



University of New Haven
College of Arts and Sciences
Humanities and Social Sciences

Course Information:

PHIL 2222, Section 01
Ethics
Fall 2015
Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:50 to 12:05
203 Kaplan Hall
3 Credit Hours

Contact Information:

Dr. Douglas Ficek
Visiting Assistant Professor
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Office Hours: M/W 1:00-3:00

Course Description:

What should I do? Who should I become? What is the meaning of life – of *this* life, of *my* life? How should I treat the others around me, and how should I expect to be treated by them? Are there solutions to the moral problems that distress us and so often divide us? Questions like these – and there are many others – are about *ethics*, and in this introductory course we will explore them across nineteen readings and, time permitting, three remarkable films.

In the first part of this course, we will consider the problem of *relativism*, which is to say that we will examine the controversial position that there are no objective moral values, that there is, in the final analysis, no such thing as “right” or “wrong.” We will carefully read three short texts, after which we will watch the film *Lone Star*, which is about, among other things, racial and ethnic diversity in the United States.

In the second part of this course, we will explore *ethical theory*. We will read about the Divine Command Theory, Ethical Egoism, Virtue Ethics, Deontology, Utilitarianism, Existentialism, Alterity Ethics, Care Ethics, and Ubuntuism – all unique approaches to ethical theory. We will then watch the film *District 9*, which, in spite of its action elements, addresses many different ethical questions.

In the third and final part of this course, we will look at *applied ethics*. This is where we take ethical theories and apply them to specific issues, specific controversies. We will begin with abortion, which is easily the most controversial issue in this country, and then continue with anti-black racism and capital punishment. We will then watch the film *Dead Man Walking*, which is probably the best movie about the death penalty.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will learn (and hopefully appreciate) what it means to do philosophy.
2. Students will discover new (and possibly profound) approaches to ethical thinking.
3. Students will become better arguers (in the sense making and evaluating arguments).

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to explain course readings in pop quizzes and written papers.
2. Students will be able to evaluate course readings in class discussion and written papers.
3. Students will be able to develop their own arguments in class discussion and written papers.

Required Texts:

All of the required texts for this course are available for download on my professional website: www.douglasficek.com. Download them ASAP, and always have the appropriate readings with you in class, either as hard copies or as electronic documents (PDFs).

Requirements:

We will cover one reading per class, and it is your responsibility to read the appropriate texts *before class begins*. To this end, I will give you several pop quizzes throughout the semester, on which you may use your notes but not the readings themselves. These pop quizzes will always be on new material; they will never be on material that we have discussed in class. Also, they cannot be made up, so do not make lateness a habit.

In addition to these quizzes, I will be assigning three papers: one on moral relativism, one on ethical theory, and one on applied ethics. These paper assignments will consist of multiple questions, from which you can choose the one that is, from your point of view, the most interesting.

There will not be a midterm exam or a final exam.

Grading:

Attendance – 10%
Pop Quizzes – 20%
First Paper – 20%
Second Paper – 20%
Third Paper – 30%

Adding and Dropping:

The final day to add or drop a course without it appearing on your transcript is Monday, August 31st. To add or drop a course, you need the instructor's signature, so do not wait until the last minute to do so.

Attendance:

All students are expected to attend regularly and promptly all their classes, appointments, and exercises. While the university recognizes that some absences may occasionally be necessary, these should be held to a minimum. A maximum of two weeks of absences will be permitted for illness and emergencies. The instructor has the right to dismiss from class any student who has been absent more than the maximum allowed. After the last date to drop as published in the academic calendar, a student will receive an F, if failing at that point, or a W, if passing at the time of dismissal.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is a core university value that ensures respect for the academic reputation of the university, its students, faculty and staff, and the degrees it confers. UNH expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Please be familiar with the UNH policy on Academic Integrity, and please ask about my expectations regarding permissible or encouraged forms of student collaboration if they are unclear.

Students are required to adhere to the Academic Integrity Policies found in the Student Handbook.

Please know that I take academic dishonesty very seriously, and that plagiarized work will count as zeros *at best*. Do not risk failing this course by stealing the work of others.

Coursework:

This course will require significant in-class and out-of-class commitment from each student. The university estimates that a student should expect to spend two hours outside of class for each hour they are in a class. For example, a three credit course should average six hours of additional work outside of class.

Bottom line: If you cannot fully commit yourself to this course, then you should not take it.

Support Services:

The University recognizes that students often can use some help outside of class and offers academic assistance through several offices. In addition to talking with your instructor and advisor, we recommend you contact the Office of Academic Services (OAS) for help with your academic work (call 203-932-7234 or visit 208 Maxcy Hall). The Center for Learning Resources (CLR) in Peterson Library is equipped to help you with writing, mathematics, biology and physics.

The University of New Haven seeks to maintain a supportive academic environment for all students inclusive of those with any disabilities, chronic medical conditions, or military-related disorders. If you feel that you may need such accommodations, please provide Linda Copney-Okeke, Director of Campus Access Services, with your Verification of Disability/Request for Reasonable Accommodations letter or contact the Campus Access Services office to begin the process to ensure that accommodations can be made available to you. Campus Access Services is located in Sheffield Hall on the ground floor in the rear of the building, and can be reached by email at CampusAccess@newhaven.edu or by phone at 203-932-7332.

Special Needs:

Students with disabilities are encouraged to share, in confidence, information about needed specific course accommodations. The Campus Access Services (CAS) office provides services and support that serve to promote educational equity and ensure that students are able to participate in the opportunities available at the University of New Haven. Accommodations cannot be made without written documentation from Campus Access Services.

Religious Observances:

The University of New Haven respects the right of its students to observe religious holidays that may require their absence from class or from other required university-sponsored activities.

Students who wish to observe such holidays should not be penalized for their absence, although in academic courses they are responsible for making up missed work. Instructors should try to avoid scheduling exams or quizzes on religious holidays, but when such conflicts occur, should provide reasonable accommodations for any missed assignment deadlines or exams. If a class, an assignment due date, or exam interferes with the observance of such a religious holiday, it is the student's responsibility to notify his or her instructor, preferably at the beginning of the term, but otherwise at least two weeks before the holiday. In a similar vein, students who will not participate in other required activities due to religious observance should notify the staff or faculty member who oversees the activity with the same lead-time. More information about religious observance policies can be found in the Student Handbook.

Caveats:

As an instructor, I am fairly easy-going. I do, however, insist upon a respectful atmosphere in the classroom. What does this mean? It means: no phone calls, no texting or Facebooking, no sleeping, and no ridiculously long bathroom breaks. If you phone does go off during class, you have a choice: You can either sing a song for the class, or I can assign an additional paper that *everybody* must do. This is not a joke.

Also, "My flash drive broke" has become the new "My dog ate my homework," and I will no longer accept it as an excuse for late or incomplete work. Please use www.dropbox.com (or something similar) to ensure the security of your written work.

Schedule:

August 25 – Course Introduction

THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM

August 27 – Selections from *Folkways* by William Graham Sumner

September 1 – "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" by James Rachels

September 3 – "Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation and Ethical Relativism" by Loretta M. Kopelman

September 8 – NO CLASS

September 10 – Film: *Lone Star*

September 15 – Film: *Lone Star*

ETHICAL THEORY

September 17 – Divine Command Theory. Selections from *Euthyphro* by Plato

September 22 – Ethical Egoism. “The Objectivist Ethics” by Ayn Rand

September 24 – Virtue Ethics. Selections from *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle

September 29 – Deontology. Selections from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* by Immanuel Kant

October 1 – Utilitarianism. Selections from *Utilitarianism* by John Stuart Mill

October 6 – Existentialism. Selections from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by Simone de Beauvoir

October 8 – Alterity Ethics. Selections from *I and Thou* by Martin Buber

October 13 – Care Ethics. “Why Care about Caring?” by Nel Noddings

October 15 – Ubuntuism. “Ubuntu and Its Socio-Moral Significance” by Mluleki Munyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi

October 20 – NO CLASS

October 22 – Film: *District 9*

October 27 – Film: *District 9*

APPLIED ETHICS

October 29 – “A Defense of Abortion” by Judith Jarvis Thomson

November 3 – “An Argument that Abortion Is Wrong” by Don Marquis

November 5 – “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion” by Mary Anne Warren

November 10 – “Racism as a Form of Bad Faith” by Lewis R. Gordon

November 12 – “Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy” by Charles W. Mills

November 17 – “In Defense of the Death Penalty” by Louis P. Pojman

November 19 – “Against the Death Penalty” by Jeffrey Reiman

November 24 – Film: *Dead Man Walking*

November 26 – NO CLASS

December 1 – Film: *Dead Man Walking*

December 3 – Discussion & Course Conclusion

December 15 – FINAL EXAM (8:00-10:00)