosophy, an analysis of possible advantages and disadvantages of the theory, and application of the theory to particular examples and scenarios. I have experimented with many texts over the years, and this one seems to be quite “user friendly.” It is imperative that you have the text and complete the assigned readings in a timely fashion. I do not give many notes. Most of our learning will be a product of the readings and interactions on the discussion boards.

You can buy the text at the campus book store. You should also be able to order the text online through a variety of websites. Please see below for text information.

Text: *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory 4th edition*

Author: Lawrence Hinman

Publisher: Thomson Wadsworth

ISBN # 0-49500674-2 or 978-0-495-00674-9

Other Readings: Discussion board assignments will at times contain websites that direct you to online reading materials. These readings are also required.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation You are expected to participate in every class assignment. Class participation encompasses the timely completion of all assignments. This includes assigned readings, participating in online class discussions, responding to questions posted, responding to assignments, and posting any questions or thoughts you have that are related to the class.

Research Discussion A discussion board titled “Research Assignments” has been set up for you to post an ethical issue of your choice. For the research discussion, you will need to select an ethical issue, present the arguments on both sides of the issue, and support your ethical position on that issue. You need to know your topic well in order to write a good summary of the issue and the ethical controversy surrounding it. You will also be responsible for answering questions and replying to comments that your fellow students have regarding your topic. Consequently, you must read up on it. This means that your post will include citations and works cited. This post should be approximately 4 to 6 paragraphs in length with your research sources cited at the end of the post. **Your topic must be approved by me in advance, so please email me your topic as soon as you choose it.** This assignment also requires that you respond to some of your classmates’ topics (at least 3).

Discussion Board Assignments There will be a series of discussion board assignments throughout the semester (approximately 16 total or 2 per chapter). The first assignment in each chapter will address the ethical theory we are studying. The second assignment in each chapter will address a contemporary ethical issue that relates to the theory of the chapter. You are expected to respond to each assignment. Your responses will be graded on how well thought out and fully explained they are. Your responses should not be merely emotional reactions; they should include some support or basis for your views and ideas. Consequently, I strongly encourage you to take time to think through your ideas before responding to assignments.

The “Open” Discussion Board A discussion board has been set up in each chapter for what I like to call an open discussion (approximately 8 total or 1 per chapter). This is a place where you can post any course related questions, comments, ethical issues in the news, course related websites of interest, etc. The open discussion board is not optional; it is part of the course requirements. You do not have to post to receive credit for an open discussion assignment. You may simply respond to a topic posted by me or a fellow classmate. *Please do not post questions or issues that only pertain to you.* Any personal correspondence with me should be communicated via email.

Final Assignment The final assignment will consist of a scenario to which you must apply some of the philosophies we have studied. You will be expected to state the ethical position the theory would take on the scenario and explain why it would take that position. The final assignment will be posted at least 5 days before it is due. Your response should be emailed to me through the course email.

GRADING

The Research Discussion Assignment 30%

The research assignment will be graded on the following criteria:

- How well you understand the issue
- How well you explain the arguments on either side of the issue
- How well you explain and support your position on the issue
- How well you respond to questions or comments on your post
- The quality of research you do on the issue
- Proper use of citation (you may use whatever method you learned)

- Whether it was submitted on time

Discussion Board Assignments 40%

The discussion board assignments will be graded on the following criteria:

- How well thought out your response is
- How well you explain and support your ideas
- The extent to which you draw from the theories we discuss
- How well you understand the theories involved in your response
- Whether it was submitted on time

Open Discussion Board 10%

The open discussion board assignments will be graded on one or more of the following criteria:

- How often you post to the board
- The substance and relevance of your posting
- How often you respond to postings
- The quality of your responses to postings
- Whether your responses are posted in a timely fashion

The Final Assignment 20%

The final assignment will be graded on the following criteria:

- How well you explain and support your ideas
- How well you understand the theories involved in your response
- Whether it was submitted on time

COURSE OUTLINE

Below is a **tentative** course outline. In my face-to-face classes, I often adjust the course outline based on student interest in and understanding of each chapter. Consequently, we may spend more time on a chapter than I anticipated, or we may spend less time on a chapter than I anticipated. Sometimes, exciting ethical issues pop up in the media during a semester. This can also lead to an adjustment in the course outline.

Introduction to Ethics – 9/2 through 9/14

Discussion 1 – due 9/8

Discussion 2 – due 9/14

Open Discussion 1 – ongoing 9/2 through 9/14

Chapter 2: Relativism, Absolutism, & Pluralism – 9/15 through 9/25

Discussion 3 – due 9/20

Discussion 4 – 9/25

Open Discussion 2 – ongoing 9/15 through 9/25

Chapter 3: The Ethics of Divine Command: Religious Moralities – 9/26 through 10/5

Discussion 5 – due 9/30

Discussion 6 – due 10/5
Open Discussion 3 – ongoing 9/26 through 10/5

Chapter 5: The Ethics of Consequences: Utilitarianism – 10/6 through 10/15

Discussion 7 – due 10/10
Discussion 8 – due 10/15
Open Discussion 4 – ongoing 10/6 through 10/15

Chapter 6: The Ethics of Duty: Kant – 10/16 through 10/26

Discussion 9 – due 10/21
Discussion 10 – due 10/26
Open Discussion 5 – ongoing 10/16 through 10/26

Research Discussion – 10/27 through 11/6

Post due 10/30
Discussion ongoing 10/27 through 11/6

Chapter 7: The Ethics of Rights – 11/7 through 11/17

Discussion 11 – due 11/12
Discussion 12 – due 11/17
Open Discussion 6 – ongoing 11/7 through 11/17

Chapter 8: The Ethics of Justice – 11/18 through 11/29

Discussion 13 – due 11/23
Discussion 14 – due 11/29
Open Discussion 7 – ongoing 11/18 through 11/29

Chapter 9: The Ethics of Character: Aristotle – 11/30 through 12/10

Discussion 15 – due 12/5
Discussion 16 – due 12/10
Open Discussion 8 – ongoing 11/30 through 12/10

Final Assignment – due 12/15

If you have any questions about the class, please email me at mrowland@umassd.edu. If you have any questions once the class has begun and after you have registered, please email me at the course website email.