



HULT
INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS SCHOOL

PHL 211

Contemporary Ethics

UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOL
Spring 2018

INSTRUCTOR
Alan Hertz

CLASS ROOM AND SCHEDULE

Please see your myCourses page for the room assignment and schedule of classes. Any changes will be indicated on myCourses.

OFFICE HOURS

Please see your myCourses page. You should take full advantage of this opportunity to meet with your professor outside the prescribed class period.

EMAIL

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

PHL 211 introduces important concepts and issues in political and personal ethics. Students look at several important approaches and apply them to a range of situations and questions in business and politics, as well as in social and personal decision-making, conduct, and judgment.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to:

- Introduce philosophical thinking and the study of ethics
- Enable students to apply ethical principles to a range of issues and decisions
- Enable students to assess, analyze, and critique ethical arguments
- Enable students to understand and articulate their own ethical preferences and judgments

Topics for study and discussion include:

How philosophers think
The concept of argument
An introduction to epistemology
Moral intuitions
Utilitarianism
Effective altruism
Liberalism and libertarianism
Kantian ethics
Justice, equality, fairness
Circles of obligation
Virtue ethics
Environmental ethics

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of this course, students should be able to:

CLO1	Articulate the key principles of five types of ethical thinking: of utility, of liberty, of rights, of fairness, of the common good
CLO2	Apply these principles to problems in personal, social, political, and business ethics, and to construct coherent, persuasive ethical arguments
CLO3	Assess the ethical arguments of classmates, as well as those made in the public realm, and to describe and defend their own ethical preferences and judgments

TEACHING AND LEARNING

PHL 211 Contemporary Ethics is part of the Hult General Education Program for undergraduates and meets the requirement for a course in ethics and philosophy. Students normally take it in their first or second year of study.

We will consider such questions as: are terrorism and torture ever justified? If so, when? Should heroin be legal? Should I fire a good worker so I can employ my cousin? Should I be reluctant to eat my pet? Should I get married to obtain a UK passport? Should I plagiarize my final exercise in this course? We will look at the biggest question of all: how can I live a good life?

Most class sessions combine lecture and discussion, with occasional interruptions for video or audio material. We regularly engage in thought experiments and sometimes play games.

METHOD AND WEIGHTING OF ASSESSMENT

Assignment 1: Midterm Test

Weighting (% of final grade): 30%

Learning Outcomes assessed: 1,2,3

Description of assignment: An in-class test in Week 7: students write two short essays, choosing from a menu of topics. One will be about philosophical thinking in general, and epistemological issues in particular. The other will invite students to apply Utilitarian reasoning to a practical problem in ethics.

Grading criteria (What constitutes a good assignment?): The test will assess:

- students' command of the reading, concepts and terminology of the first half of the course
- students' ability to apply these concepts to practical problems
- students' ability to construct a philosophical argument
- students' ability to write a short academic essay on an assigned topic under time pressure

A full rubric is available in an appendix to this document and on our myCourses page.

Assignment 2: The Bad Argument Dustbin

Weighting: 20%

Learning outcomes assessed: 1, 2, 3

Description of assignment: Students are expected to contribute to the discussion forum every week from week 3 to week 14. They summarize, analyze and develop arguments about ethical issues that they hear or read in the media and from other people.

Grading criteria: This assignment assesses:

- students' awareness of the ethical problems and discussions in the media and their everyday lives
- students' ability to think critically and apply ethical concepts outside an academic setting

A full rubric is available in an appendix to this document and on our myCourses page.

Assignment 3: Final exam**Weighting:** 50%**Learning outcomes assessed:** 1, 2, 3**Description of assignment:** In this two-hour final exam, held in week 15, students write two essays. One will involve applying the key concepts of the course to a specific ethical problem. The other will be an ethical self-analysis.**Grading criteria:** The test will assess:

- students' command of the reading, concepts and terminology of the second half of the course
- students' ability to apply these concepts to practical problems
- students' ability to construct a philosophical argument
- students' ability to write a short academic essay on an assigned topic under time pressure

A full rubric is available in an appendix to this document and on our myCourses page.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY		EVALUATION CRITERIA			
Assignment 1	20%	Description	Grade	Grade Points	Percent Scale
Assignment 2	30%	Very High Quality	A	4.00	90-100
Assignment 3	50%	Good	B	3.00	80-89
		Adequate (Pass)	C	2.00	70-79
		Inadequate	D	1.00	60-69
		Fail	F	0.00	0-59

SPECIAL POLICIES FOR THIS COURSE

You should read the Student Handbook to ensure you understand the School's policies and procedures. Remember that:

- Students arriving more than five minutes late will not be admitted to class.
- A late assignment will be penalized 10 points per day, including weekends.
- If a student has below 70% attendance by the end of the semester, and if there are no approved mitigating circumstances, the student will receive an F grade for their final assessment deliverable or exam.

You are also expected to conduct yourself in a professional manner. That means mobile phones must be switched off and in your bags. You must be prepared to take notes, whether on a laptop or on paper, and should bring paper and pen to class for this purpose. The professor reserves the right to ask you to close your laptop at any time.

The learning environment is delicate and easily disrupted, so:

- I will begin class with announcements—if you miss them, do not pester me or blame me for your confusion.

- You must not leave class in the middle except at break time. Eat, drink, smoke and excrete before class starts or after it ends.
- You must not conduct private conversations in class, or use electronic devices for anything other than classwork.
- All assessed work must be submitted as .doc or .docx documents through the appropriate channel of our myCourses page. The filename must include your name. I will not mark or grade work submitted in any other format or through any other channel, including e-mail.
- You must treat your classmates and me with courtesy and generosity. You must express your views temperately and kindly. People -- even people you disagree with, dislike or disapprove of -- have feelings, and in this class those feelings must be acknowledged and respected.

ESSENTIAL READING

The course is built around the work of two philosophers: Michael Sandel and Julian Baggin. Two books are required:

- Michael J Sandel, *Justice*
- Julian Baggin, *The Big Questions: Ethics*

You must buy both books and bring them to every class.

There will sometimes be additional required reading posted on our myCourses page.

RECOMMENDED READING

We will also occasionally use material from other books by Julian Baggin: *Do You Think What You Think You Think?* [Granta 2006]; *Making Sense*; *The Pig that Wants to Be Eaten* [Granta, 2005]; and *The Duck that Won the Lottery* [Granta 2008]. Copies of these are in the school's reserve collection.

These books usefully supplement the course material:

- *The Ethics Toolkit*, by Baggin and Fosl, is a more academic introduction to the study of ethics.
- In *The Puzzle of Ethics*, Peter Vardy and Paul Grosch take a traditional Christian approach.
- Peter Singer is probably the most important philosopher today in the field of Applied Ethics. His book *Practical Ethics* is a classic survey of important issues from a Utilitarian perspective; his *Animal Liberation* is a classic.
- William Macaskill's *Doing Good Better* is an excellent introduction to effective altruism.
- Amartya Sen's *The Idea of Justice* is an important attempt to make a political ethics of equity work.
- Ronald Dworkin's *Taking Rights Seriously* is a very challenging attempt to make natural rights the basis for ethical and political discussion; his recent book *Justice for Hedgehogs* continues the effort.

OTHER USEFUL MATERIAL

Sandel's website <http://www.justiceharvard.org/> allows you to hear a series of lectures from his Harvard course on which the book is based. They are wonderful, and we will spend some time with them in class. Other lectures by Sandel are

available on the BBC website and YouTube.

Peter Singer's "Ethics" at www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1985 is an excellent historical and thematic introduction; the website includes lots of other good things.

<https://www.thelifyoucansave.org/> and <http://www.givewell.org/> are the websites of organizations which support effective altruism.

The Guardian website www.guardian.co.uk also has a great deal of interesting material. The databases available to Hult students on myHult are full of buried treasure. It's worth digging!

COURSE SCHEDULE

This schedule will probably change as the course develops.

WEEK ONE

Class 1

Course introduction

Thinking philosophically: consistency, intuitions, thought experiments

Homework for class 2

- Explore our myCourses page
- Read the course outline and assignment briefs

Class 2

An excursion into epistemology: how and what do we know?

The need for knowledge: why epistemology first?

Hard and soft skepticism

Homework for week 2

Begin contributing to the Dustbin

Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "Evolutionary Psychology: a primer" at <http://www.cep.ucsb.edu/primer.html>

WEEK TWO

Epistemology continued: the tainted sources of knowledge

- Heredity
- Experience
- Culture

Homework for week 3

The Dustbin

Selections from Stuart Sutherland, *Irrationality: the enemy within* on our myCourses page

Selections from Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought* on our myCourses page

WEEK THREE

Class 1

Even more epistemology: obtaining, retaining, recalling knowledge

- Our weak, corruptible senses
- Our selective, corruptible memory

Class 2

Even more epistemology: the limitations of language

- A glimpse of Saussurean linguistics
- The many types of ambiguity

Homework for week 4

The Dustbin

Ursula K LeGuin, "The Ones who Walk away from Omelas" at <http://engl210-devkute.wikispaces.umb.edu/file/view/omelas.pdf>

WEEK FOUR

Class 1

The Moral Consistency Test

A visit to Omelas

Abraham, Isaac, and moral intuition

Class 2

The concept of argument

- Good, bad and dubious
- Some structures of argument
 - Deductive and inductive argument
 - Common strategies: analogy, the slippery slope, and others

Homework for week 5

The Dustbin

Baggini, *Ethics*, Chs 2,7

Sandel, *Justice*, Chs 1,2

Peter Singer, "Equality for Animals?" at <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1979----.htm>

WEEK FIVE

Class 1

Utilitarianism and outcome ethics

Rule Utilitarianism

Class 2

Applied Utilitarianism: animal interests

Homework for week 6

The Dustbin

Baggini, Ch 6, 14

Sandel, Ch 3
William Macaskill, "The Five Key Questions" on our myCourses page.

WEEK SIX

Class 1

Utilitarianism in action: effective altruism

Class 2

The principle of liberty

Consequentialism and deontology

Homework for week 7

The Dustbin

Baggini, Ch 10

Revise for midterm test

WEEK SEVEN

Class 1

Applying the principle of liberty

- Freedoms of speech: pornography, slander, hate speech, offensiveness
- The legal and the moral: sexual behavior and the law

Class 2

Midterm test

Homework for week 9

The Dustbin

Baggini, Chs 11, 12

Sandel, Ch 4

WEEK EIGHT

Reading week

WEEK NINE

Class 1

From liberalism to libertarianism

- Market morals
- Taxation and slavery

Class 2

Libertarianism again: conscription and conscientious objection

Midterm feedback

Homework for week 10

The Dustbin

Baggini, Ch 1,3,16

Sandel, Ch 5

WEEK TEN

Class 1

Kantian ethics

- Rights and rules
- Lies and promises

Class 2

Applying Kantian ethics

- Torture and terrorism
- Assisted dying

Homework for week 11

The Dustbin

Baggini, Chs 4,5,11

Sandel, Ch 6,7

WEEK ELEVEN

Class 1

What do we deserve? Justice, fairness, equality

Charity and obligation

Class 2

Applying the ethics of obligation

- Nepotism
- Affirmative action

Homework for week 12

The Dustbin

Baggini Ch 13

Sandel, Chs 8,9,10

WEEK TWELVE

Class 1

The ethics of the common good

- Immigration
- Nudging

Class 2

Environmental ethics: Gaia and her children

- Nuclear power
- Who cares if we survive?

Homework for week 13

The Dustbin

Baggini, Ch 8,14,15,17

WEEK THIRTEEN

Class 1

Positivism: do ethics progress?

The morality of war

Class 2

When principles collide

The ethics of abortion

Homework for week 14

Last chance for the Dustbin

Baggini, Chs 18,19,20

WEEK FOURTEEN

Class 1

The personal is the ethical

- Being a good student
- Living one's principles/Doing what you can
- Personal and professional ethics

Class 2

Taking your ethical fingerprint

Course review

WEEK FIFTEEN

Final exam: to be arranged