Ethics (Honors)

PHI 120H-1600 (27941)
Spring 2020
3 Credits

Wednesdays
4:00 – 6:45 pm
Fiterman 1003

Professor: Cara O’Connor
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Office: N655

Office Hours (Chambers N655):
Tuesdays 11 am – 12pm and 3:30-4:30 pm
Wednesdays 7:00 pm-8:00 pm
and by appointment.

PRE-REQUISITES: P-ENG 088 or ESL 094, and ACR 094

COURSE DESCRIPTION From the course catalogue: “This course will examine major historical and contemporary perspectives in moral philosophy. We will consider questions such as, ‘Are there universal moral values? Are ethical conduct and self-interest compatible?’, ‘What is the source of our ethical obligations (God? Society? Or Reason?) and how can we justify them?’ and ‘How does globalization impact ethical theory?’ The course will look at what attributes and qualities make up a successful ethical theory and will compare competing approaches to ethical decision-making. Throughout the course, the emphasis will be on real-world ethical issues that arise in contemporary life and society.”

In our course we will explore some of the key ingredients of philosophical ethics, such as how to distinguish between moral and non-moral values, why autonomy is important to morality, and the logical components of moral reasoning. We will debate the merits of at least four fascinating moral theories: utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and care ethics. Together, we will read and analyze primary philosophical sources for these theories: Mill, Kant, Aristotle, and Noddings. Thanks to many cases and examples, we will practice and experience for ourselves these diverse, challenging, and highly influential approaches to moral reasoning.

REQUIRED MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGY


***PRIMARY-SOURCE READINGS*** provided by Prof. O’Connor and on Blackboard

*** ACCESS TO BLACKBOARD ***
GENERAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to recognize and evaluate arguments; they will learn to discriminate between the mere disagreement with a position and well-founded criticism of a position; conversely, they will appreciate the distinction between the mere approval of a position and well-founded support for a position. **MEASUREMENTS:** Case-study discussion papers, applied ethics essay

Students will develop their own critical thinking skills, and will learn how to place the presuppositions of their own thinking in question. **MEASUREMENTS:** Class discussion, discussion groups, peer-review work, case-study discussion papers

Students will become sensitive to the many connections, and not infrequent disjunctions, between abstract philosophical concepts and personal lived experience. **MEASUREMENTS:** Class discussion, discussion groups

Students will develop sound reading and writing habits that will enable them to explicate, interpret, and criticize primary and secondary philosophical texts. **MEASUREMENTS:** Case-study discussion papers, applied-ethics essay, weekly homework “assignment questions” and “reading questions,” and in-class tests.

HONORS LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to communicate clearly, knowledgeably, and effectively in written, spoken, visual, oral, and technological modes for a variety of purposes, with different audiences in various contexts, using appropriate formats and technologies. **MEASUREMENTS:** Case-study discussion papers, five-minute presentation, applied-ethics essay, discussion groups

Students will be able to conceive, plan and execute a high quality (multi) disciplinary research, creative, or applied project, using multiple modes and technologies, including qualitative methods and other modes of inquiry and research. **MEASUREMENTS:** Applied ethics essay, five-minute presentation.

Students will, through independent learning and collaborative study, attain, use and develop knowledge in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences, with disciplinary specialization and the ability to integrate information across disciplines. **MEASUREMENTS:** Discussion groups, peer-review, applied ethics essay, and in-class tests.

Students will demonstrate an ability to give constructive criticism and accept feedback as part of the process of peer review. **MEASUREMENTS:** Discussion groups, peer-review of applied ethics essay
REQUIREMENTS AT A GLANCE

In this class you earn points, up to 100. At least 92.5 points are needed for an A.

Case-study Discussion Papers = 24 points
Blackboard Journal, In-Class Work, Presentation = 27 points
Tests = 24 points
Applied Ethics Essay = 25 points

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA IN DETAIL

PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY. DUE-DATES ARE LISTED ON THE COURSE CALENDAR.

“CASE” DISCUSSION PAPERS (24 points – 8 points each)
Each student is required to share and discuss three CASE STUDY DISCUSSION papers with their discussion group. These papers are thoughtful responses to ethical cases given in the textbook. The papers you write will be the basis for your small group discussion on the day they are due (see the course calendar). You will choose a case from the assigned chapter and you will write a two-page (400-500 word) response that gives an ethical evaluation of that case. You may use the questions given in the textbook for guidance, as well as the advice on page xxiii. Grading criteria are given in the “grading criteria” section of this syllabus and/or discussed in class.

TESTS (24 POINTS – 8 points each)
Three Tests will be given over the course of the semester. While only 8 points each are needed, the final test will be cumulative, with more questions than the first two tests, and worth up to 12 points. Extra points (above 8) earned on the final will count as bonus points (this can help to offset difficulties you might have had with either of the first two tests).

1 A NOTE ABOUT GROUPS AND CASE-STUDY PAPER ASSIGNMENTS: The class will be divided up into DISCUSSION GROUPS. You will work with the same group throughout the semester to discuss your case papers. Each group will have members designated as “A” or “B” (usually two A’s and two B’s per group). On the course calendar you should note that if you are an “A” member, you are responsible for sharing and discussing your case-study papers for chapters 2, 6, and 11. If you are a “B” member, you are responsible for sharing and discussion of your case study papers for chapters 3, 8, and 12.
BLACKBOARD JOURNAL, IN-CLASS WORK, PRESENTATION (27 POINTS)

COMPONENT 1 (12 points): Blackboard Philosophy Journal Entries
You are given points for your timely (pre-class) answers to “Assignment Questions” and “Reading Questions” that you post online in your “blackboard philosophy journal” (BBPJ). There are 15 assigned “BBPJ” journal entries, but only 12 points are needed. Journal entries are worth 1 point each. Extra entries may be done for bonus points.

COMPONENT 2 (10 points): DISCUSSION GROUP AND PEER-REVIEW ACTIVITIES
The main components of this grade are your SIX small group discussions (1 point each = 6 points) and your two peer feedback sessions for the applied ethics essay (2 points each = 4 points). There may be one or two other in-class exercises in addition to these, which will be added on as bonuses/supplements.

COMPONENT 3 (5 points): 5-minute PRESENTATION
Students will make 5-minute presentations on the topic of their term paper. You are encouraged to make use of visuals/media, such as slides, writing on the blackboard, or offering a handout in order enhance and focus your presentation.

APPLIED ETHICS ESSAY (25 points, awarded in components)
You will be given instructions for an essay that you will work on over the semester. The final product will be 8-12 pages-long. Your essay will investigate an ethical problem of your choice. By “investigate” I mean that you will (a) try to determine what the relevant facts are, broadening your understanding of the ethical problem through independent research and (b) analyze the ethical problem from at least TWO of the philosophical perspectives studied in class. You may choose to work with an ethical problem laid out already in one of the “cases” in the textbook or you may choose an ethical problem that is not discussed in the textbook. Either way, you should generate a short bibliography that includes at least two sources other than the textbook and the assigned readings. These sources should ideally be factual sources that help you to understand the facts of the issue, rather than other articles that make ethical arguments about the same issue; however, it is often difficult to find purely factual sources and you may need to locate the facts from within editorial sources. The 25-points for the essay is earned as follows:

- PROPOSAL & provisional annotated bibliography – 3 points
- First draft “rough draft” (for peer review only, sent to peer by email with Prof cc’d) -- 2 points
- SECOND DRAFT (evaluated by me) -- 8 points
- Third draft “penultimate draft” (for peer review only, sent to peer by email with Prof cc’d) -- 2 points
- FINAL DRAFT (evaluated by me) -- 10 points
GRADING CRITERIA

Case-Study DISCUSSION PAPERS:

8 = excellent (100% A); 7 = good (87% B+); 6 = acceptable (75% C); 5 = seriously flawed (62% D); 4 (and below) = failed attempt (50%)

I’m looking for: (1) Clarity in how the ethical issue is presented; (2) Logical and reasonable application of the relevant concepts or ethical theory to the case you are discussing; (3) “Clean” copy without a lot of spelling and careless errors; (4) Thoughtfulness and sincerity in how you engage with the ideas.

In-Class ACTIVITIES/PARTICIPATION/PEER REVIEW:

Blackboard philosophy journal: 1 point = good answer; .5 point = less-than satisfactory answer; 0 = unsatisfactory. Good “journal” entries show that you read the assigned reading prior to class. This is shown through the precision of the answers you give to the “assignment questions” for the textbook or the “reading questions” for the primary-source readings. You only need to do 12 good entries to make your required points in this category. Points earned above 12 will count as bonus.

Group-discussion worksheet: 1 point = good; .5 point = flawed; 0 = unsatisfactory. A good worksheet is one that follows the instructions and tells me something concrete about the conversation you had.

Peer-feedback (a worksheet or guidelines will be provided): 2 points = good; 1 point = flawed; 0 = unsatisfactory effort. Good peer feedback is constructive and offers a bit of detailed advice. Flawed peer feedback occurs when the comments are too general and don’t relate very helpfully to the actual piece of writing.

PRESENTATION: 5 points = excellent (100% A); 4.5 = good (90% A-); 4 = acceptable (80% B-); 3.5 = flawed (70%); 3 = seriously flawed (60%). An excellent presentation sticks to the time limit, conveys why you care about the topic, and gives us a sense of how you plan to approach the topic in your essay.

TESTS: The tests may include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and short-essay answers. Each test is worth 8 points, with the final test also providing extra possible points beyond 8, which will count as bonus. Test #1 will be focused on the main concepts discussed in Ethical Choices chapters 1-4. You should be able to demonstrate competence in understanding, for example, differences in values, problems of relativism, concepts of autonomy, and the structures of moral reasoning. Test #2 will focus on the main ideas in Ethical Choices chapters 6 & 8 together with the main ideas in the primary-source readings on Utilitarianism and Deontology. You should be able to demonstrate competent understanding of and ability to compare between consequentialism and deontology. You should also demonstrate familiarity with key ideas found in Mill’s and Kant’s theory. Test #3 will be cumulative. In addition to demonstrating competence in the areas covered by tests 1 & 2, and thus showing that you have retained what you learned, you will also be expected to show your understanding of basic ideas and concepts in virtue ethics (ch 11) and care ethics (ch 12), and other assigned material, should there be time for an additional reading or chapter. You will also show familiarity with main ideas found in the primary-source readings on Virtue Ethics and Care Ethics.
Applied-Ethics ESSAY: Scoring is particular to each component. I’m looking for: (1) Clarity in how the ethical issue is presented; (2) Logical and reasonable application of the ethical theories you are discussing; (3) “Clean” copy without a lot of spelling and careless errors; (4) Thoughtfulness and sincerity in how you engage with the ideas; (5) An accurate bibliography and accurate use of footnotes; (6) Sufficient length (for example, 8 or more pages for the final essay). Detailed instructions will be provided, but here is some additional information about my expectations for each step of the process.

1. The proposal should state the ethical problem that you aim to investigate. It should list the sources that you plan to read (beyond the textbook) in order to investigate the topic. If it is applicable, the proposal should indicate which case study from the textbook you will use as the foundation for your essay.

2. The first draft (rough draft) is for your peer reviewer. You should put the ethical issue into your own words and you should evaluate the ethical issue from a deontological and a utilitarian standpoint.

3. The second draft will be graded by me. It can be very similar to the first draft, but should reflect improvements based on the peer review experience. I am looking for a clear statement of the problem you are addressing, along with relatively coherent arguments relating to the ethical perspective/s you are considering.

4. The third draft must engage two or more of the four ethical perspectives we are studying (your second draft might have started with only one). You will share the new material with your peer reviewer.

5. The final draft can be very similar to the third draft, but should reflect improvements based on the peer review experience. All references to sources should be supplied. Plagiarism will result in a zero.

BMCC and COURSE POLICIES

Class Participation: Participation in the academic activity of each course is a significant component of the learning process and plays a major role in determining overall student academic achievement. Academic activities may include, but are not limited to, attending class, submitting assignments, engaging in in-class or online activities, taking exams, and/or participating in group work. Each instructor has the right to establish their own class participation policy, and it is each student’s responsibility to be familiar with and follow the participation policies for each course.

Attendance policy for this course: Strong attendance (missing no more than 3 classes) is needed for the sake of graded participation and class morale. If you plan to be absent on a day that you have an assignment due, you must notify me ahead of time and send me your assignment by email prior to the start of class. You can email me at coconnor@bmcc.cuny.edu or phone me at 212-220-8000 ext. 5240.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM: Cell phones must be stored away for the duration of the class. I reserve the right to prohibit computer use if it becomes distracting.

Contacting the Instructor: I am located at room N655 (199 Chambers). I encourage you to seek me out to discuss anything relevant to the class, from paper ideas to difficulties you may be having with the readings, or with other aspects of the class, including open-ended philosophical ideas that you are turning over in your mind. You may “drop
in” during office hours, which means you do not need an appointment. Please take advantage! If my office hours do not work with your schedule, we can schedule an appointment for another time. I am best reached by email (not phone) and will do my best to reply within 48 hours to your emailed questions.

**BMCC Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Statement:** Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else’s ideas, words or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one’s own creation. Using the idea or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations to the original source. Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism. Students who are unsure how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult with their instructors. The library has guides designed to help students to appropriately identify a cited work. The full policy can be found on BMCC’s Web site, [www.bmcc.cuny.edu](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu). For further information on integrity and behavior, please consult the college bulletin (also available online).

**Points System Translated into Letter Grades:**
- A (93-100)
- A- (90-92)
- B+ (87-89)
- B (83-86)
- B- (80-82)
- C+ (77-79)
- C (73-76)
- C- (70-72)
- D+ (67-69)
- D (63-66)
- D- (60-62)
- F (0-59)

**Additional Resources**

**BMCC Writing Center:** [https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/writingcenter/](https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/writingcenter/)
The writing center provides one-on-one tutorials (up to two appointments per week). Drop-ins are possible, but they encourage you to make an appointment. To make appointments, please visit Room S-510 or call (212) 220-1384 during our business hours. According to their webpage, the center offers help with a wide array of questions, including how to understand the syllabus, how to getting started with your writing, thesis statements, transitions, argumentation, and writing essays for scholarship and transfer applications.

**BMCC IS COMMITTED TO THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALL STUDENTS. IT IS COMMON FOR EVERYONE TO SEEK ASSISTANCE AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIFE, AND THERE ARE FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL SERVICES ON CAMPUS THAT CAN HELP.**

**Single Stop** [www.bmcc.cuny.edu/singlestop](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/singlestop), room S230, 212-220-8195. If you are having problems with food or housing insecurity, finances, health insurance or anything else that might get in the way of your studies at BMCC, come by the Single Stop Office for advice and assistance. Assistance is also available through the Office of Student Affairs, S350, 212-220-8130.

**Counseling Center** [www.bmcc.cuny.edu/counseling](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/counseling), room S343, 212-220-8140. Counselors assist students in addressing psychological and adjustment issues (i.e., depression, anxiety, and relationships) and can help with stress, time management and more. Counselors are available for walk-in visits.

**Office of Compliance and Diversity** [www.bmcc.cuny.edu/aac](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/aac), room S701, 212-220-1236. BMCC is committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive learning environment free of unlawful discrimination/harassment, including sexual harassment, where all students are treated fairly. For information about BMCC’s policies and resources, or to request additional assistance in this area, please visit or call the office, or email olevy@bmcc.cuny.edu, or twade@bmcc.cuny.edu. If you need immediate assistance, please contact BMCC Public safety at 212-220-8080.

**Office of Accessibility** [www.bmcc.cuny.edu/accessibility](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/accessibility), room N360 (accessible entrance: 77 Harrison Street), 212-220-8180. This office collaborates with students who have documented disabilities, to coordinate support services, reasonable accommodations, and programs that enable equal access to education and college life. To request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please visit or call the office.