

Course Syllabus

ETHICS: THEORIES OF GOOD AND EVIL

PHL 315 | University of Alabama at Birmingham | Fall 2018

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Note: Print a copy of this syllabus for easy reference about due dates, policies, student support, etc. The syllabus is the ruling document, although small changes are sometimes needed. If changes are made, an announcement will be sent through Canvas.

1. BASIC COURSE INFO

Professor Info:

Prof: Dr. Joshua May
Office: Humanities Bldg. Rm 425
Email: joshmay@uab.edu
Website: www.joshdmay.com
Office Hours: Wed. 10:30-11:30 (& by appt.)

Lecture Info:

Time: MWF 2:30 pm - 3:20 pm (sect. 1G)
Location: Humanities Bldg. room 235
Course Website: Canvas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course covers some central debates in ethical theory, which ultimately seeks a general explanation of what makes something morally right or wrong. Half of the course focuses on normative theories of right and wrong, such as utilitarianism, which judge the morality of an act solely in terms of its consequences (think: “the ends justify the means”). Alternative theories insist on including other elements as well, such as human rights, rational choice, and the character of the actor. The other half of the course covers metaethics, which tries to answer questions such as: Are there moral facts? If so, are they in some sense objective? Is moral judgment grounded primarily in reasoning or in emotion? Are humans fundamentally good?

Prerequisite: One previous PHL course or permission of instructor required.

This course counts toward: the *Philosophy & Law minor*, the Philosophy major (including the *Ethics and Value Theory* requirement for the Honors track), and the Ethics Track of the Philosophy major.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand prominent moral theories and concepts.
- Clearly and accurately explain complex ideas in writing.
- Critically evaluate moral arguments in writing.
- Evaluate and justify one's moral beliefs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

(1) *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (2nd ed. 2013) by R. Shafer-Landau, Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN: 978-0470671603. [Locally or online for about \$60 new, \$30 used, and \$43 for ebook].

(2) Some additional readings (as PDFs) will be available on the course website (on Canvas).

ASSESSMENT

1. Engagement	(in class)	10% of grade	(attendance, participation, outline, etc.)
2. Quizzes (x5)	(in class)	20% of grade	
3. Midterm Exam	(in class)	20% of grade	
4. Essay	(~8 pgs.)	30% of grade	
5. Final Exam	(in class)	20% of grade	(not cumulative)

Note: For exact due dates, see the Schedule at the end of this syllabus.

CLASS UPDATES

Important announcements and updates will be made occasionally on the course website (<https://uab.instructure.com/>). So do check it frequently or make sure to have it set up to email you each announcement.

MATERIAL COVERED

We will be discussing material primarily from the text. However, we may not cover everything in the assigned reading, and sometimes material will be brought up in lecture that is not in the readings. So it's crucial that you come to class. Likewise, there may be some material in the readings you'll be accountable for that we don't discuss in great detail in lecture.

COURSE MATERIALS: HANDOUTS, LECTURE SLIDES, ETC.

To help students, I will provide handouts, slides, and so on. I hope providing slides in particular will allow students in class to participate in discussion rather than write down everything I say. Keep in mind, though, the slides will be rather *barebones*, so you may want to supplement them with some of your own notes.

Copyright Notice: The course materials that I create (e.g. handouts, slides, exams) are intellectual property. They are for you to use in this class only, during this semester. Course materials are not for others to use (e.g. they're not to be posted on other websites or otherwise shared with others).

NO LAPTOPS, PHONES, ETC.

During class, turn off and put away all computers, phones, and other electronic devices. Texting, instant messaging, web surfing, message checking, e-mailing, are all distractions to you and your fellow classmates. After much deliberation, I believe the best option is to just ban it all during lecture. Think of the class meetings as a "philosophy retreat" where you focus on only philosophy. That's not too much to ask. (If you have a special need for some such device, talk with me and of course we can make exceptions as needed.)

A rationale I endorse:

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/>

Penalties: If I catch you during class, I'll ask you to put the device away and you won't be marked as present for that lecture. If the problem persists, you will need to leave.

2. ASSIGNMENTS

ENGAGEMENT

Your Engagement grade will be determined by the following assignments (which add up to 100 points):

- (a) *Profile Picture* on Canvas [4 pts] – an appropriate picture of yourself.
- (b) *Peer Discussion* [12 pts] – brief report of ethical discussion with a peer outside of class.
- (c) *Outline Comments* [12 pts] – submit an essay outline & comment on another student's.
- (d) *Attendance* [72 pts] –

I will do roll call. It encourages attendance but also helps me to learn names. Your Engagement grade will be primarily determined by this. We'll have about 36 regular class meetings [so about 2 points each] and your grade will largely be determined by the proportion of lectures you attend.

For example, if you attend 75% of lectures, then you will receive around a C grade. However, I reward those who consistently participate in class and penalize those who consistently cause problems (see below).

Tardiness: If you're late and miss roll call, you can receive 50% of the points for the day, but *only if you inform me after class that you were late.*

Unexcused absences: You'll receive 0 points for the missed lecture. Ultimately, acquiring a few unexcused absences isn't very detrimental (provided you aren't disruptive in class). But of course missing more than a few classes can make it difficult to keep up with the material.

Excused absences: These require proper documentation—e.g. for jury duty (note from the court), military service (note from military superior), or required university-sponsored activities (documentation from UAB official or supervisor). Students who get absences excused won't earn the points for that day but won't lose points either—the day just won't be factored into the calculation of their attendance score. Remember, students with excused absences must still complete work and readings by the required due dates, unless I approve an extension.

Participation & Disruptions: I'm very interested in what you think about the issues we discuss in class. For example, ask questions (even if just about clarification) and make comments (such as criticizing one of the authors we're discussing). Outstanding participation can be like extra credit for your final Engagement grade: it can boost it. Being disruptive, however, can negatively affect your score (e.g. losing attendance points that day).

QUIZZES/IN-CLASS WRITING

Quizzes will be either *multiple choice*, *short answer*, or *short essay* (or some combination), depending on the week. I'll mix it up so there are a number of different testing methods used. So these may involve some short essay writing. The quizzes occur about every other week. *No quizzes can be made up without very special circumstances.*

The quizzes cover the material from before it (from the last quiz). So, for example, Quiz 2 will cover the material on the Schedule that falls between Quiz 1 and Quiz 2. That's not a precise measurement, since sometimes a quiz will occur during the middle of a topic, in which case the following quiz may cover some of that same overlapping topic.

Also, some quizzes may test whether you've done the reading. So come to class prepared.

EXAMS

Both the midterm and final exams will involve short-answer questions (e.g. multiple-choice, fill in the blank, or define terms) and a short essay. Before the exams, you'll receive a *study guide*. The final will be partly *cumulative* but weighted toward material covered since the midterm.

Feedback: I have to grade a lot of finals over a short period of time, so I'm not always able to provide comments on the essay portion. And I don't plan to let students see their responses to the multiple choice or the answers. Sorry, I know that's unfortunate, but the final exam is the main hurdle in this course and I need to prevent versions of it from floating around out there for some future students to cheat off of or use to gain an unfair advantage over others.

ESSAY

Later in the term I'll provide detailed information on how to write a philosophical essay. But note now that you will be required to write at the college-level. Poor writing skills will greatly hinder one's performance in this course.

LATE & MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments can be made up or submitted late only if you have very *extenuating circumstances* (e.g. medical, military, jury duty) that you can document. Make sure you let me know as soon as *such special circumstances arise*; otherwise I might not be able to work something out with you. Moreover, make-ups are conditional on our being able to schedule a mutually convenient time for it and a time that is either soon before or after the original assignment occurred. For example, don't expect to be able to take an exam two weeks after (or before) the rest of the class takes it.

What are the late penalties? If I accept a late assignment without an agreed upon extension, a 5% penalty applies for the first day late; 2% per day is applied for the next 13 calendar days after the due date. Assignments won't be accepted after more than 14 calendar days, except in exceptional circumstances and in consultation with the professor. Late penalties are rounded down to the nearest whole point (e.g. 1 day late on a 10-point assignment yields 1 point off).

CHEATING (INCLUDING PLAGIARISM)

Should students cheat? No! It's immoral and imprudent. I warn against this at the beginning of every semester, and still nearly every time at least one person gets caught! *I take this extremely seriously.* I will give all cheaters a failing grade and report the incidents to the university.

What counts as cheating? Academic cheating or misconduct includes *abetting, collusion, fabrication, and misrepresentation*. But it's *your responsibility* to make sure that your work doesn't violate university policies. (Compare: Ignorance of the law is generally no excuse.)

All UAB students are expected to be familiar with the *UAB Academic Honor Code*, as well as any honor codes that are specific to their schools or disciplines. The code represents a commitment to integrity in the academic community and respect for educational endeavors. For your convenience, here is the link to UAB's page on *Academic Integrity*:

<http://www.uab.edu/students/one-stop/policies/academic-honor-code>

If you need any help in understanding the honor code or are in any doubt about whether your work may violate it, check with me well in advance. For a tutorial on plagiarism, see:

<https://www.mhsl.uab.edu/2009/plagiarism/>

How is cheating detected? Various ways. Note, however, that if you take this course you're agreeing to submit your work online, when instructed, to a program called *TurnItIn* that detects cheating (from plagiarism to collusion). Note that TurnItIn will retain an anonymous version of your submission as part of their database so that students who cheat from it can be detected. Because of this program, the vast majority of you who do your own work and cite the sources of your information properly will not have to compete with students who commit undetected plagiarism.

GRADES

All grades for assignments will be posted on the course website. Canvas automatically calculates your grade based on the weight of the assignments. Using the "What-If Grades" feature, you can see what your final course grade will be if you get a certain score on future assignments. I use a standard conversion from percents to letter grades (A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, etc.). Note: For final grades, UAB only uses A, B, C, D, F (no +/-).

Note Well: The default grade for any assignment is *not* an "A" or 100% with points taken away for errors. Rather, the default grade (if we must imagine one) is more like a "C" which is supposed to be the grade for average work meeting minimum expectations. Points are then taken off for doing worse than this or added for doing better.

What if you're unhappy with a grade? Ultimately, not everyone will receive the grade they wanted. But please note that I apply the usual standards in the discipline of Philosophy and I apply them fairly. That means I can't make a special exception for anyone (e.g. "I tried really hard" or "I need to get an A for a scholarship" or "I felt I did really well," etc.). Making special exceptions for some students but not others is unfair and unethical. I will amend grades only if I made a calculating error or inadvertently misapplied a standard. I will not change the grading standards or offer extra credit opportunities for only some students.

Do you offer extra credit? Rarely, and when I do the opportunity is open to the entire class. I usually only offer extra credit for attending events relevant to our course, typically only for ones organized by the Philosophy Department. Giving extra credit for events is tricky. Some people can't attend them because they have other obligations, and then they can't take advantage of the opportunity. So it's a bit of a dilemma. It's good to encourage students to support events related to our class topics, but that unfortunately leaves some others out. So what I do is make sure the extra credit isn't especially hefty. That way, for those who can't make it, you're not missing out on an amazing opportunity to radically improve your grade in our class. But it still provides an incentive for students to attend who can make it.

3. STUDENT SUPPORT

CONTACTING ME

Email is the preferred method of contact for this course (I aim to respond within 24 hours on weekdays). Other ways to talk with me include: before or after class, during my regular office hours, by appointment to meet in person or chat via Skype. I encourage you to *communicate with me outside of class*. Talking to me about the material, especially in preparation for an upcoming assignment, is not just for those who fear failing the course; it's also for those who want to secure an "A" (or whatever your goal is).

INTERNET RESOURCES

The website for this class and my personal website have some links that may prove useful in the course. See also the *Library's Philosophy Guide*: <https://guides.library.uab.edu/phil>

WRITING SUPPORT

I'll be expecting you to write *college-level papers*. Your writing should be clear, organized, professional, and so on. Furthermore, writing in philosophy is often very different from writing in other disciplines. Since philosophy requires the clear communication of often difficult and subtle ideas, weak writing renders high level performance impossible. So I encourage you to talk to me about your paper (and exams) before the due date if you have any questions. (More details on requirements for papers will be provided later on in the course.)

In general, I am happy to discuss with you drafts of your papers before they are turned in. However, I will *not* accept emailed or dropped off drafts. Instead, you are welcome and encouraged to bring your drafts into office hours (or make an appointment) to *discuss* them.

PHILOSOPHY CLUB

At UAB's Student Fellowship of Philosophy (Phil Club), all are welcome. You don't need to be a Philosophy major or minor to attend meetings, and your friends are welcome too. Meetings

each semester are either weekly or biweekly and snacks (often pizza) are typically available. The Club usually either discusses a philosophical topic, watches a video, or organizes events. Early in the semester I'll announce the meeting schedule, but you can also see their Facebook group ("UAB Philosophy Club").

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

The Health and Wellness Center is located at 1714 9th Avenue South. Call (205) 934-3581 for an appointment. In addition to a wide array of health services, the center offers a strong, confidential counseling program free of charge to current UAB students. Psychiatric services are also available. Call (205) 934-5816 or stop by to schedule an appointment. Stress, anxiety, and depression are the leading issues handled by our professional counselors.

IF YOU FACE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES

If for any reason you are struggling—due to medical issues or otherwise—get in touch with me as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully. But you must get in touch as soon as you know there's a problem. Waiting until the last minute, for example, might mean we can't work anything out. I also recommend getting in touch with UAB's *Office of Student Advocacy, Rights, and Conduct* (<http://www.uab.edu/students/sarc/>).

DSS ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

If you're registered with Disability Support Services (DSS), let me know as soon as possible about requested accommodations. If you have a disability but haven't yet contacted DSS, please contact them as soon as possible (<https://www.uab.edu/students/disability/>). Accommodations are not retroactive. Students should obtain an accommodation letter from DSS at the *beginning* of each semester, get that letter to the instructor, and contact the instructor several days before the accommodation is required. Requests for reasonable accommodations involve an interactive process and consist of a collaborative effort among the student, DSS, faculty and staff.

TITLE IX STATEMENT

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is committed to providing an environment that is free from sexual misconduct, which includes gender-based assault, harassment, exploitation, dating and domestic violence, stalking, as well as discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. If you have experienced any of the aforementioned conduct we encourage you to report the incident. UAB provides several avenues for reporting. For more information about Title IX, policy, reporting, protections, resources and supports, please visit <http://www.uab.edu/titleix> for UAB's Title IX Policy, UAB's Equal Opportunity, AntiHarassment Policy and Duty to Report and Non-Retaliation Policy.

4. COURSE SCHEDULE

WHEN TO READ

Students are expected to *do the assigned reading*. You should aim to do the reading *the day it's covered* in class—or at least around that time. The point of this is: *don't give up on the reading*. If you didn't get to it before we covered it in class, make sure you do it after. This is especially important because philosophy involves close examination of often fairly dense arguments. However, you aren't expected to have figured it all out before the relevant lecture. That's what we're going to try to do in class. (Notice also that I've provided the page numbers of each reading so you can see the length and plan ahead.)

Mental Fatigue: Don't underestimate the power of mental fatigue. When reading, if you find that you can't process it, try reading it again. If you still feel rather lost, it might be that you're getting mentally exhausted. Try putting the book down and coming back to it later, even perhaps the next day. It's quite likely that you'll find it much easier after a break.

Pro Tip: I don't expect you to read the footnotes or endnotes of the articles before coming to class. Just have a quick read to get an overall sense of what the author's main ideas are.

SCHEDULE/CALENDAR

Some readings are in our textbook (*ET*=*Ethical Theory*); the rest are PDFs available on Canvas.

- The schedule is subject to minor change, but unlikely.
- Tasks in brackets and not bolded—e.g. [Disc. 1]—are for *online students only*.
- 📖 = read for the corresponding lecture. 🎧 = listen.
- **pp.** = pages (e.g. "pp. 2-3 only" = read pages 2-3 only; "20pp." = 20 pages in length)

Week	Date	Module #, Lecture Topic, & Reading	Tasks Due
#1	8/27	1a. Intro: Ethical Theorizing 📖 Syllabus 📖 Singer, Peter (2013). "Heartwarming Causes are Nice, but Let's Give to Charity with Our Heads." <i>Washington Post</i> (4pp.)	
	8/29	1b. Intro: The Trolley Problem 📖 Foot, Philippa (1967). "...and the Doctrine of the Double Effect." <i>ET</i> (pp. 536-542)	Profile Pic
	8/31	1c. Intro: Ethics & Religion 📖 Plato (ca. 380 BCE). "Euthyphro" (excerpt). <i>ET</i> (pp. 218-19).	
#2	9/3	No Class – Labor Day	
	9/5	2a. Utilitarianism: Maximize Happiness 📖 Shafer-Landau, Russ (2013). "Introduction to Part VIII." <i>ET</i> (pp. 413-6).	
	9/7	2b. Utilitarianism: Mill's Defense 📖 Mill, J. S. (1863) "Hedonism" (from <i>Utilitarianism</i>). <i>ET</i> (pp. 258-63).	
#3	9/10	2c. Utilitarianism: Objections 📖 Nozick, Robert (1974) "Experience Machine." <i>ET</i> (pp. 264-5).	Quiz 1
	9/12	3a. Consequentialism: Maximize Good Results 📖 Smart, J. J. C. (1956) "Extreme & Restricted Utilitarianism." <i>ET</i> (pp. 423-7).	
	9/14	3b. Consequentialism: Alienation 📖 Railton, Peter (1984). "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality." <i>ET</i> (pp. 441-57).	
#4	9/17	3c. Consequentialism: Progress 📖 Srinivasan, Amia (2015). "Stop the Robot Apocalypse." <i>London Rev. Bks.</i> (15pp.)	
	9/19	Catch Up & Discussion Day	Quiz 2
	9/21	4a. Deontology: Golden Rule Improved 📖 Shafer-Landau, Russ (2013). "Introduction to Part IX." <i>ET</i> (pp. 481-4). 📖 Kant, Immanuel (1785). "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (excerpt). <i>ET</i> (pp. 490-7 only) [2 nd half of chapter]	
#5	9/24	4b. Deontology: Debunking Intuitions 📖 Singer, Peter (2005). "Ethics and Intuitions." <i>Journal of Ethics</i> (20pp.).	
	9/26	Catch Up & Discussion Day	
	9/28	No Class – Prof. Away for Conference	
#6	10/1	** Midterm ** (in Class)	Midterm
	10/3	5a. Virtue Ethics: Morality's Scope 📖 Wolf, Susan (1982). "Moral Saints." <i>ET</i> (pp. 200-11).	
	10/5	5b. Virtue Ethics: A Third Way? 📖 Shafer-Landau, Russ (2013). "Introduction to Part XI." <i>ET</i> (pp. 611-4).	

#7	10/8	5c. Virtue Ethics: Guiding Action 📖 Annas, Julia (2004). "Being Virtuous & Doing the Right Thing." <i>ET</i> (pp. 676-85).	
	10/10	5d. Virtue Ethics: Character Critique 📖 Doris, John (1998). "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics." <i>Nous</i> (pp. 504-30).	
	10/12	No Class – Prof. Away at Conference	
#8	10/15	6a. Egoism: Are We Selfish? 📖 Mencius (340 BC). "Are Humans Good by Nature?" <i>Ethics</i> , P. Singer (ed.). (2pp.)	Quiz 3
	10/17	6b. Egoism: Arguments Against 📖 May, Joshua (2011). "Psychological Egoism" (excerpt, §§1-4) <i>Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (12pp).	
	10/19	6c. Egoism: Arguments Against 📖 Feinberg, Joel (1965). "Psychological Egoism." <i>ET</i> (pp. 167-73) [skip §D].	
#9	10/22	7a. Realism: Objective Morality 📖 Shafer-Landau, Russ (2013). "Introduction to Part I." <i>ET</i> (pp. 3-6).	
	10/24	7b. Realism: Moral Language 📖 Ayer, A. J. (1936). "A Critique of Ethics." <i>ET</i> (pp. 16-21).	
	10/26	7c. Realism: Relativity 📖 Gensler, Henry (1998). "Cultural Relativism." <i>ET</i> (pp. 44-7).	
#10	10/29	8a. Motivation: Problem for Realism? 📖 Hume, David (1739). "Of the Influencing Motives of the Will." <i>ET</i> (pp. 7-9) [only read first section]. 🎧 <i>This American Life</i> (2011) "The Psychopath Test." (50 min. audio or transcript).	
	10/31	8b. Motivation: Brain Damage 📖 Roskies, Adina (2003). "Are Ethical Judgments Intrinsically Motivational? Lessons from 'Acquired Sociopathy.'" (16pp.)	
	11/2	Catch Up & Discussion Day	Quiz 4
#11	11/5	8c. Motivation: A Realist Reply 📖 Smith, Michael (1993). "Realism." <i>ET</i> (pp. 63-7)	
	11/7	Interlude: Writing a Philosophy Essay 📖 Pinker, Steven (2014). "The Source of Bad Writing." <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (4pp.) 📖 May, Josh (2016). "How to Construct an Essay" & "Writing in Philosophy" (10 pp.)	
	11/9	No Class – Complete Peer Discussions (Prof. at Ethics Bowl)	Peer Disc.
#12	11/12	9a. Rationalism: Reason Reigns 📖 Kant, Immanuel (1785). "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (excerpt). <i>ET</i> (pp. 485-90 only) [first section only].	
	11/14	9b. Rationalism: Objections 📖 Arpaly, Nomy (2002). "Moral Worth" (excerpt). <i>J. of Philosophy</i> (pp. 225-231).	
	11/16	Catch Up & Discussion Day	Quiz 5
Thanksgiving Break: 11/19 - 11/23			
#13	11/26	10a. Sentimentalism: Emotion Reigns 📖 Hume, David (1740). "Moral Distinctions Not Deriv'd from Reason." <i>ET</i> (pp. 9-15) [now finishing this chapter].	
	11/28	10b. Sentiment: Scientific Update 📖 Prinz, Jesse (2006). "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments." <i>Philosophical Explorations</i> (excerpt: only pp. 29-33).	
	11/30	Catch Up Day + Review	
#14	12/3	**Final Exam** (long quiz)	Final Exam
	12/5	No Class – Work on Essays, Submit Outline online	Outline
	12/7	No Class – Peer Review of Outlines online	Comment
#15	12/10-4	**Essays Due** (Online): Mon. Dec. 10th	