ETHICS & SOCIETY
Political Science 300X

Course Description

This course takes stock of the rich history of ethical thought 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 expressions through an examination of contemporary moral issues and dilemmas ranging from capital punishment to abortion, cloning, torture, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, environmental protection, animal rights, economic justice, and more.

Learning Objectives

The goals for student leaning 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:

- Possess a synoptic view of the arguments presented by the thinkers we have engaged with.
- Possess a faculty for connecting the main debates in the history of moral philosophy to the empirical examples that manifest these debates.
- Be able to read texts closely and critically, assess ideas, and analyze arguments creatively and insightfully.
- Be able to clearly and effectively communicate your own ideas, both orally 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 (including films) to supplement the exposition of the course thematics.

**Requirements**

1. *Quizzes, Exams and Writing Assignments:*
   Weekly reading quizzes will be administered on surprise dates. A midterm (8 January, in class) and final exam (14 January) will be scheduled, each of which will be comprised of a mix of multiple choice, short and long essay questions. In addition you will be called on to write a term paper (5-7 double-spaced pages in length, due in class 14 January). The term paper is specifically designed to gauge student learning outcomes.

   The grades for these assignments will be assessed according to the following rubric:

   - Reading Quizzes ........................................20%
   - Participation.............................................20%
   - Mid-term Exam.........................................20%
   - Final Paper.............................................20%
   - Final Exam..............................................20%

2. *Attendance and Participation:*
   Participation is an important part of this class. This means regular attendance, 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 (available at the university book store):**

### 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 per UAF policy.
Reading and Lecture Schedule
(Note: ‘LV’ refers to the Lewis Vaughn’s Doing Ethics;
readings marked with an “*” refers to material located online on Blackboard)

Part I. Varieties of Ethical Expression

1. OF FIDELITY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND SACRIFICE
   3 January
   Sophocles, The Antigone
   Chapter 1, “Ethics and Examined Life,” LV
   Film: Incendies

2. HEDONIC CALCULUS
   5 January
   Chapter 5, “Consequentialist Theories,” LV
   John Stuart Mill, from Utilitarianism, LV, pp. 96-101
   Peter Singer, “The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle” *
   Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” *
   Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” *
   Film: U-571

3. DEONTOLOGY, NATURAL LAW, AND RADICAL EVIL
   6 January
   Chapter 6, “Nonconsequentialist Theories,” LV
   St. Thomas Aquinas, from Summa Theologica, LV, pp. 125-136
   Immanuel Kant, from Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals, pp. 116-124
   Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, chapter I, II, VI, VII
   Film: Excerpts from The Eichmann Trial
4. FROM VIRTUE ETHICS TO EMOTIVISM

7 January

Chapter 2, “Subjectivism, Relativism, and Emotivism,” LV, pp. 23-32
Ruth Benedict, from *Anthropology and the ABNORMAL*, LV, pp. 34-37
Mary Midgley, from *Trying Out One’s New Sword*, LV, 37-42
E.M. Cioran, from *A Short History of Decay*
Chapter 7, “Virtue Ethics,” LV, pp. 136-142,
Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics*, LV, pp. 144-152

Film: *The Mission*

Part 2: Ethical Treatment and Real Politics

5. ABORTION & CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

8 January

Chapter 8, “Abortion,” LV, pp. 163-174,
Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion,” LV, pp. 175-184,
Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” LV, pp. 194-204,
Chapter 11, “Capital Punishment,” LV, pp. 353-362
Hugo Adam Bedau, “Against the Death Penalty,” LV, pp. 380-384

Film: *Citizen Ruth*

6. EUTHANASIA & CLONING

9 January

Chapter 10, “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide,” LV, pp. 292-301

John Hardwig, from Is There a Duty to Die?, LV, pp. 317-326

Chapter 9, “Altering Genes and Cloning Humans,” LV, pp. 229-237


Dan Brock, “Cloning Human Beings,” LV, pp. 272-282

Film: Facing Death, Frontline; and Cloning the First Human, BBC

7. SEXUAL MORALITY & SAME SEX MARRIAGE

12 January

Chapter 12, “Sexual Morality,” LV, pp. 410-415


John Finnis, “What’s Wrong with Homosexual Conduct?” LV, pp. 431-433

Martha Nussbaum, “Homosexuality and Love,” LV, pp. 433-435

Thomas Nagel, “Sexual Perversion,” LV, pp. 441-447

Chapter 13, “Same-Sex Marriage,” LV, pp. 451-455

Maggie Gallagher, “What Marriage is For,” LV, 469-472

Andrew Sullivan, “Here Comes the Groom,” LV, pp. 473-475

8. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS & ANIMAL RIGHTS

13 January

Chapter 14, “Environmental Ethics,” LV, pp. 487-496,

Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” LV, pp. 536-540

David Schmidtz, “Are All Species Equal?” LV, pp. 516-523,


Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” LV, pp. 553-562,

Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights,” LV, pp. 563-569
Film: *Justice* (BBC)

9. TORTURE, JUST WAR, POLITICAL VIOLENCE

14 January

Chapter 16, “Political Violence,” LV, pp. 595-612,

Michael Walzer, “Against Realism,” LV, pp. 622-632,

Alan Dershowitz, “The Case for Torturing the Ticking Time Bomb Terrorist,” LV, pp. 669-677,

Stephen Nathanson, “Can Terrorism be Justified?” LV, pp. 661-668