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:

- Become conversant with the material we have engaged and possess a thorough view of the arguments our authors have presented.
- Possess a fluency with the debates central to moral philosophy, and develop a proficiency for invoking and deliberating 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 daily. A midterm (Wednesday, January 8) and final exam (Wednesday, January 15) will be scheduled, each of which will be comprised of a mix of multiple choice, true/false, short and long essay questions. In addition, a final paper, 5-7 pages in length, is required (also due January 15). The grades for these assignments will be assessed according to the following rubric:

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

2. Attendance and Participation:
   Punctual attendance is expected and is required. Each unexcused absence will result in a 20% drop in your “Attendance & Participation” grade. Beyond being physically present, you are expected to participate vocally in ongoing classroom discussions. This means asking questions, staking out positions, and being an active, vocal, and respectful classroom citizen. Before class, spend time carefully reading each text, marking important passages, jotting own questions, and engaging the text and its author as conversation partners. Discussion amplifies your opportunities for interaction. Remember that this course is ours, not only mine or yours, so we are all responsible for its success.

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, ‘LV’ refers to the Lewis Vaughn textbook)

**Part I. Varieties of Ethical Expression (Week 1)**

*Friday, January 3: Ethics & Examined Life*

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

  Film: *Michael Sandel and Justice*

*Saturday, January 4: Utilitarianism*

- Chapter 5, “Consequentialist Theories,” pp. 84-95, LV
- John Stuart Mill, from *Utilitarianism*, LV, pp. 96-101
- Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” *
- Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” *

  Film: U-571
Monday, January 6: Kant’s Deontological Ethics

Chapter 6, “Nonconsequentialist Theories,” pp. 102-114, LV
Immanuel Kant, from *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, pp. 116-124
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Chapters I, II, VIII, XV

Film: Excerpts from *The Eichmann Trial*, and/or *Hannah Arendt*

Tuesday, January 7: Virtue Ethics

Chapter 7, “Virtue Ethics,” pp. 136-142, LV
Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 144-152, LV

Film: *The Mission*

Wednesday, January 8: Relativisms, Egoisms, Emotivisms

Ruth Benedict, from *Anthropology and the Abnormal*, LV, pp. 34-37
E.M. Cioran, from *A Short History of Decay*

Chapter 5, “Ethical Egoism,” pp. 78-84, LV
Ayn Rand, from “The Objectivist Ethics,” *The Virtue of Selfishness*
Marquis de Sade, from *Juliette*
Max Stirner, from *The Ego and its Own*

Film: *The Fountainhead*

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

Thursday, January 9: Abortion & Capital Punishment

Chapter 8, “Abortion,” LV
Don Maquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” GM

Chapter 11, “Capital Punishment,” LV
Hugo Adam Bedau, “Against the Death Penalty,” pp. 380-384, LV

Film: *Citizen Ruth*, and/or *The Execution*
Friday January 10: Cloning & Euthanasia

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

Chapter 10, “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide,” LV
John Hardwig, from Is There a Duty to Die?, pp. 317-326, LV

Film: Human Cloning, BBC Documentary; and Facing Death, Frontline

Monday, January 13: Sexual Morality & Gay Marriage

Chapter 12, “Sexual Morality,” LV
John Finnis, “What’s Wrong with Homosexual Conduct?”
pp. 431-433, LV

Chapter 13, “Same-Sex Marriage,” LV
Maggie Gallagher, “What Marriage is For,” 469-472, LV
Andrew Sullivan, “Here Comes the Groom,” pp. 473-475

Tuesday, January 14: Environmental Ethics & Animal Rights

Chapter 14, “Environmental Ethics,” pp. 487-496, LV
Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” pp. 536-540, LV

Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” pp. 553-562, LV
Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights,” pp. 563-569

Film: Alaska Gold; and/or More Than Honey

Wednesday, January 15: Political Violence

Chapter 16, “Political Violence,” LV
Michael Walzer, “Against Realism,” pp. 622-632, LV
Alan Dershowitz, “The Case for Torturing the Ticking Time Bomb Terrorist,” pp. 669-677, LV