

## **Introduction to Morality and Society Syllabus**

**Instructor:** Keith Buhler

**Email:** keith.buhler@uky.edu

**Twitter:** keith\_buhler

**Office Hours:** Monday, Wednesday, 12-1pm; after class; by appointment

**Text:** *The Moral Life*, Pojman and Vaughn (Fifth Edition)

### **Description:**

This course is an exercise in careful and deep thinking about morality, society, good, and evil. Each week will introduce a topic and encourage reflection on a literary or philosophical writing, which will be discussed in class. You will not only learn some new terms, concepts, and facts, but we will practice thinking philosophically about these topics and about our own lives. We will argue for and against significant truth claims, testing ourselves and the argument. In this way, we will not only think abstractly but may see our own moral failings, become more self-aware, more humble, and more moral.

### **Goals:**

- To practice thinking philosophically by examining, understanding, and critiquing complex arguments.
- To become familiar with major ethical theories, such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, commonsense intuition, divine command theory
- To reflect on our own lives, thoughts, and actions and become more virtuous, thoughtful, and wise human beings in the pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty.

### **Scope and Sequence:**

The course is broken into 4 Units of 3-4 weeks each:

- Unit 1. The Nature and Purpose of Morality (weeks 1, 2, 3)
- Unit 2. Moral Theory (weeks 4, 5, 6, 7);
- Unit 3, What is Worthwhile (weeks 8, 9, 10); and
- Unit 4 Applied Ethics (weeks 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16).

Each unit consists of three components. (1) Reading and weekly quizzes, (2) Discussion in class, (3) Writing.

**Grades:**

Readings = 25%

Participation = 25%

Disputations = 50%

Extra Credit = 0-5%

You will be graded on reading, participation, and papers, plus applicable extra credit. The best way to earn an 'A' is to read carefully, participate in and out of class, and write well.

**I. Outline:**

The Outline (*subject to minor changes*) tells you the reading, topic for each day. All readings are from Pojman, *The Moral Life* unless otherwise noted.

**Week 1 Introductions**

W Jan-11: Syllabus day (no reading)

F Jan-13: Pojman, "Introduction" (pp. 1-5) and discussion of Ethics

**Week 2 The Nature and Purpose of Morality**

M Jan-16: Chapter 1 Introduction; "Lord of the Flies", and Pojman, "On the Nature and Purpose of Morality"

W Jan-18: Thomas Hobbes "On the State of Nature" (10-49) and Kreeft "Moral Law" handout

F Jan-20: Discussion of Nature of Morality (Buhler)

**Week 3 Good and Evil**

M Jan-23 Chapter 2, Introduction; Melville "Billy Budd", Dostoyevsky "Why is there evil?", Styron "Sophie's Choice", (51-)

W Jan-25 Chapter 3 Introduction; Herodotus "Custom is King", Benedict "The Case for Moral Relativism", Rachels "Why Morality is Not Relative" (130-152)

F Jan-27 Discussion of Good and Evil (Buhler)

**Week 4 Utilitarianism**

M Jan-30 Part II, Chapter 4 Introduction; "Seaman Holmes and the Longboat", Bentham "Classical Utilitarianism", Mill "Utilitarianism refined" (191-205)

W Feb-1 Nielsen, "A Defense of Utilitarianism" and Williams, "Against Utilitarianism" (205-234)

F Feb-3 Discussion (Buhler) and Writing Workshop for Unit Paper 1

**Week 5 Deontological Ethics**

(Unit Paper 1, Nature of Morality Due Monday by Midnight)

M Feb-6 Chapter 5, Introduction; "Immanuel Kant" and "Kant's Theory" (237-259)

W Feb-8 “Does Morality Depend on Religion?” and “Divine Command Theory” (294-300)

F Feb-10 Discussion of Deontological ethics (Group 1)

### **Week 6 Virtue Ethics**

M Feb-13 Chapter 6, Introduction; Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics” and MacIntyre “the Virtues”, (314-346)

W Feb-15 “Sermon on the Mount” (388-391) and “Stoic Catechism” (415-425)

F Feb-17 Discussion on Virtue Ethics (Group 2)

### **Week 7 Feminist Ethics**

M Feb-20 Chapter 7, Introduction; “Feminist Ethics” (439-456)

W Feb-22 “The Need for More than Justice”, and “Ethics of Care” (465-490)

F Feb-24 Discussion on Feminist Ethics (Group 3)

### **Week 8 Egoism**

(Unit Paper 2, Moral Theories Due Monday by Midnight)

M Feb-27 Chapter 8, Introduction; Plato, “Ring of Gyges” and Rand, “In Defense of Ethical Egoism” (495-513)

W Mar-1 Chapter 8, Pojman, “Egoism and Altruism” and “Critique of Ethical Egoism” (521)

F Mar-3 Discussion on Egoism (Group 4)

### **Week 9 The Meaning of Life**

M Mar-6 Chapter 9 Introduction; Voltaire, “Good Brahmin”, Epicurus “Hedonism” (534-545)

W Mar-8 Camus “Life is Absurd”, and Pojman “Religion gives meaning to life” (545-557), and

Russell, “Reflections on Suffering” 569-571 F Mar-10 Discussion on Meaning of Life (Group 5)

### **Break**

M Mar-13 *Spring Break*

W Mar-15 *Spring Break*

F Mar-17 *Spring Break*

### **Week 10 Autonomy**

M Mar-20 Chapter 10, Introduction; King “I have a dream”, “Experiment in Autonomy” (573-593)

W Mar-22 Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism” (593-601); Vonnegut “Harrison Bergeron” (612-617)

F Mar-24 Discussion on Autonomy (Group 6)

**Week 11 Sexual Ethics**

(Unit Paper 3, Moral Issues Due by Midnight)

M Mar-27 Chapter 11, Introduction; Kant, "On the Place of Sex", McMurtry "Monogamy: A Critique", and Bayles, "Marriage, Love, and Procreation" (619-635)

W Mar-29 Levin "Homosexuality is Abnormal", Corvino "A Defense of Homosexuality" (664-688)

F Mar-31 Discussion on Sexual Ethics (Group 7)

**Week 12 Abortion**

M Apr-3 Chapter 12, Introduction; Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" (689-709)

W Apr-5 Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (710-727)

F Apr-7 Discussion on Abortion (Group 8)

**Week 13 Euthanasia**

M Apr-10 Chapter 13, Introduction; Brock "Voluntary Active Euthanasia" (760-780)

W Apr-12 Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia" (781)

F Apr-14 Discussion on Euthanasia (Group 9)

**Week 14 Animal Rights**

M Apr-17 Chapter 14, Introduction; Orwell "Shooting an Elephant" (793-800)

W Apr-19 Singer "All Animals are Equal", Cohen "The Case Against Animal Rights" (801-820)

F Apr-21 Discussion on Animal rights (Group 10)

**Week 15 Globalism**

(Unit Paper 4, Moral Problems due Monday by Midnight)

M Apr-24 Chapter 16, Introduction; Hardin "Living on a Lifeboat" (852-871)

W Apr-26 Murdoch, "A Critique of Lifeboat Ethics" (872-887)

F Apr-28 Discussion on Globalism (Buhler) and Term Paper Work Shop

**Finals Week**

M May-1 No class W May-3 Reflections and Extra Credit Due by 11:59PM online.

F May-5 Term Paper by 11:59pm online

**Policies**

All other policies are on the online syllabus.