

Philosophy 210-7 Ethics
American University of Beirut, Spring 2010
T & TH 2:00 PM – 3:15 Nicely 103

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“We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live.” *Socrates*

Course Description: This course introduces the student to the theoretical foundations of ethics. Ethics concerns how we *ought* to conduct our lives, usually but not exclusively, in our relations with others. The central question in ethics is *what makes an act ethically right or wrong?* We will examine several answers to this question, such as God’s commands, whatever makes you happy, whatever makes most people happy, Kant’s “categorical imperative,” or having “virtuous” character. Specific questions that will arise are: should we act so that the overall happiness is increased, or must we perform certain moral duties regardless of the happiness they may bring? Do ethical principles have *universal* validity, or are they valid *relative* only to individual opinions or cultural norms? We will also examine the ethical reasoning behind everyday and controversial moral problems such as euthanasia, suicide, torture, and carnivoria. Many of the problems that arise will not seem to have definitive answers; however, we will find that some answers are definitely “better” than others, namely, those that follow from “good reasons.” So, really, the main goal of this course is to improve our ability to *reason* about these matters, and to clarify and critically examine our own opinions, so that we may become more conscientious moral agents. To this end, you will write frequent answers to questions on the readings, formulate thoughtful responses to difficult moral scenarios, and formulate your own questions and answers. You can expect the readings to be very difficult, if not impossible, to understand at times. But we must concentrate, be patient, read slowly and repeatedly, ask a lot of questions, and try to have some fun. Class discussion is an essential activity in this course.

Important: Read this syllabus carefully. By taking this class, you agree to understand and comply with this syllabus. To maintain class organization and fairness, I must maintain the policies stated herein. If I make any changes to it, I will inform you. If there is anything that you do not understand or agree with, or needs to be added/changed/corrected, feel free to discuss it with me. I am always happy to talk about anything. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say, “oh, I didn’t know.”

Required Texts:

- Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy 6th Edition*.
- Additional readings available on Moodle

Course Assignments

- Reading Response papers: at least 6, making up 50% of course grade
- Quizzes, several, making up 10% of course grade
- Final exam (in-class essay), 40% of course grade

Reading Response papers: Response papers consist of your responses to several substantial questions about the assigned readings (for due dates, see Course Schedule, below). The Response questions are posted on Blackboard under “Assignments.” Simply download the question form and type in your responses, single-spaced, leaving the questions in place. Save to your disk, print, SIGN YOUR NAME, staple the pages, and hand in at the end of class. Each response paper is assigned one of the following grades¹: 92 (Excellent); 85 (Very Good); 80 (Good); 75 (OK+); 70 (Fair); 60 (Weak or Whoops!) 0 (Fail). To give you an idea of what I am looking for, I keep the following criteria in mind while grading:

- Engagement and thoughtfulness: The writer demonstrates serious and sustained engagement with the text and questions. This means that you really tried to understand the reading and that you had something appropriate and interesting to say about it. You didn’t simply read;

¹ For details, see the handout “Calculating and Estimating Your Course Grade”.

you *thought*. The minimally appropriate length for each question is approximately 70 words. More is probably better; but what matters most is that you have sincerely engaged the question.

- Clarity: The writing is clear, that is, word choices have been carefully considered and the words are arranged to facilitate comprehension *for the reader* (i.e., the sentences are grammatically correct, syntactical units are kept together, and flow of ideas is logical and organized). For more information, see “writing guides” on Moodle.
- Mechanics: Minimal grammatical, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. Responses must be typed in 12 point, Times-Roman, and SINGLE-spaced.

These criteria are for your guidance, and I try to follow them closely. Do your best to fulfill them in an *excellent* manner, and you will get 92 points. However, be aware that additional factors may weigh in my judgment. For example, if you are excellently “engaged,” but the mechanics are sloppy, you’ll get docked. Conversely, if your mechanics and clarity are perfect, but your engagement is light, don’t expect to get 92 points. Also, if you repeatedly make the same mistakes after I have repeatedly told you to fix them, I tend to grade more harshly. But progress makes me happy. In addition, note that:

- On occasion I may base your Response paper grade on only *one* out of several questions. Therefore, since you won’t know which of your answers I will choose to read, you should do your best on each answer.
- These assignments are to be done *before you come to class*, because the topic of discussion for every class will be *your answers to these questions*. In addition, Response papers not completed or not in your hands by the beginning of class will be marked down to the next point level (e.g., from 92 to 85). If you are two days late, two levels; three or more days late, you get 0 points. Response papers cannot be e-mailed in. *Do not e-mail me any work, unless you have asked and I say you can.*
- Note: Your lowest Response score will be dropped from your final grade calculation.

Quizzes: See course schedule. Quizzes will consist of a few short answer questions based on the reading assigned for that same day. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class and cannot be made up. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped from the final calculation.

Final Exam: The exam will take place in-class during the three-hour final exam session (time TBA). You will answer three or four questions based on the assigned readings and class discussions. The length of each answer should be at least three “blue book” pages. Grading criteria will be similar to those of the response papers. You will be expected to understand the theories we have covered, the criticisms of them, and how to apply them to real-life scenarios. Special attention will be paid to the organization of your essay. You will have time to make an outline of your essay before composing it. You must write neatly. Some idea of what the questions will be about will be given beforehand. But your best preparation is to *do the work throughout the course*.

Attendance: Class attendance and participation are vital components of this course and will affect your grade both directly and indirectly. If you do not arrive by the time I take attendance, or if you leave the classroom for more than five minutes, you will be marked absent. For every unexcused absence over three, your course points will be reduced by 3. If you accumulate more than eight absences, you *automatically fail the course*. I accept excuses *only for extreme circumstances that you must discuss with me in person and provide documentation*—no exceptions. Also, please do not ask me if you missed anything in class the day you were absent—you did! Any important notices will be posted on Moodle. Note: Bonus for good attendance: if you have no absences throughout the semester, 4 points will be added to your course grade; only one absence, 3 points; two absences, 2 points.

Note: You will not be excused for missing class due to special sessions or make-ups in other classes. If a teacher in another class schedules you for anything that conflicts with this class time, you must tell that teacher that you cannot make it because you already have a class at that time. In other words, no scheduling conflicts are allowed. This rule comes by order of the Dean of FAS. But it is your responsibility to make sure that you do not have any scheduling conflicts.

Participation and class conduct: Participation is strongly encouraged. In order to participate well, you must read and do the Responses before class, and *always bring the assigned text to class*. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off-base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions.

Occasionally, I may call on you unexpectedly. A philosophy class is one of the very few places where you will have the opportunity to express and examine opinions. But (1) you should expect to have your opinions challenged; (2) you are expected to listen to and to think about the opinions of your classmates. Therefore, **ONLY ONE PERSON MAY SPEAK AT A TIME, AND NO ONE MAY TALK IN THE BACKGROUND**. For breaching this rule, either you will be marked absent, or points will be taken off your final grade.

ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST BE TURNED OFF AND PUT AWAY. You will be marked absent or have points taken off your final grade for the following behaviors I consider disrespectful: Cell phones going off; text messaging in class; leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class. I reserve the right to take your “Crackberry” until class is over. During class discussions, be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves. Also, as a courtesy to me, *do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over*.

Grades: Criteria and Calculation: I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. There are two main parts to the grading process: Criteria and Calculation. Above, I have indicated the criteria I consider when grading your Response and Final papers. Additional grading criteria are posted on Moodle. For Calculation, see the document titled “Calculating and Estimating Your Grades.” This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. But here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Gradebook,” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up. To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average, and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts (see “Calculating and Estimating. . .”). Be sure to drop your lowest Response score when figuring your average.

Plagiarism: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, and learner. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms not only you, but all students and professors. Plagiarism is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. It is the same as stealing and lying, and no amount of it will be tolerated in my class. **If you intentionally plagiarize anything in this class, you will automatically fail the course, and possibly be dismissed from the university.** This includes any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, using dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. Sometimes I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment. I also use Google and other resources. You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, check BB for brief guides, or consult the MLA guide in the library. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

Turnitin. Unfortunately, due to a few people’s insidious attempts to plagiarize, I must force everyone to submit all assignments to Turnitin.com, *in addition* to submitting a hard copy to me. Failure to submit your work to Turnitin results in an automatic 0 for the assignment. Here is how it works: As their website says, “Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals” (http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html).

To use Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on Turnitin for the current assignment.

The following is from http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_plagiarism.html

What is Plagiarism?

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft
- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism. See our section on [citation](#) for more information on how to cite sources properly.

What is citation?

A "citation" is the way you tell your readers that certain material in your work came from another source. It also gives your readers the information necessary to find that source again, including:

1. information about the author
2. the title of the work
3. the name and location of the company that published your copy of the source
4. the date your copy was published
5. the page numbers of the material you are borrowing

Why should I cite sources?

Giving credit to the original author by citing sources is the only way to use other people's work without plagiarizing. But there are a number of other reasons to cite sources:

1. citations are extremely helpful to anyone who wants to find out more about your ideas and where they came from.

2. not all sources are good or right -- your own ideas may often be more accurate or interesting than those of your sources. Proper citation will keep you from taking the rap for someone else's bad ideas.
3. citing sources shows the amount of research you've done.
4. citing sources strengthens your work by lending outside support to your ideas.

Doesn't citing sources make my work seem less original?

Not at all. On the contrary, citing sources actually helps your reader distinguish your ideas from those of your sources. This will actually emphasize the originality of your own work.

When do I need to cite?

Whenever you borrow words or ideas, you need to acknowledge their source. The following situations almost always require citation:

1. whenever you use quotes
2. whenever you paraphrase
3. whenever you use an idea that someone else has already expressed
4. whenever you make specific reference to the work of another
5. whenever someone else's work has been critical in developing your own ideas.

(end of website)

Citation Mechanics: See Instructions posted on Moodle

Moodle: Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and the Response questions. When the questions are ready, I will alert you by e-mail (via the "News Forum") so, check your e-mail regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

The Writing Center:

If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb

Course Schedule: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well.

Week and Theme	Tuesday	Thursday
1. Welcome!	16/02 Introduction to course syllabus	18/02 Introduction to course syllabus
2. Why be good? What is morality?	23/02 Plato, "The Ring of the Shepherd" (MOO) Rachels, Ch. 1	25/02 Discussion of Rachels, Ch. 1 Response 1 Due
3. How can we reason about morality?	02/03 "Evaluating Moral Arguments" (MOO)	04/03 Quiz 1 on Evaluating moral arguments.
4. Subjectivism: Are ethical claims objective, or simply a matter of personal taste?	09/03 Rachels, Ch. 3 Proofs in Ethics?	11/03 Cont. Ch. 3. Applied: the ethics of homosexuality? Response 2 due
5. Cultural Relativism	16/03 Rachels, Ch. 2 Quiz 2	18/03 Discussion
6. Morality and Religion: Divine Command theory Natural Law theory	23/03 Rachels, 4.1 & 4.2 "Can We Have Morality without God and Religion"? (MOO)	25/03 NO CLASS
7. Ethical Egoism and	30/03 Rachels, Chapter 5 Psychological vs. Ethical Egoism, Egoism vs. Altruism	01/04 Response 3 due
8. Social Contract theory	06/04 NO CLASS Recommended reading: Rachels Chapter 6	08/04 NO CLASS
9 Utilitarianism: The Greatest Happiness Principle	13/04 Rachels, Ch. 7 and 8	15/04 Articles on MOO: Williams, "Utilitarianism and Integrity" Nozick, "The Experience Machine" Response 4
10.	20/04 Utilitarianism: euthanasia, non-human animals, and pot	22/04 Article on MOO: "Should You Be Eating That?" Response 5 due
11. Kant's ethics of duty	27/04 Rachels, Ch. 9 and 10. Quiz 3	29/04 Discuss Handouts on MOO
12.	04/05 Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (MOO)	06/05 <i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i> (MOO) Response 6 due
13. Excellence of character (virtue ethics)	11/05 on Aristotle: "The Virtues" (MOO)	13/05 Discussion of "The Virtues" Quiz 4
14.	18/05 Rachels Ch. 9 up to p. 133	20/05 Discussion of Reading on happiness (MOO) Quiz 5
15. What would a satisfactory moral theory be like?	25/05 Rachels, Ch. 12	27/05 Response 7 Review (last class)
16. FINAL EXAMS	01/06	03/06
17. EXAMS	08/06	10/06

Final Exam: Saturday June 5th 11:30 AM WHCR

15/06 end of semester