

Ethics and Society

PHIL 2290

Course Syllabus

Welcome to PHIL 2290, “Ethics and Society.” In this course, we will apply ethical theory to the analysis of some problems in contemporary society, helping you to improve your critical thinking and writing skills as you respond to these problems.

Every day, we use our skills in analysis and ethical decision-making to choose between the kinds of alternatives presented to us in contemporary society. Where you live, what you eat for breakfast, what clothes you choose to wear, your choice of job or school (or even how you study ethics by distance!) is the result of a choice. We are constantly choosing between alternatives, based on the values we hold as individuals and as a society. Our everyday decisions may lead to unexpected consequences when we do not adequately consider our choices.

Ethical decision-making—something that comes out of the study and application of ethical theory—involves considering alternatives and making choices. There are various ways of justifying the decisions we make, different frameworks within which to analyze problems, as well as a variety of approaches to deciding what to do.

The choices we make can be personal choices as well as social choices. As individuals, we may have to decide whether or not to have an abortion or to support a partner who makes that choice; we may also have to decide if society as a whole should make abortion legal or illegal. Debating the pros and cons of assisted suicide or euthanasia is one thing if you are considering whether this should be permitted in society; it might be a different thing to respond to such a request from a parent or friend.

Ethical decision-making results from being confronted by choices. When these choices are about moral issues, there is seldom only one valid solution to the problem or one answer to the question. While it is important for us to understand the reasons behind our choices, it is equally important for us to understand the reasons behind the choices other people may make that are different from what we decide. Because we live together in society, there is always a degree of compromise, of negotiation, between the differing ideas and conclusions—and values—of the people who make up a society. Only by understanding “the other sides” can we expect people who make different choices to respect the ones we make; only by listening to their arguments can we engage in a conversation leading to a defensible conclusion.

In this course, you can expect to be challenged to think about the decisions you make about some sensitive issues. The assignments will present situations in which you must make a choice and then defend that choice (supported by argument and evidence) in order to persuade your reader that your choice is valid and plausible. In the online discussion groups, you will also have a chance to engage other students in this kind of conversation, presenting and defending what you understand and debating the opinions of others, as well.

Contacting your instructor

For information on contacting your instructor as well as other important information from your instructor see the Instructor Letter link in your course website.

Course description

From the *University of Manitoba Undergraduate Calendar*:

An examination of some contemporary ethical theories and their application to a number of practical issues. Current issues to be discussed may include: ethics and the environment; abortion and euthanasia; sexual freedom and human equality; civil disobedience; individual liberty vs. state authority; capital punishment; and justice and utility. Students may not hold

credit for both PHIL 2290 (or 015.229) and any of: PHIL 2531 (or 015.253), PHIL 2740 (or 015.274) and PHIL 2750 (or 015.275). Prerequisite: 30 hours of university credit.

Course goals

Upon successfully completing this course you should be able to:

- apply acquired knowledge of a variety of approaches to ethical decision-making;
- analyze and support alternative decisions about a range of contemporary ethical issues;
- demonstrate developed critical thinking and essay writing skills through the articulation and defence of your own ethical perspective on selected social issues; and
- analyze a range of contemporary ethical issues.

Course materials

Required

The following required materials are available for purchase from the [University of Manitoba Bookstore](#). Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your [Distance and Online Education Student Handbook](#) for instructions on how to order your materials.

Waller, Bruce N. *Consider Ethics: Theory, Readings and Contemporary Issues*. 3rd ed. Toronto/Montreal: Pearson Longman, 2011.

The textbook provides a running commentary on the wide range of issues and approaches in moral theory, identifying and explaining a working vocabulary.

Thomas, John, and Wilfrid Waluchow. *Well and Good: A Case Study Approach Health Care Ethics*. 4th ed. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2014.

As its title indicates, this is a very different book. Adapting their material from actual cases, Thomas and Waluchow encourage you to grapple with how ethical theories are embodied in decision-making within a medical context. Some of the assignments are drawn from the unanalyzed cases in the final chapter and some of the discussion group questions require you to consider other cases in the book.

Desjardins, Joseph R. *Business, Ethics, and the Environment*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007.

"The starting premise of this text is that in the early years of the twenty-first century, human society is entering into a new social, political, and economic era, 'the next industrial revolution.' This revolution is being shaped by events at the intersection of the global economy, the natural environment, and ethics. Old ways about thinking about how we should live, how we should manage our businesses, and how we should shape our economies are being overtaken by the movement toward sustainable development, sustainable economies, and sustainable business. This book provides an introduction to, and an ethical case for, this emerging model of sustainable business" (Preface, xi).

Discussion questions and a portion of the final exam will be drawn from this book.

Optional

The following optional material is available for purchase from the University of Manitoba Book Store. Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* for instructions on how to order your material.

Pojman, Louis P. and James Fieser. *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*. 8th ed. Toronto: Wadsworth, 2016.

Should you want to do some extra reading, there are many examples of further reading at the end of the chapters in Waller's book. The other text, a classic one by Pojman (who for many years taught

ethics at West Point Military Academy), gives you some further reading about the process of ethical decision-making.

Course overview

Introduction

The course is divided into four modules. Each of the four modules consists of three units. In turn, each unit contains material to be covered in roughly a two-week period.

Outline: Course modules, units and assignments

Module 1: Introduction to Moral Theory

- Unit 1 Thinking about Ethics
- Unit 2 Reason or Emotion?
- Unit 3 Utilitarian Ethics and Social Contract Theory

Modular Assignment: Assignment #1

Module 2: Medical Ethics

- Unit 4 Issues at the Beginning of Life
- Unit 5 Virtue Ethics/Treatments, Experiments and Research
- Unit 6 Care Ethics/Issues at the End of Life

Modular Assignment: Assignment #2

Discussion Group Term 1: Assignment #3

Module 3: Social Ethics

- Unit 7 Are There Moral Facts?
- Unit 8 Life and Death Choices
- Unit 9 Freedom and Social Responsibility

Modular Assignment: Assignment #4

Module 4: Environmental Ethics

- Unit 10 The Challenge of Sustainability
- Unit 11 Sustainability and Business
- Unit 12 Consuming the Future?

Discussion Group Term 2: Assignment #5

Final Examination

How to proceed

For each module, you should read the modular introduction and note the due date for the assignment(s) required at the end of the module.

For each unit, you should:

- read the course notes;
- read the required readings for the unit;
- review the material from Waller by completing the exercises at the end of the assigned chapter; and
- participate in the online unit discussion.

Evaluation and grading

There are **five required** assignments and a **final exam**. The assignments are:

- three required written assignments, one at the end of each of the first three modules;
- required participation in scheduled online discussions, which are evaluated at the end of Modules 2 and 4; and
- a final exam that will be scheduled in the regular examination period.

Distribution of marks

Evaluation	Percentage
Assignment 1	15%
Assignment 2	15%
Assignment 3 (participation in online discussion)	10%
Assignment 4	15%
Assignment 5 (participation in online discussion)	10%
Final examination	35%
Total	100%

Grading scale

Letter grade	Percentage range	Description
A+	90–100	Exceptional
A	80–89	Excellent
B+	75–79	Very good
B	70–74	Good
C+	65–69	Satisfactory
C	60–64	Adequate
D	50–59	Marginal
F	less than 50	Failure

Please note: All final grades are subject to departmental review.

Assignments

Written assignments (3 X 15%)

Assignments 1, 2 and 4 are 1,250–1,500 word essays on a topic found in the assignment package included with the course materials. The assignments require you to read materials in the course texts and to answer, in essay format, the question that has been posed. **Outside sources are not necessary**, as the purpose of the assignment is to have you

- identify a thesis in response to the question,
- structure a reasoned argument in support of that thesis, and
- provide whatever evidence is needed from the required or optional readings included in the course materials to defend your position.

Grading guidelines

The following offers a general overview of the expectations for written work at each grade level.

A	• excellent work: clear, flawless, engaging writing, well organized, logical, demonstrating a clear command of the topic and original insights in the interpretation. • work exceeds all of the minimum requirements of the assignment and shows a sophisticated thesis that is well supported by the evidence. • evidence of an advanced understanding of the material and evidence of ability to critically analyze and/or synthesize issues and problems. • clear evidence of advanced research and/or analytical skills. • virtually no problems with writing style, grammar, or spelling.
B	• good work: clear, well written, well organized. • work meets and often exceeds all of the minimum requirements of the assignment, with frequent flashes of original thought. • evidence of an advanced understanding of the material and evidence of attempts to critically analyze and/or synthesize issues, problems. • clear evidence of advanced research and/or analytical skills. • very few problems with writing style, grammar, or spelling.
C	• acceptable work: generally clear and easy to read. • work meets, and at times exceeds all of the minimum requirements of the assignment. • evidence of a basic if unambitious or undeveloped understanding of the material; limited analysis. • clear evidence of basic research and/or analytical skills. • some problems with writing style, grammar, or spelling.
D	• marginal work. • work meets only the minimum requirements of the assignment. • evidence of only a simplistic understanding of the material. • limited evidence of research and/or analytical skills. • significant problems with writing style, grammar, or spelling.
F	• unsatisfactory work. • work does not meet the minimum requirements of the assignment. • failure to grasp even the most basic concepts.

Greg T. Smith, 2004. Department of History, University of Manitoba. Permission granted by the author.

Online discussion assignments (2 X 10%)

For assignments 3 and 5, you will be required to post an answer and a response for each of ten unit discussion questions, first from unit 2 to unit 6 (Module 2) and then from unit 7 to unit 11 (Module 4).

Full participation consists of:

- **one** posting in response to a unit discussion question, and **at least three** substantive responses to the posting of other students. The discussion questions are found in the assignment link.

Each discussion groups will be open for two weeks. Ten percent will be assessed and recorded at the end of Module 2. The remaining ten percent will be assessed and recorded at the end of Module 4. Check the course schedule for due dates.

Make use of the course web site to see how your fellow students are responding to the reading, and to share your own observations or reactions. Your answer to one of the self study questions at the end of the assigned chapters in the textbook may make a good web posting, or you may want to raise some issue that you found important but that was not mentioned in this online course. Read what other students have posted on the course web site, and then post your response, explaining your agreement or disagreement, or offering further application or alternate considerations. You can also post a question and see what answers other students offer, or answer questions that other students have posted.

There is no prescribed length for your postings; it is assumed that you will contribute a reasonable amount of material to the discussion.

No deduction of marks is made for mistakes in grammar or spelling in the web discussion unless such mistakes interfere with the clarity of what you are trying to say. No deduction of marks is made for mistaken interpretation as long as you show an honest effort to work with the assignment.

Your responses to other students' postings must show courtesy and respect – feel free to disagree, even passionately, but always demonstrate civility in what you post.

While the discussion will be monitored by your instructor to ensure appropriate conduct and content—and to correct any misperceptions that may arise—the intention is to create an opportunity for you to freely exchange your ideas and opinions with other students in a supportive and thoughtful forum. Your instructor will regularly review what has been posted on the web and may occasionally post an answer or response, but web discussion is meant to be among the students who are currently enrolled in this class. If you have a question to which you want the instructor's direct response, you should contact your instructor directly. Your instructor is prepared to assist you. Do not hesitate to address any concerns regarding the course and assignments directly with your instructor. Check the contact information in your instructor's letter of introduction to determine the best way to communicate.

Discussion group marking rubric (Modules 1, 2, 3 and 4)

9-10	For submitting an answer to the assignment question and posting at least three responses to the postings of other students. Both the posting and the response will show full engagement with the topic, the reading, and the other postings. Remarks are expressed clearly and developed logically. All postings should show respect for other members of the class.
6-8	For submitting an answer to the assignment question and posting at least three responses to the postings of other students. Both the posting and the response relate more or less well to the topic, the reading, and the other postings. Remarks may not always be entirely clear or logical. All postings should show respect for other members of the class.
1-6	For irregular submissions in response to the assignment questions and one's own original posting and irregular responses to others. Remarks may lack relevance, clarity, logic, or due respect.
0	Did not post to discussion board.

Please note: You are required to participate in the online discussions for each unit.

Assignment due dates

Consult your course schedule for the assignment due dates. All assignments **MUST** be submitted using the online submission tools.

Examination

The final examination for the course is a three-hour examination, scheduled in the regular examination period. It will consist of three sections:

- a short answer section, in which you are asked to define and identify the significance of a selection of terms from the whole course;
- a short essay section, in which you will write two short essays in response to passages selected from the reading materials assigned for module 4; and
- a long essay section, in which you will write one essay reflecting on some of the broader themes in the course.

Late assignment submission

If a student finds (due to personal circumstances or because of where they are studying) that a written assignment is likely to be late, short extensions without penalty may be negotiated, by e-mail, with the instructor. Longer extensions or extensions required as a result of medical or other serious reasons may also be negotiated, though documentation may be necessary.

No coursework will be accepted once the examination period has begun without going through the formal appeal process.

For questions about deferred examinations or appeals for incomplete standing, please refer to the current *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook*.

Writing an essay

In this course and in others you will take, you will be required to write essays, either as assignments or as part of an exam. Essay writing is therefore an essential skill if you want to perform well in such a course.

There are many guides to essay writing available, so the advice offered here is meant as a supplement to focus on the requirement of this course, which is to articulate and defend your decisions about issues in ethics and society.

The main differences between an argumentative essay and a narrative essay are the presence of a thesis; the argument to prove that thesis; and the evidence needed to persuade the reader your argument and your conclusions are valid.

A thesis is a short, simple, direct, declarative and active sentence that takes a position on the assigned topic. As an example of a thesis, consider: "The [insert name of sports team here] will not win the league championship this year."

This is a declarative statement, requiring you to give reasons why you think this is the case. The reasons you advance in support of your argument then become structural elements in the argument you develop in the rest of your paper.

For example, you could add "...because the coach is incompetent, the players are inept and even the cheerleaders are clumsy."

You then have a three paragraph or three section paper, in which you give evidence (in the first section) that the coach is incompetent; in the second section, you give evidence of the how inept the players have been in previous games; and in the third section, evidence of just how clumsy the cheerleaders have been so far.

This then leads into a concluding paragraph in which you restate your thesis, and close with any final thoughts to persuade your reader.

In the absence of the thesis and the argument to prove it, you would instead have a narrative telling the story of just how bad a year it has been for the [insert team name here], the kind of piece you might find in a sports magazine.

You will be writing to persuade, to argue, to prove—not just to tell a story, and so the presence of a clear and direct thesis, with supporting argument, is essential. Fortunately, you have several opportunities to write such an essay, and you will find that the experience of constructing a clear and persuasive argument, supported by evidence, is a useful skill to develop in terms of writing essays in other courses.

For further assistance with essay writing, consult the *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or contact the Academic Learning Centre on campus or online (<http://umanitoba.ca/student/academiclearning/handouts/handouts.html>).

Plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation

You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation as detailed in the General Academic Regulations and Policy section of the University of Manitoba *Undergraduate Calendar*. Note: Refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>.

Acknowledgments

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