

University of Alaska
MAYmester 2019
MTWRF, 10am-3pm
Bunnell 313

Dr. Alexander Keller Hirsch
Office: Honors House
Office Hours: By Appointment
Email: ahirsch@alaska.edu

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. Thinkers who will strongly influence our approach to these themes include Socrates, Aristotle, Aquinas, Bentham, Kant, and their many contemporary followers. 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 welfare, and more.

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 students should:

- Possess a synoptic view of the arguments presented by the philosophers we have engaged with.
- Possess a faculty for connecting the main debates in the history of moral philosophy to the contemporary 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:

- A) Daily reading quizzes will be administered. These quizzes will ask basic questions about the reading due each day.
- B) Students will take a midterm exam (Friday, May 10, in class), as well as a final exam (Friday, May 17, in class). Both exams will consist of a mix of multiple choice questions, as well as short and long essay questions.
- C) Students will write and submit a term paper. This paper will be 5 double-spaced pages in length, due in class on the last day of instruction, Friday, May 17. The term paper is specifically designed to gauge student learning outcomes. Students enrolled in the Honors section of 300X will submit a term paper, responding to the same essay prompt, that is twice as long, or 10 pages in length.

Final grades will be assessed according to the following rubric:

Reading Quizzes	20%
Participation / Attendance.....	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 maintaining diligent attendance, speaking up in class regularly, asking questions, staking out positions, and being an active, vocal, and respectful classroom citizen. Students will be docked 50% of their participation grade for each class missed.

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):*

Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. New York: Penguin.

Vaughn, Lewis. *Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Plato, *Last Days of Socrates*. New York: Penguin Classics.

Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*. New York: Penguin Classics.

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 Lewis Vaughn's *Doing Ethics*;
readings marked with an '*' refer to material located online on Blackboard)

Part I. Species of Moral Judgment

1. OF FIDELITY, RESPONSIBILITY, SACRIFICE, AND PROTEST

6 May

Sophocles, "The Antigone," from *The Theban Plays*
Plato, "Euthyphro", "The Apology," and "Crito," from *The Last Days of Socrates*

2. PLEASURE, HAPPINESS, AND THE GREATEST GOOD

7 May

"Utilitarianism," from Chapter 5, "Consequentialist Theories," LV
Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"*
Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"*
David Pearce, "Earth's Predatory Species"*

Watch (in class): Peter Singer, from *Examined Life*; *The Dark Knight* (excerpt); and *The Act of Killing* (excerpts)

3. DUTY, NATURAL LAW, AND RADICAL EVIL

8 May

Chapter 6, “Nonconsequentialist Theories,” LV
Immanuel Kant, from *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, LV

Hannah Arendt, chapters I, VIII, XV, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
St. Thomas Aquinas, from *Summa Theologica*, LV

Film: Excerpts from *The Eichmann Trial*; and *Hannah Arendt*

4. FROM EMOTIVISM TO VIRTUE ETHICS

9 May

Chapter 2, “Subjectivism, Relativism, and Emotivism,” LV
E.M. Cioran, from *A Short History of Decay* *

Mary Midgely, “Trying Out One’s New Sword,” LV

Chapter 7, “Virtue Ethics,” LV

Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics*, LV

Film: Excerpts from Philip Seymour Hoffman interview, “Happiness”

10 May

Film: *The Mission*

MIDTERM EXAM

Part 2: Real Politics and the Arts of Ethical Attention

5. ABORTION & CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

13 May

Chapter 8, “Abortion,” LV

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” LV

Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” LV

Chapter 11, “Capital Punishment,” LV

Ernest van den Haag, “The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense,” LV

Hugo Adam Bedau, “Against the Death Penalty,” LV

6. EUTHANASIA & CLONING

14 May

Chapter 9, “Altering Genes and Cloning Humans,” LV
Leon Kass, “The Wisdom of Repugnance,” LV
Walter Glannon, “Genetic Enhancement,” LV
Chapter 10, “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide,” LV
J. Gay-Williams, “The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia,” LV
Sheri Frank, “The Deadly Choices at Memorial”*

Film: Brittany Maynard interview; Maurice Sendak interview;
and *Facing Death* (excerpts)

7. SEXUAL MORALITY

15 May

Chapter 12, “Sexual Morality,” LV
Roger Scruton, “Sexual Morality,” LV
Thomas Nagel, “Sexual Perversion,” LV
Adam Phillips, “Sex Mad”*

8. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS & ANIMAL WELFARE

16 May

Chapter 14, “Environmental Ethics,” LV
David Schmidtz, “Are All Species Equal?” LV
Chapter 15, “Animal Rights,” LV
Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights,” LV

Film: *If a Tree Falls*

9. TORTURE, JUST WAR, POLITICAL VIOLENCE

17 May

Chapter 16, “Political Violence,” LV
Elaine Scarry, “The Body in Pain: An Interview”*
Jay Bernstein, “Torture and Dignity”*

Film: *The Fog of War* (excerpts); *Justice: A 21st Century Citizen’s Guide* (excerpts)