

AI 322 Problems and Issues in Contemporary Ethics

Campus: Loop ; Thurs, CAN, 1/6 – 3/7, 6 – 9 pm.

Competencies: A-4, A-3-C, A-3-E, F-X.

Faculty: David Simpson received his PhD in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and has served on the faculty in English and humanities at Columbia and Northwestern. His academic interests include classical and Renaissance literature, media studies, American culture, professional communication, and intellectual history. A former member of the Chicago Board Options Exchange, he has served as a consultant in business writing and technical stock-market analysis and has written articles and reviews on topics ranging from jazz and cinema to slang and cyber-culture. He has served on the visiting faculty at SNL since 1990.

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Course description: An introduction to moral philosophy with particular emphasis on the conflict between ethical relativism (or "subjectivism") on the one hand and moral realism (or "objective" ethics) on the other. During the course students will be introduced to classic theories and leading figures in the history of ethics, from Plato and Aristotle to Sade and Nietzsche. Class discussions will focus on issues (e.g., world poverty, drug use, capital punishment, sex, euthanasia, cloning, animal rights, terrorism, personal privacy, etc.) at the center of contemporary ethical debate in the United States and throughout the world.

Special Requirements: Access to and familiarity with the Internet recommended. No special training or advanced computer skills required.

Competence statements:

A-3-E	Can compare theological or philosophical systems.
A-3-C	Can examine a social issue from an ethical perspective.
A-4	Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems.
F-X	To be written by the student in cooperation with the instructor.

Criteria for demonstrating competence:

F-X: Option 1. A 6-8 page essay examining a current issue relating to workplace policies or business ethics. Option 2. A take-home exam.

A-3-E: A take-home exam (part essay, part objective) requiring students to identify and define a range of important philosophical terms and to compare and apply the views of two or more philosophers to a current ethical issue.

A-3-C: Option 1: A 6-8 page essay examining a contemporary social issue from an ethical perspective. Option 2. A take-home exam.

A-4: Option 1: A 6-8 page essay analyzing a current political issue or social problem from two different ethical viewpoints. Option 2: A take-home exam.

Assessment: Students are expected to attend regularly and be prepared to participate fully in class discussions. Written projects will be evaluated on the basis of interest and accuracy of content, depth of understanding, quality of research, force of argument, and overall organization, readability, and style.

Assignments

Note: In addition to their term projects (which are due during Week Nine), students will also be responsible for a brief in-class presentation on one of the featured course topics. Students can indicate their topic preferences via a sign-up sheet, which will be distributed during the first two class meetings.

Format: Informal seminar with student-led discussions and occasional brief presentations by the instructor.

Required Text:

Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 4th Edition. Hightstown, NJ: McGraw Hill, 2002.

Recommended Texts:

Rachels, James (ed.). *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*. 2nd Edition. Hightstown, NJ: McGraw Hill, 1999.

Singer, Peter, (ed.). *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.

Plato's *Protagoras* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (both available in electronic format) are also recommended.

Note: All students in the course are expected to uphold the guidelines on academic integrity as set forth in the DePaul Student Handbook.

Schedule of class meetings and discussion topics

Note: Topics for Weeks 4 – 9 will be determined by the interests and preferences of class members and announced during the third class meeting. Possible topics include (but are not limited to): Sex and Drug Use, Capital Punishment, Euthanasia and Suicide, Political Violence and Terrorism, Business and Professional Ethics, Preferential Treatment and Discrimination, Mood and Behavior Modification, Biomedical research, Animal Rights and the Environment, Wealth and Poverty.

Week 1. Jan. 6. Right and Wrong: Moral Facts and Personal Opinions.

Topics: Introduction to Moral Philosophy; Moral Realism and Ethical Relativism; Plato and Aristotle; Protagoras; The Socratic Paradox.

Suggested Readings: Rachels, Chapters 1 and 2.

Week 2. Jan. 13. Doing the Right Thing: Applying Tests, Standards, and Principles to Ethical Decisions.

Topics: Aristotle and the Golden Mean; Kant and the Categorical Imperative; Utilitarianism; Libertarianism; Right Reason, Natural Law, and Individual Conscience.

Suggested Readings: Rachels, Chapters 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Week 3. Jan. 20. Post-modern Ethics: Back to Protagoras?

Topics: Egoism and Romanticism; Sade; Byron; Emerson and Thoreau; Kierkegaard and subjective truth; Nietzsche and nihilism; Social Contract theory; Neo-pragmatism and Post-modernism.

Suggested Readings: Rachels, Chapters 3, 5, 6, 11, and 12.

Week 4. Jan. 27. Topic to be announced.

Assignment: F-X, A-3-E , A-3-C, and A-4 exams distributed. (Due 11/9.)

Week 5. Feb. 3. Topic to be announced.

Week 6. Feb. 10. Topic to be announced.

Week 7. Feb. 17. Topic to be announced.

Week 8. Feb. 24 Topic to be announced.

Week 9. March 3. Topic to be announced.

Assignments: All student projects, exams, and written assignments due.

Week 10. March 10. Summary and Review.
