

PHIL 200  
Ethics: Great Traditions  
University of Montana  
Fall 2009

Soazig Le Bihan



# Syllabus

## 0.1 General Information

### Course Information :

- Course Number: PHIL 200E-02
- Credits: 3
- Class meets: MWF 3:10 pm - 4:00 pm, JOUR 304
- Prerequisites: None

### Instructor Information :

- Office: LA 153
- Office Hours: Fridays 8:30 - 11:30 am and by appointment
- Mailbox: LA 101
- Email: soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu
- TA: TBA

**Course Website :** The most up-to-date course information (including class notes, homework assignments, announcements, any revision of the schedule, links etc.) can be found on the course web site: <http://www.soaziglebihan.org/0901-PHIL200.php>

## 0.2 Course Description

We all have ethical convictions, that is, we all have beliefs about what is right or wrong to do. We also know that ethical issues are not easy to solve. Various people have conflicting convictions, and we sometimes find ourselves facing ethical dilemmas. A course in Ethics should give the means to critically evaluate ethical beliefs, your own and others'. The questions to start with are 1. whether or no our beliefs are consistent with one another, and 2. whether or not we have good reasons to believe what we believe.

To this aim, we will examine the major approaches in ethical theory. We will carefully read the works of great philosophers, including Aristotle, Hobbes, Mill and Kant. We will also look at the works of some important contemporary philosophers in the field. On the basis of these readings, we will be able to construct a tool box for the evaluation of ethical arguments. With this tool box in hand, we will work our way through topics in applied ethics, including abortion, euthanasia, and death penalty. Note that the focus of the course will be focused on the Western vision of morality.

At the end of the course, you should be able to:

- show critical knowledge of the major approaches in ethics;
- recognize the origin and context of ethical arguments;
- evaluate the validity and soundness of ethical arguments;
- convey your own ethical convictions with clarity and circumspection.

## 0.3 Course Schedule

*Note that the course schedule is subject to change. Consult the course website for the most up to date class information, especially if you miss a class. You are held responsible for staying up to date even if you were absent. No class day is fixed. I may also add some readings along the way.*

The **required text** for the course is:

Cahn, Stephen M., and Markie, Peter, *Ethics, History, Theory, and Contemporary issues* Fourth Edition, Oxford University Press

### UNIT 1 – Philosophy and Morality

#### Week 1 – Presentation and Introduction to Ethics

- 8/31 – Syllabus + Presentation
- 9/2 – Movie “The Courage to Care” + debate on morality
- 9/4 – Morality, Reason, and Argument

An example: Is Homosexuality unnatural?

Readings: ‘Is Homosexuality Unnatural?’ Burton M. Leiser, on Blackboard

#### Week 2 – Arguments

*No class on Monday 9/7*

- 9/9 – Arguments
- Readings: Course notes on Arguments
- Do the exercises
- 9/11 – TEST 1

### UNIT 2 – Self, Culture, Religion and Evolution

#### Week 3 – Morality, Culture and Self Interest

- 9/14 – Cultural Relativism
- Readings: Rachels, ‘The Challenge of Cultural Relativism’, pp. 696-703
- 9/16 – Morality and Self Interest
- Readings:
- Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 357a-369c – pp. 65-73
- Feinberg, ‘Psychological Subjectivism’ pp. 548-555
- 9/18 – Review and TEST 2

**Week 4** – Morality and Religion

- 9/21 – Divine Command Theory

Readings: Plato, *Euthyphro*, p. 5-16

- 9/23 – Natural Law Theory

Readings: Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, Chap. II, III, and XXV, pp. 202-207

- 9/25 – Review and TEST 3

**Week 5** – Morality and Evolution

- 9/28-30 – The Evolution of Morality?

Readings:

Thomson, ‘The Trolley Problem’, pp. 910-923

Singer, ‘The Moral Instinct’, *The New York Times Magazine*, January 13

‘Moral Minds: the Evolution of Human Morality’ ABC’s All in the Mind interview with March Hauser and Richard Joyce,

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/allinthemind/stories/2006/1793870.htm>

-10/2 – Review and TEST 4

**UNIT 3** – Great Traditions

**Week 6** – Utilitarianism

- 10/5-7 – Readings:

Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Chap. I-IV, pp. 319-327

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chap. I, and Chap. II to “the whole sentient creation”, pp. 327-333

Williams, ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism’, pp. 606-622

- 10/9 Review and TEST 5

**Week 7** – Duty Theory

- 10/12-14 – Readings:

Kant, *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, pp. 280-318

Foot, ‘Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives’, pp. 556-561

- 10/16 Review and TEST 6

**Week 8** – Virtue Ethics

- 10/19-21– Readings

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I and II, pp. 124-140

Nussbaum, ‘Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach’, pp. 704-723

-10/23 Review and TEST 7

**UNIT 4** – Applied Ethics

**Week 9** – The Issue of Death Penalty

- 10/26-28 – Movie ‘Dead Man Walking’
- 10/30 – QUESTIONNAIRE and Debate

**Week 10** – The Issue of Death Penalty

- 11/2-4: Readings:
  - Pojman , ‘A Defense of the Death Penalty’, Blackboard
  - Bright, ‘Why the United States Will Join the Rest of the World in Abandoning Capital Punishment’, Blackboard
- 11/6 – Review and TEST 8

**Week 11** – The Morality of Voluntary Assisted Suicide

- 11/9-13 – Movie: ‘A Death of One’s Own’
- No Class on 11/11*
- 11/13 – QUESTIONNAIRE

**Week 12** – The Morality of Voluntary Assisted Suicide

- 11/16-20 – Readings:
  - Rachels, ‘Active and Passive Euthanasia’, pp. 811-815
  - Doerflinger, ‘Assisted Suicide: Pro-Choice or Anti-Life?’, Blackboard

**Week 13** –

- 11/23 Review and TEST 9
- 11/25-11/27 – *Thanksgiving Break*

**Week 14** - The Morality of Abortion

- 11/30-12/2 – Readings:
  - Thomson, ‘A Defense of Abortion’, pp. 765-775
  - Warren, ‘On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion’, pp. 776-786
  - Marquis, ‘An Argument That Abortion is Wrong’, pp. 786-796
- 12/4 – Review and TEST 10

**Week 15** – 11/7-11/11 – Environment / World Hunger or Animal Rights

## 0.4 Course Requirements

The first requirement for the course is that students carefully read all assignments, and come to class fully prepared. This is simply essential for passing the class.

**Attendance and Etiquette** Attendance is crucial for your success, especially in a philosophy class. You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class.

To attend a class does not mean merely sitting in class. You are expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other modes of communications should be turned off for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc.

**Exams** There will be 10 tests, 2 Questionnaires and a final, comprehensive exam. They will almost all take place on Friday afternoons.

**The 10 exams** are non-cumulative. They will each be worth 10 points each. They cover the material since the last exam, or the beginning of the class for the first exam. They will consist in 2 parts:

1. Part 1 : You will be asked to answer 3 questions that test your command of the course content. Your answer should not be more than 50 words long for each question.
2. Part 2: You will have to explain and discuss a passage taken from the readings. That is, you will have to identify the philosophical point that the author is making and discuss it in a short essay (no more than 400 words).

The answers in Part 1 will receive a letter grade. Your answer in Part 2 will be graded P (passing), U (unsatisfactory), or E (excellent). A P will raise the grade for part 1 by one step (B to B+ for example), a U will lower it by one step, and a E will raise it by two steps (B to A- for example).

**The Questionnaires** consist in questions about the movies we will be watching. They will receive a letter grade, and will be worth 5 points each.

**The final exam** is cumulative. It will consist in 20 questions, 17 out of the preceding exams, 3 on the material covered since the last exam. It will have the weight of four ordinary exams – 40 points.

**Make up exams** will be given only in extreme circumstances, family death, severe illness, severe car accident, etc. *Proof of extreme circumstances is required in order to make up an exam.* Oversleeping is not an acceptable excuse, nor busses running late, stuck in detox, etc. Take extra precautions on exam days to avoid these problems. Exams not taken, for any reason, will receive a zero.

You will be able to make up only two exam during the semester. The make up exam will take place on Monday, December 7th, room and exact time TBA.

**Academic misconduct** You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://www.umt.edu.SA>). The exams are closed-note: you may not consult anything but your own mind in order to answer questions on the exam. You may not use cell-phones, or any electronic devices to aid you, nor fellow students, nor fellow students' answers on exams, etc. You will receive no credit for any exam that you cheat on. Your conduct will also be reported to the Dean.

**Students with Disabilities** If you are a student with a disability and wish to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, contact me privately to discuss the specific modifications you wish to request. Please be advised I may request that you provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying your right to reasonable modifications. If you have not yet contacted Disability Services, located in Lommasson Center 154, please do so in order to verify your disability and to coordinate your reasonable modifications. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/).

