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PHL 110.30: Introduction to Ethics

Soazig Le Bihan

University of Montana - Missoula, soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu

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PHL 110 – 30: Introduction to Ethics

Course Information

- Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan
- Email: soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu
- Course website on Moodle
- Mailbox: LA 101
- Office: LA 153
- Credits: 3

Communication Expectation: I try to always respond to email messages within one business day (24h). Students are expected to check their university email and the course website at least once a day.

Course Description

This course is a practical, hands-on introduction to ethics and moral philosophy, the branch of philosophy that concerns right conduct and how we ought to live. We will ask, “What role do ethics play in my daily life? How should I live? What choices should I make? What ethical values should guide my decision-making? What would it mean for me to live good life?” These questions are very difficult and confusing. Few people, if any, have definite answers to them, yet none of us can ignore them. While we might not be able to have absolute certainty, philosophical reflection, argument, and analysis can help us arrive at answers to complex moral problems that are reasonable and defensible. In this course, we will attempt to grapple with the questions posed above in an honest, circumspect, and rigorous way.

You will learn about the various ethical traditions in philosophy. You will also learn how to analyze and assess ethical arguments. You will learn to critically and rigorously address various ethical issues, among which: abortion, the death penalty, euthanasia, or racism. Finally, you will learn to apply your theoretical understanding of ethics in practical situations, as it will be required that you work on a civic engagement project. The project will be a real-life investigation of the relationship between applied ethics and issues affecting the community in which we live.

Learning goals: Upon completion of this course, students are expected to be able to:

- LG1: understand the nature of ethical inquiry and values,
- LG2: understand what makes a problem an ethical problem,
- LG3: understand and critically assess major ethical theories,
- LG4: identify, explain, and critically assess ethical arguments,
- LG5: understand and critically assess challenges to ethical theories,
- LG6: understand some of the major issues in applied ethics,
- LG7: apply theoretical understanding of ethics in practical situations,
- LG8: construct, convey, and argue for, their own views in a coherent, convincing, and circumspect way.

Textbook

Required textbook: Weston, Anthony. *A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox*. 3rd Edition. New York: Oxford, 2013. ISBN 978-0-19-975881-4.

Course Requirements

Grading % (point score)

- Day Quizzes: 19% (19 quizzes, 1 point each for a total of 19 points)
- Day Discussion Boards: 19% (19 discussions, each worth 1 point, total of 19 points)
- Weekly Cumulative Quizzes: 20% (5 quizzes, worth 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 points, total of 20 points)
- Weekly Syntheses: 15% (5 syntheses, each worth 3 points, total of 15 points)
- Civic Engagement Project: 27% (Draft 1, 2, and 3 each worth 4 points, Final Project worth 15 points)

Daily Quizzes (19 quizzes, 1 point each for a total of 19 points)

LG 1-7

Daily multiple-choice quizzes are required. They are meant to help check if you know the material for the class. There will be a lot of material covered, and the material covered will be difficult.

Missed quizzes may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. Note that you also will be expected to work through the material covered during the classes you may have missed. Make up quizzes may be given in cases if documentation of illness or extreme circumstances is provided.

Grading Policy. To get full credit, you need to answer all of the 5 multiple-choice questions correctly. Each error will cost you 0.20 points.

Daily Discussion Boards (19 Discussions, each worth 1 point for a total of 19 points)

LG 1-8

Participation to the daily discussion boards is required. Discussion boards are meant to help you check if you understand the material covered in class. Understanding is generally defined as the ability to summarize, infer from, generalize, and/or transfer your knowledge of the material. Discussion boards are also opportunities to develop your writing skills.

There will one or several prompts for the discussion. You are expected to make at least one entry for each prompt on the discussion board. Your entry should be between 100 and 300 words in length. It should be well written and well articulated, display your understanding of the material (e.g. by showing how you can apply your knowledge to the videos or articles linked). Ideally, it should be insightful and inspire further discussion. It must be respectful and civil.

Missed discussion assignments may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. Note that you also will be expected to work through the

material covered during the classes you may have missed. Make up assignment may be given if documentation of illness or extreme circumstances is provided.

Grading Policy. Your participation to discussion boards will be graded along the following criteria:

- A range (0.9-1): Accurate and Insightful. The Material is very well understood. The post does answer the prompt but also goes beyond that. It attempts to stimulate further thought and discussion. It is well coherent and articulated. The assignment is written in whole sentences, good English, and clear style. It is respectful of others.
- B range (0.8-0.9): Either the post is insightful, but reveals some minor misunderstanding of the material, or the material is well understood, but the post does not stimulate further thought and discussion. It is coherent and well articulated. The post is written in whole sentences, good English, and clear style. It is respectful of others.
- C range (0.7-0.8): The post reveals either several minor misunderstandings of the material or one major one. The post is coherent and reasonably well articulated. The post is written in whole sentences, good English, and reasonably clear style. It is respectful of others.
- D range (0.6-0.7): There are several major problems with the answers. The assigned material was read, but not well understood. Or: the post is not written properly. The post is respectful of others.
- F (0.5): The material was probably not read, and/or the answers are irrelevant, and/or offensive.
- No credit for no post.

Weekly Cumulative Quizzes (5 quizzes, worth 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 points, total of 20 points)

LG 1-7

Weekly multiple-choice cumulative quizzes are required. They are meant to help you check if you know the material covered in class. They include questions randomly chosen from **all** of the previous quizzes. So, the first cumulative quiz contains questions from the first-week quizzes; the second cumulative quiz contains questions from the first two week quizzes, etc...

- Cumulative Quiz 1: 10 questions, each worth of 0.2 point, total of 2 points
- Cumulative Quiz 2: 15 questions, each worth of 0.2 point, total of 3 points
- Cumulative Quiz 3: 20 questions, each worth of 0.2 point, total of 4 points
- Cumulative Quiz 4: 25 questions, each worth of 0.2 point, total of 5 points
- Cumulative Quiz 2: 30 questions, each worth of 0.2 point, total of 6 points

Missed quizzes may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. Note that you also will be expected to work through the material covered during the classes you may have missed. Make up quizzes may be given in cases if documentation of illness or extreme circumstances is provided.

Grading Policy. To get full credit, you need to answer all the multiple-choice questions correctly. Each error will cost you 0.20 points.

Weekly Syntheses (5 syntheses, each worth 3 points, total of 15 points)

LG 1-8

Every week, you are required to write a synthesis on the material covered for that week. Syntheses are meant to help you check if you understand the material. Understanding is generally defined as the ability to

summarize, infer from, generalize, and/or transfer your knowledge of the material. Syntheses are also opportunities to develop your writing skills.

In a synthesis, you are expected to (1) summarize at least one view covered during the past week; (2) summarize the argument behind that view, as well as its strengths and weaknesses; (3) relate it to your own experience or knowledge.

- A range (2.7-3): The synthesis contains an accurate reconstruction of the views and an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments supporting these views. It contains the strengths and weaknesses of these views/arguments. The student demonstrates his/her capacity to make insightful connections between new knowledge and personal experience and/or previously acquired knowledge. The synthesis is clear, written in proper English, and proofread.
- B range (2.4-2.6): The synthesis contains a reasonably accurate reconstruction of the views, as well as a charitable reconstruction of the arguments supporting these views. It includes a reasonably accurate analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments. The student demonstrates his/her capacity to make connections between new knowledge and his/her personal experience and/or previously acquired knowledge. The synthesis is written in proper English and proofread.
- C range (2.1-2.3): The synthesis presents the views and supporting arguments, their weaknesses and strengths, but does so either not accurately, or in an incomplete manner. The student makes some connections between new knowledge and personal experience and/or previously acquired knowledge, but without articulating these connections properly. The paper is written in proper English and proofread.
- D range (1.8-2.0): The synthesis misconstrues the view in a significant respect or it provides a poor summary of the views and arguments offered or it fails to make connection between new knowledge and the previous knowledge and / or previous experience or it is not written in proper English.
- F (1.5): The synthesis misconstrues the view in a significant respect and it provides a poor summary of the views and arguments offered and it fails to make connection between new knowledge and previous experience and/or previous knowledge.

Missed synthesis assignments may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. Delay for turning in the assignment may be given if documentation of illness or extreme circumstances is provided.

Civil Engagement Project

LG 1-8

In this class, we will work on a civic engagement project (CEP). This project is an investigation of the relationship between applied ethics and issues affecting the community in which you live. You may work as an individual or in a small group. This is NOT a research project. This is a DOING project—where you will do something to make the world a better place. I am giving more details about CEPs below (p.7 of the syllabus).

Responsibilities

My role as an instructor is to provide you with an opportunity to learn and master the material. I will do my best to foster your learning, and to make my expectations clear. I want you to succeed in this course and I am available to help you.

Your role as a student is to be proactive and to advocate for yourself. Philosophy is hard and it is only if you engage the material that you will get something out of it. If you do not understand something or are

confused, please let me know. It is your responsibility to voice your questions and concerns. We will work together to help you succeed in the course. Be sure to advocate for yourself. In my experience, students who put in effort, turn in assignments, and ask for help when they are confused, can succeed in my classes.

“Show up, Pay attention, Ask for help” (Advice from Anonymous on ratemyprofessor.com)

Important Note

*If you encounter difficulties concerning an assignment, it is almost always possible to make arrangements if you contact me early enough. **Never hesitate to contact me, but do it as soon as possible.** I will be happy to look at drafts, set up (possibly virtual) appointments, etc. Again, I am willing to help, but I cannot help unless you ask for it.*

Academic Misconduct

You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code available online:
http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php.

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be your own. If you plagiarize, your assignment will receive a zero. You may fail the class altogether depending on the circumstances. Also, I will report the case to the Dean. I will be glad to answer questions you may have about how to document sources properly. Anytime you take a phrase or sentence from someone, you have to quote it. Anytime you take an idea from someone, you have to cite your source(s).

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Mo Janzen who gave me tremendous help getting on board with engaged philosophy. She provided me with teaching material and examples of her students' projects. I also want to send some big thanks to the Office of Civic Engagement on Campus, in particular to Coleen Kane and Andrea Vernon, for establishing contacts with various organizations in our community. Finally, I want to thank Nancy Clouse for all her help on putting together the online version of this course.

University Resources

Writing Center

Students from all levels can take advantage of the writing center (LA 144: drop in or by appointment): “The Writing Center exists to help all UM students improve their writing skills as they pursue their academic and professional goals. We provide free writing instruction through one-on-one tutoring, in-class workshops, and the Writing Assistant program.” (quoted from the writing center website). The tutors will not write your assignment for you, but they will teach you how to write better. For more information, go the website: <http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/>

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and wish to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, it is your responsibility to contact me and 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/.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1 – Unit 1 – Foundations of Ethics

- Day 1: Introduction and Syllabus (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 2: What is Ethics? (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 3: Values (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 4: Using Your Tools: Eating Right (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 5: Wrap Up #1 (*Cumulative Quiz, Synthesis, CEP Draft 1*)

Week 2 – Unit 2 – Tools for Ethics (No assignment on July 4th)

- Day 1: Critical Thinking (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 2: Reframing Moral Dilemmas (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 3: Consistency, Thought Experiments (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 4: Wrap Up #2 (*Cumulative Quiz, Synthesis, CEP Draft 2*)

Week 3 – Unit 3 – Ethical Theories

- Day 1: Persons (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 2: Happiness (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 3: Virtue (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 4: Care (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 5: Wrap Up #3 (*Cumulative Quiz, Synthesis, CEP Draft 3*)

Week 4 – Unit 4 – Challenges to Ethics

- Day 1: Ethics and Religion (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 3: Egoism (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 2: Relativism (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 4: Morality and Evolution (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 5: Wrap Up #4 (*Cumulative Quiz, Synthesis*)

Week 5 – Unit 5 – Ethical Theories Applied

- Day 1: Death Penalty (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 2: Race and Racism (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 3: Rape, Responsibility, Consent (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 4: VAS / Euthanasia (*Quiz, Discussion Board*)
- Day 5: Final Wrap Up (*Cumulative Quiz, Synthesis, CEP Final Project*)

Civic Engagement Project

Nature and Objectives

This project is an investigation of the relationship between ethics and issues affecting our community. As we learn about ethics, your goal is to pick an issue you feel *passionate* about, to identify how you can make an impact regarding that issue in ways that are sensitive to the needs of our community, and to actually make a difference. Don't overestimate how much work you can get done, but try to pick something interesting, challenging, and meaningful. You may work in groups, but groups will be expected to accomplish more and have a more complete portfolio. And remember that I am here to help you accomplish your goals.

Your objectives are to:

- relate the theoretical material covered in class to the concrete ethical issues in your own life and in the lives of others;
- further your understanding of complexities involved in an issue you are passionate about;
- define, plan, and carry out a project within time constraints;
- assess the needs of your community and use campus and/or community resources to accomplish your goals;
- gain experience and skills to act on social issues;
- actually make a difference regarding an issue that you feel passionate about.

This project is worth a large portion of your grade. I expect you to be working on it throughout the month. You should expect to work a minimum three hours each week on this project (about 15-20 hours total). This is not a research project, this is a doing project. That said it comes with writing and oral assignments. These assignments will be graded by the regular standards of academic rigor.

Examples of Projects

Here are some successful past project (at other universities):

- Build a trailer for aluminum can recycling at a church.
- Plan a fun activity to build community (for example, a Dodge ball tournament, a block party). This could be in your neighborhood, community center, building association, or place of worship.
- Plan a party or event to raise money for a cause you want to support.
- Work with a pro-life or pro-choice group (or any cause you pick) to advocate for your cause.
- Plan a neighborhood, or community coat and mitten drive.
- Start an activity group at a local nursing home as a way to help residents be more active and engaged with others.
- Start a letter writing campaign to a store or a politician about an issue you care about. For example, join activists who are pressuring Gap to adopt safety standards in factories after the building collapse in Bangladesh. Or, get a group together to write your legislators about gun control or preserving gun ownership.

Logistics

The main purpose of the portfolio is to help you document what your project is about, what steps you took when you worked on it, and how it relates to our work in the classroom.

Your project will be divided into 5 parts: I. Introduction, II. Background Research, III. Theoretical Investigations, IV. Actions Taken, V. Results and Reflection.

- You will complete your project pieces by pieces:
 - Draft 1: Proposal for your project.
 - Draft 2: Draft of parts I and II are due on Friday of the second week.
 - Draft 3: Draft of part III is due on Friday of the third week.
 - On the fourth week, you are expected to take action.
 - The complete portfolio **and** efolio are due on Friday of the last week.
- After you turn in a draft, I expect you to revise that section based on the feedback I give you.
- The final port- and e-folio will contain all five parts: revised versions of parts I, II and III, and parts IV and V.
- Each part should be at least 500 words.
- Your e-folio should contain a video and pictures of your project.

Detailed Project Description

Below are the items that your project should include.

- Title, name, date
- Introduction ([Draft due date: Friday Week 2](#))
 - Summary: Describe what you plan to do and what you hope to accomplish.
 - Importance: Explain why we should care about your project, how it affects others, how it could make the world a better place.
 - Ethical Nature: Explain how your project is related to ethics – you need to define ethics to do that.
 - Ethical Values: Explain which ethical values you hope your project promotes, explain how these values are related to your project.
- Background Research ([Draft due date: Friday Week 2](#))
 - Previous endeavors: explain what other people have done regarding the issue you are tackling. Include citations and sources.
 - Goals/Possibilities: explain how this informs your goals and plan of action, how your own project compares to other projects on the issue. Think creatively (see page 344 of your textbook).
- Theoretical Investigations ([Draft due: Friday Week 3](#))
 - Theory: Explain how your project relates to **one** ethical theory that we have studied in class (Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, or Care Ethics).
 - Kantian ethics. How does your project promote respect? How does the categorical imperative apply?
 - Utilitarianism. How does your project promote happiness? For whom? What kind and level of harm will come out of your project (if any)? Will it be doing more good than harm?
 - Virtue Ethics. Which virtues does your project promote? How does it promote cultivating good habits and changing of character for the better?
 - Care Ethics. How does your project fosters relationships and promotes caring for others in your community?
 - Limits: Explain the limits of your project regarding to theory, i.e explain in what sense and to what extent it falls short of the demands of theory.
- Actions Taken: ([Due in Final Project: Last day of class](#))

- Steps. List all the steps you took and explain what each of them entailed. For example, don't just list "asked my friends to help" as one of your actions. Explain how you contacted your friends, who/how many specifically you asked, and who ended up helping. Give details.
 - Failures. Explain why some of the things you tried didn't turn out as you had planned.
- Results and Reflection: [\(Due in Final Project: Last day of class\)](#)
 - Results. Explain what you've accomplished.
 - Reflection. Explain the extent to which to which your project was successful or not. Explain how you would, or you would recommend others do differently regarding a similar project.

General Tips for Success

- Be proactive: you have a big project, so plan ahead.
- Be conscientious: pay attention to your writing:
 - Proofread and edit your papers.
 - Find your voice.
- Be honest. If something you tried didn't work, say so. You will not be graded on your "success" but rather on your writing and your effort.
- Be resourceful. Get help if you need it.
- Be professional. Do what you have committed to do.

See Grading Grid on last page

Grading Grid

Draft 1

Your cause	1
Your previous experience	1
Your tentative project	1
Your worries / expectations	1
	4 points

Draft 2

Introduction	Summary and Importance	1
	Ethical Nature/Values	1
Background	Previous Endeavors	1
	Goals/Possibilities	1
		4 points

Draft 3

Theoretical Investigations	Theory	2
	Limits	2
		4 points

Final Project

Introduction	Summary	1.5
	Ethical Nature/Values	1.5
Background	Previous Endeavors	1.5
	Goals/Possibilities	1.5
Theoretical Investigations	Theory	1.5
	Limits	1.5
Actions Taken	Steps	1.5
	Failures	1.5
Results and Reflection	Results	1.5
	Reflection	1.5
		15 points