ETHICS & SOCIETY
Political Science 300X

Course Description

This course takes stock of the rich history of ethical expression in the West. Of particular interest will be various philosophies of right and wrong, of justice and freedom, of the human condition as such, and of the sometimes fraught relationship between ethics and politics in American life and beyond. Throughout the “semester” we will ponder questions, debate arguments, read closely, and think seriously about a variety of ethical theories through an examination of contemporary moral issues and dilemmas ranging from capital punishment, to abortion, cloning, torture, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, environmental protection and animal rights.

Learning Objectives

The goals for student learning in this course can be divided into two broad categories: one bearing on student knowledge, the other emphasizing student skills. By the end of the semester you should:

• Be familiar with the texts we have read and have a comprehensive view of the arguments the authors have presented.

• Possess a fluency with the main debates in ethical philosophy, and be acquainted with the empirical examples that manifest these debates.

• Be able to critically read texts, assess ideas, and analyze arguments.

• Be able to clearly and effectively communicate your own ideas both verbally and in writing.

Course Mechanics

Each student should come to class well read and prepared to participate in robust discussion and debate. Though a lecture will be delivered for each course session, students will be expected to share interactively in a conversation about what
stimulates, engages, frustrates, and disappoints them in their reading and writing. I will strive to foster a classroom space for the expression of dissident views, and expect students to help me safeguard that space. In addition to lecture and discussion, I will prepare several visual presentations to supplement the exposition of the course thematics, by way of film screenings and power point displays.

Requirements

1. **Quizzes, Exams and Writing Assignments:**
   Reading quizzes will be administered regularly. A midterm (Friday, May 17) and final exam (Friday, May 24) will be scheduled, each of which will be comprised of a mix of multiple choice, short and long essay questions. The grades for these assignments will be assessed according to the following rubric:

   - Mid-term Exam ....................... 30%
   - Attendance and Participation .......... 20%
   - Reading Quizzes ....................... 15%
   - Final Exam ............................. 35%

2. **Attendance and Participation:**
   Participation is an important part of this class. This means speaking up in class: asking questions, staking out positions, and being an active, vocal, and respectful classroom citizen.

3. **Grading Guidelines:**
   I have established the following standards for the evaluation of written work in this course:

   **A:** Excellent work, with clear, challenging, original ideas supported by sufficient, appropriate, logically interpreted evidence. The essay should engage the reader in the inquiry, convincingly answer opposing views, be well organized, and free of significant flaws. An ‘A’ paper should be not just good but outstanding in ideas and presentation.

   **B:** Good to very good work, with a clear thesis supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence, organized and interpreted logically. The ‘B’ paper may have some outstanding qualities but be marked by significant flaws which keep it from being an ‘A’; or it may be all-around good work, free of major problems but lacking the deeper insight necessary for excellence.

   **C:** Satisfactory work, but not yet good. The ‘C’ paper meets the basic requirements of a thesis supported by interpretation of specific
evidence, but it needs work in thinking and/or presentation. There may be a lack of clarity, the evidence may not always be sufficient and appropriate, or the interpretation may have logical flaws. The essay may have organizational or mechanical problems that keep it from being good. The ‘C’ paper may be good in some respects but poor in others, or it may simply be adequate but not noteworthy overall.

**D**: Barely passing work that shows effort but is so marred by serious problems that it cannot be considered a satisfactory paper. Papers without a readily identifiable thesis are liable to be graded ‘D’.

**F**: Failing work – for example, a hasty, sloppy paper that shows little or no thought, effort, or familiarity with the text.

4. **Required Books (found at the university book store):**


5. **Recommended / Optional Readings:**

Accessibility and Disabilities

The University of Alaska Fairbanks is committed to equal opportunity for students with disabilities. Such students are encouraged to contact the coordinator of Disabilities Services at the Center for Health and Counselling. In addition to consulting with Disability Services, students with documented disabilities who may need reasonable academic accommodations should discuss these with me at some point during the first two weeks of class.

Academic Dishonesty

High ethical standards are essential for maintaining credibility in the field of political science. Every course taught at UAF seeks to maintain these standards, starting with an emphasis on producing original and factual work. If you cite or quote from someone else’s work, you must include a proper citation using an established style sheet (to be discussed in class). Plagiarism is defined as appropriating passages or ideas from another person’s work and portraying them as one’s own. Neither plagiarism nor fabrication will be tolerated. Any student found to have plagiarized or fabricated statements will receive, at a minimum, an automatic “F” for the class. Further action, such as expulsion, will also be considered, as per UAF policy.

Reading and Lecture Schedule

(Note: below, ‘GM’ refers to the Gordon Marino text, while ‘LV’ refers to the Lewis Vaughn)

Part I. Varieties of Ethical Expression (Week 1)

Monday, May 13: Ethics & Examined Life

Chapter 1, “Ethics and Examined Life,” LV
Sophocles, The Antigone

Film: Incendies

Tuesday, May 14: Utilitarianism

Chapter 5, “Consequentialist Theories,” LV
J.S. Mill, from Utilitarianism, GM
Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism”

Film: U-571
Wednesday, May 15: Virtue Ethics

Chapter 7, “Virtue Ethics,” LV
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, GM
Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, GM

Film: *The Mission*

Thursday, May 16: Kantian Deontological Ethics

Chapter 6, “Nonconsequentialist Theories,” LV
Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, GM
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chapters 1, 2, and 15

Film: Excerpts from *The Eichmann Trial*

Friday, May 17: Relativisms

Chapter 2, “Subjectivism, Relativism, and Emotivism,” LV
David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, GM
Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Genealogy of Morals*, GM

Film: *Roshomon*

Part II. Ethical Philosophy and “Real Politics” (Week 2)

Monday, May 20: Abortion & Cloning

Chapter 8, “Abortion,” LV
Don Maquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” GM
Chapter 9, “Altering Genes and Cloning Humans,” LV

Film: “Abortion Clinic,” Frontline

Tuesday, May 21: Capital Punishment & Euthanasia

Chapter 10, “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide,” LV
Chapter 11, “Capital Punishment,” LV
Wednesday, May 22: Ethics of Sex & Same Sex Marriage

Chapter 12, “Sexual Morality,” LV
Chapter 13, “Same-Sex Marriage,” LV

Film: TBD

Thursday, May 23: Environmental Ethics & Animal Rights

Aldo Leopold, “A Sand County Almanac: The Land Ethic,” GM
Chapter 14, “Environmental Ethics,” LV
Chapter 15, “Animal Rights,” LV
Tom Regan, The Case for Animal Rights, GM

Film: A Fierce Green Fire

Friday, May 24: Torture and Political Violence

Chapter 16, “Political Violence,” LV
Jacques Lezra, “Terrible Ethics” handout

Film: Michael Sandel and Justice