

American University of Beirut, Fall 2009
Philosophy 210-5 Ethics
T & TH 14:00 – 15:15 Nicely B2

Instructor: Dr. Chris Johns E-Mail: cj08@aub.edu.lb (best contact) Phone: Ext. 4259	Office: Fisk, 147 Office Hours: TTH 13:00 – 14:00, and by appointment
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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 word about this syllabus: To maintain class organization and fairness, I must maintain the requirements and policies stated in this syllabus. By taking this class, you agree to understand and comply with this syllabus. 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*.
- Occasional handouts (available on Moodle)

Course Assignments

- Reading Response papers: at least 10, making up 60% of course grade
- Final research paper, 40% of course grade

Reading Response papers: Each week, a Response paper is due, consisting of your brief 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, 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 graded on a four-point scale (4 = A, 3 = B, 2 = C, 1 = D, 0 = F) according to the following criteria:

- 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. Responses that do not *themselves* ask questions appropriate to the text will get no more than 2 points. The minimally appropriate length for each question is approximately 50 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, 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 4 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 4 points. Also, if you repeatedly make the same mechanical mistakes, after I have repeatedly told you to fix them, I tend to grade more harshly. But progress makes me happy.

Notice that 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 docked one point. Two days late, 2 points; more than three days, you get 0 points. Your lowest Response score will be dropped from your final grade calculation. *Do not e-mail me any work, unless you have asked and I say you can.*

Final Paper: Throughout the course a number of ethical issues will come up. Start thinking about which one you would like research. The aim of your research would be to work out a well-reasoned position/argument on any ethical topic on which there is substantial controversy, either theoretical or practical. For example, say you want to write on the death penalty. The two main things you need to do are (1) find out what the controversy is about, what the facts are, and what the opposing positions are. (2) Take a position of your own on the issue, taking into account the relevant facts, controversies, and objections to your own position. Or, if you prefer a theoretical topic, for example, relativism, you should research the relevant positions and take one of your own (note that this option will probably be more difficult). Your paper should be 5-6 pages, DOUBLE spaced, and properly, scrupulously, cited. You must also submit your paper to Turnitin.

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 absence over three, your course grade will be reduced by 3 points. If you are absent more than eight times, *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. Assume you missed everything! 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 gets you 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. That is, no scheduling conflicts are allowed. This rule comes by order of the Dean of A& S. But it is your responsibility to make sure that you do not have any scheduling conflicts.

Participation: in class discussions is strongly encouraged. In order to participate well, you must read and respond 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 you will have the opportunity to express and examine opinions. But you should expect to have them challenged. However, **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.

Class conduct: 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. **ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST BE PUT AWAY AND INVISIBLE DURING CLASS** (absence or points off for breaching this rule). 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 grading calculation, see the document titled “How to Estimate and Calculate 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 then check the Grade Scale (see “How to . . .”). For your Final Grade, *your lowest Response grade will be dropped.* Add up your remaining points, and check the Grade Scale (see “How to . . .”). The reason I initially assign *points* to your papers, and then convert them to letters, is so I can make distinctions that are more fine than the letter grade system allows.

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: (Instructions forthcoming)

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 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! Why be good?	6/10 Introduction to Course Plato, <i>The Ring of the Shepherd</i>	8/10 Discussion of <i>The Ring</i> and other intro topics
2. What is morality? How can we reason about it?	13/10 Rachels, Ch. 1 Response 1 due	15/10 Discussion Read: "Evaluating Moral Arguments" (handout)
3. Does morality depend on religion? Divine Command theory	20/10 Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i> (handout) Response 2 due	22/10 Discussion Rachels, Ch. 4, up to p. 53 Philosophy Gym: "Can We Have Morality Without God and Religion"? (MOO)
4. Natural Law theory	27/10 Rachels, Ch. 4 pp. 53-61 Response 3 due	29/10 Discussion
5. Subjectivism, egoism Social contract theory	3/11 Read all of Chapter 3 (Subjectivism), and all of Chapter 5 (Egoism)	5/11 Read all of Chapter 6 (Social Contract Theory) In-class response
6. Cultural Relativism	10/11 Rachels, Ch. 2 Response 4 due	12/11 Discussion
7.	17/11 Articles on Cultural relativism Response 5 due	19/11
8. Utilitarianism: The Greatest Happiness Principle	24/11 Rachels, Ch. 7 and 8 Handout on Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> (see Blackboard) Responses 6 due	26/11 Discussion Euthanasia and non-human animals
9 Kant's ethics of duty	1/12 Rachels, Ch. 9 and 10.	3/12 Discuss
10.	8/12 Handouts on MOO Response 7 Due	10/12 Discuss <i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i> (MOO)
11.	15/12 Autonomy	17/12 Response 7 due
12. BREAK	22/12 BREAK	24/12 BREAK
13. BREAK	29/12 BREAK	31/12 BREAK
14. Excellence of character (virtue ethics)	5/01 Rachels Ch. 9 up to p. 133 Also see material on MOO	7/01 Response 8 due
15.	12/01 Rachels, Ch. 12 Response 9 due	14/01
16. What would a satisfactory moral theory be like?	19/01	21/01 Review (last class) Response 10
17. FINAL EXAMS	26/01	28/01 Final Paper Due ?