

**Missouri State University
College of Humanities and Public Affairs
Department of Philosophy**

**Spring 2016
Syllabus & Schedule**

Course: Ethics & Contemporary Issues, PHI 115, Section 898

Credit hours: 3

Time and Location: This is an on-line, asynchronous course with no class meetings. You will complete all your work on-line. Weeks will begin at 12:01 a.m. on Mondays and end at 11:59 p.m. on Sundays.

Email: patrickbeach@missouristate.edu

Office: Strong 329

Telephone 417-836-5720 (I am easier to reach by email)

Office Hours: MWF 9:00–11:00, R 9:30–11:00, and by appointment (including Skype and phone)

Course Website: blackboard.missouristate.edu

Communication Policy: I will respond to emails within 24 hours (but usually sooner). The same is expected of students.

Required Texts

- Steven M. Cahn. *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*. Third. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014
- Supplemental materials will be posted on or linked from Blackboard.

Course Description

General Education Course (Focus on Public Issues). This course examines ethical principles and theories in relation to contemporary moral issues (e.g. euthanasia, capital punishment, economic justice, environmental issues, world hunger). Through a consideration of ideals of justice and human dignity, as well as concepts of rights and responsibilities, it also explores the moral requirements for community and justified political order.

Course Goals

- General Goal (1): Students will be able to develop the disposition and skills to gather, organize, refine, analyze, and evaluate critically information and ideas.
- General Goal (2): Students will be able to develop new ideas, products, or solutions and explore novel perspectives and approaches.
- General Goal (14): Students will be able to articulate their value systems, understand the ethical implications of their actions based on those values, and develop skills consistent with having a positive impact on individuals, groups, or communities.

Student Learning Outcomes

- SLO1.1 Identify and follow through on personally and socially relevant problems and reasonable solutions to those problems.
- SLO1.2 Identify relevant information sources, make reasoned choices among those sources, and open-mindedly follow where those sources lead.
- SLO1.3 Justify conclusions reached in the analysis of information.
- SLO1.4 Analyze evidence, statements, alternative viewpoints, graphics, and other forms of information.
- SL2.1 Develop creative and novel solutions to personally and socially relevant problems.
- SL2.2 Take account of novel, alternative, contradictory, and even radical viewpoints in creating new ideas, products, or solutions appropriate to the domain or subject matter.
- SL14.2 Understand the foundations for ethical thought and action.
- SL14.3 Identify areas of difficulty in responding to situations demanding ethical inquiry.
- SL14.4 Analyze complex ethical dilemmas facing the world.
- SL14.5 Employ supporting materials (e.g., explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, and quotations from relevant authorities) in a manner that establishes the speaker's credibility/authority on the topic.

Course Requirements

Work Load Estimates: In a typical week, you should expect to devote about 9–12 hours to the reading and writing for this course. Sometimes the readings are long and sometimes they are quite difficult. You will need to invest time in preparing for class. In addition, since this course is completely on-line, for most students it will require a larger (not smaller) time investment than for a face-to-face course.

Means of Assessment: (A) Three exams, (B) best ten reading quizzes (out of about 12), (C) three discussion board entries. There will be six discussion board topics with only half the students writing on each (so each student should do three—and only three—of the six.) Students who are listed in Blackboard by last name A–J will do odd-numbered discussion boards, and K–Z will do even-numbered discussion boards.

Extra Credit: I offer no extra credit. Take your grades seriously from day one of this course. At the end of the semester there is *nothing* you can do to improve your grade other than do your best on the remaining assignments.

Attendance Policy: Since this is an on-line course, if you miss an assignment for a planned event, such as representing MSU on a debate team, I will be hard pressed to accept that as an excuse if you could easily complete the assignment earlier in the week in which it is due. I do not allow make up work except in cases which can be documented for (a) a death in your family, (b) extreme illness, (c) religious observation, or (d) your representation of MSU in some official capacity (such as presenting at a conference).

Grading Proportions

Best 10 on-line reading quizzes: 25%

Three exams: 60%

Three discussion board assignments: 15%

Grading Scale

94–100% = A

90–93% = A-

87–89% = B+

84–86% = B

80–83% = B-

77–79% = C+

74–76% = C

70–73% = C-

67–69% = D+

60–66% = D

0–59% = F

See <http://www.missouristate.edu/registrar/catalog/grades.html> for an explanation of what the grades mean.

Advice

- Read the material carefully and take reading notes as you go along. Mark up the text in meaningful ways as you read. While I sometimes will give some guidance on the material before you read it, some of it will still be difficult. Be prepared to read and re-read the material. Philosophy *cannot* be skimmed.
- Watch all slide presentations and take good notes on them. (I will provide the slides that you can print out and annotate as you watch the videos.) Note that there will not be a slide presentation every week (but most weeks).
- Look up terms you don't understand.
- Write summaries of the readings, and write up what you think are the muddiest points in your understanding of the material.
- Get help with any writing problems that you know you have. I can help you and the writing center can help you. I expect college-level reading and writing skills.
- Come to office hours (face-to-face or virtually) and we can talk about the material. I am the most informed person you can talk to about this class—I am the best free tutor you have for this course. Or set up discussion groups (face-to-face or virtually) and invite me to participate. Warning: my time becomes very tight before exams.
- Philosophy is a *content-laden* discipline. We will pay attention to a lot of fine-grained details. So while looking at the big picture helps, much of what we will attend to (and you will be responsible for) is at the micro level. The devil is in the details.
- Students may vary in their abilities to read and write at the college level. You can expect to acquire these abilities only if you honor all course policies, attend classes regularly, complete all assigned work in good faith and on time, and meet all other course expectations of you as a student.

Policies

- Students who cheat or plagiarize will fail the course with a grade of XF. Refer to the Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures. It is available at the reserve desk at Meyer Library and at http://www.missouristate.edu/policy/Op3_01_AcademicIntegrityStudents.htm
- Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Disability Resource Center. <http://www.missouristate.edu/disability/>

- Respectful, professional, and civil conduct is the expected norm for the class.
- You are expected to check your MSU email daily and respond to any email that I send you (seeking a response) within 24 hours. You do not need to respond to informative emails from me. Any emails sent to me should be written to a professional standard (see “How to Email Your Professor” on Blackboard).
- The schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, or to ensure better student learning.

Tentative Schedule

Last Updated: July 17, 2016
(Subject to Revision)

Note: Readings are in Steven M. Cahn, *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Analogy, Third Edition* (Cahn) or are posted as PDFs on Blackboard (Bb) unless otherwise noted.

Week / Week of	Topics, Readings, & Tests	Assigned Work
1	Topic 1: Moral Theories	
Jan. 11	Watch: "Video: Course Introduction" Read: Beach, "Logic and Truth" (Bb) & Beach, "Enthymemes and Rendering Arguments" (Bb) Watch: "Video: Logic and Truth" (Bb)	Reading Quiz 1
2	Read: Cahn, "God and Morality" (Cahn) Jan. 18 Read: Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (Cahn) Read: Rachels, "Egoism and Moral Skepticism" (Cahn) Watch: "Video: Cahn, Rachels, and Rachels" (Cahn)	Discussion Board 1 Reading Quiz 2
3	Read: Kant, "The Categorical Imperative" (Cahn) and O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (Cahn) Jan. 25 Watch: "Video: Kant and O'Neill"	Reading Quiz 3
4	Read: Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Cahn) Feb. 1 Read: Pojman, "Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism" (Cahn) Watch: "Video: Mill and Pojman"	Reading Quiz 4 Discussion Board 2
5	Read: Aristotle, "The Nature of Virtue" (Cahn) and Mayo, "Virtue Ethics" (Cahn) Feb. 8 Exam 1: Due February 14	Reading Quiz 5 Exam 1: February 14
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Week / Week of	Topics, Readings, & Tests	Assigned Work
6	Topic 2: Abortion and Euthanasia	
Feb. 15	Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (Cahn) and Warren “On the Moral and Legal Justification of Abortion” (Cahn)	Reading Quiz 6
7	Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” (Cahn)	Reading Quiz 7
Feb. 22		Discussion Board 3
8	Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” (Cahn)	Reading Quiz 8
Feb. 29	Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (Cahn)	
	Spring Break	
Mar. 7		
9	Steinbock, “The Intentional Termination of Life” (Cahn)	
Mar. 14	Exam 2: March 20	Exam 2: March 20
10	Topic 3: Animal Rights and World Hunger	
Mar. 21	Peter Singer, “Animal Liberation” (Video)	Reading Quiz 9
11	Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights” (Cahn)	Reading Quiz 10
Mar. 28	Cohen, “Why Animals Have No Rights” (Cahn)	Discussion Board 4
12	Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (Cahn)	Reading Quiz 11
Apr. 4	Arthur, “World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer” (Cahn)	
13	Topic 4: Capital Punishment and Terrorism	
	Kant, “The Right of Punishing” (Bb)	
Apr. 11	Bentham, “Of the Proportion between Punishments and Offenses” (Bb)	Discussion Board 5
14	van den Haag, “The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense” (Bb)	
Apr. 18	Nathanson, “An Eye for an Eye?” (Bb)	Reading Quiz 12
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Week / Week of	Topics, Readings, & Tests	Assigned Work
15 Apr. 25	Walzer, "Terrorism" (Cahn) McPherson, "Is Terrorism Distinctively Wrong" (Cahn)	Discussion Board 6
16 May 2	Nathanson, "Can Terrorism Be Morally Justified?" (Bb)	Reading Quiz 13
Final May 9	Final Evaluation: May 12 by 5 p.m. (It may, of course, be completed earlier)	Final posted the first day of finals, due the last day