

**Course Title:** *Contemporary Moral Issues*

**Semester:** Spring 2010

**Instructor's Name:** Mark Holcombe

**Class Day/Time:** M-W-F 10:00 – 10:50; 12:00 – 12:50

**Office Location:** HB414

**Office E-Mail:** [mholc@uab.edu](mailto:mholc@uab.edu)

**Office Mailbox:** HB414A

**Office Hours:** M-W-F 11:00 – 11:50; by appointment

**Website:** <http://www.philosophicalturn.net>

## **Course Description**

This course analyzes various schools of normative ethics that have been offered and defended throughout history that have contributed to our concept of ethics. We will also examine legal arguments and popular-culture arguments presented in the mass media. We will analyze contemporary ethical issues with respect to those theories in an effort to work towards a resolution and to promote a consistent normative system.

## **Course Objectives**

1. To understand the normative theories which have contributed to our conception of ethics.
2. To become more aware of the complexities of ethical dilemmas in general and, in particular, contemporary issues.
3. To comprehensively analyze and debate contemporary ethical issues.
4. To identify which normative theory/theories are being utilized in defense of a position or utilized to critique a position.
5. Identify the type of dispute and what method, if any, can resolve that dispute.
6. To be able to apply various normative theories consistently in one's personal life.

## **Text Books, Course Materials**

1. Daniel Bonevac *Today's Moral Issues*
2. James Rachels *The Elements of Moral Philosophy. Fourth Edition Only*
3. Other Supplemental Materials posted on-line and Blackboard
4. A Blue Book for each test. *You will not be allowed to take the tests without one.*

## **Pedagogical Philosophy**

The grading system above is the result of research within cognitive psychology on how people learn. Learning is achieved when one is capable of utilizing/applying information to novel scenarios. Learning is not the ability to store and accurately recall information. Therefore, student learning will be assessed by measuring the student's ability to apply the information discussed and contained in the reading assignments. Learning will not be assessed by measuring the student's ability to store and accurately recall information upon demand (that is, not by measuring memorization).

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## Grading

An A indicates comprehension and application; a B indicates comprehension; a C indicates recognition of relevant materials but insufficient comprehension and application; a D is unpersuasive work or minimal recognition of relevance; an F indicates unpersuasive work or non-recognition of relevance.

Grades are determined by how students reflect a mastery of the material and how competitive the student is with his/her peers.

I will consider quality and not quantity of class participation in calculating your final grade.

At the end of the semester when tallying your grade I will consider only the quality of your work, attendance, and effort. Principles of fairness include equal opportunity, consideration, and treatment for everyone with no exceptions. In tallying your final grade, I will not take into account your negotiating skills. You are advised to apply that effort to the assignments throughout the course rather than mustering all you have at the end to sway me to give you preferential treatment and consideration.

Grading Criteria for Course		Grading System
Tests	Points designated on each	A: 92% or higher of total points available
Paper	100 Points	B: 80 – 91%
Blackboard Learning Modules	See Blackboard Syllabus	C: 70 – 79%
		D: 60 – 69%
		F: 59% and below

## Testing Format

Tests will consist of short answer questions and one essay. You will be required to discuss a case study in relation to one author.

*You will need a blue book for each exam.* You must write clearly and legibly; if I cannot read your answers, you will not receive credit.

*You cannot make-up more than one test without a legitimate reason or the final exam at all. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail. **Make-up tests must be conducted within one week of the original testing date.***

*Word of warning: practically no one passes a make-up test!!!*

## Blackboard Learning Modules

A separate syllabus outlining which Blackboard Learning Modules are required and which are optional is posted on the Blackboard site for this course.

You will need Adobe Reader 9.0 or later!

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### **Class Participation**

Classroom participation is essential to the student's viability in this course. Participation affords the instructor an opportunity to assess each student's comprehension of the course material. Class participation is not only required but it is also necessary to the student's developmental understanding as well as the student's ability to convey the same orally.

### **Incompletes**

Incomplete grades may be awarded if and only if factors outside the student's control prevent the student from completing coursework in any course (proof required) and the student has a grade of B or higher in the course at the time of request. Requests must be made prior to the second to last week of classes. The Chair, the Dean, and I must approve all requests by University policy. Refer to the UAB Student Handbook.

### **Papers**

Paper topics are posted online along with the required bibliographies. The paper is to be written as an in-depth analysis of a case study. Take a position and defend it using only the provided course materials.

**NOTE:** If quality of work on a paper(s) is unusually superior to the quality of work on tests, I reserve the right to singularly compute your grade based upon the tests.

### **Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism is defined as the following:

- using the exact words of another person's work/writing without acknowledgment of your source through the use of quotation marks *and* correct citation/documentation;
- to claim as one's own the ideas or words of another is plagiarism.
- rephrasing a passage by another writer without giving proper credit;
- using someone else's facts or ideas without acknowledgement;
- using a piece of writing for one course that was already used in a previous course (or in courses in which you are simultaneously enrolled) without express permission from both instructors to do so; and
- presenting fabricated or falsified citations or materials.

Please consult with the instructor of this course if you are unsure about how to document sources. Cheating on exams is also an affront to the principle of academic honesty. At the very least, an assignment on which plagiarism or cheating has occurred will receive no credit, i.e., a "zero," and an Academic Dishonesty Incident Form concerning the incident will be kept on file in the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. A plagiarist/cheater is also subject to failure in the course and/or appearance before the Justice Council.

(Approved by Faculty Senate, Spring 2000)

***Plagiarism will result, at minimum, in no credit on the assignment if not failure for the course. At maximum, you could be expelled from the university.***

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### **Classroom Policies**

Kindly switch all cell-phones off prior to entering the classroom. All cell phones, pagers, mp3 players, Blackberrys, etc. must be completely turned off and stored away.

If I catch you texting in class, surfing the net, etc. you will be removed from class. Do not listen to headphones in class or while waiting for class to start.

You may record the class session but not using your cell phone//iPhone.

### **Students with Disability Statement**

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible so that we can make the necessary accommodations and/or coordinate with UAB Disability Support Services (DSS),

516 Hill University Center

(205) 934-4205 (Voice)

(205) 934-4248 (TDD)

dss@uab.edu

Services available and how to register with the [DSS Office](#):

<http://students.uab.edu/services/show.asp?durki=40136>

### **Attendance Policy**

You are expected to attend my classes. We will cover issues that arise outside the scope of the readings and will have discussions which will change the focus of the assignments in ALL cases. If you are not a part of these discussions, you will be unable to address issues on graded work adequately. If you find that sickness or other personal problems prevent you from attending classes regularly, you should expect your grade to be adversely affected. You will not pass if you do not attend classes regularly and do the reading assignments.

### **Early Alert System**

The University has requested all professors teaching 100 and 200 level courses to participate in the Early Alert System. This system is intended to identify students who are in danger of receiving a D, F, or W grade. The criteria are left to each professor individually. My criterion is based upon class attendance, grades on the reading quizzes, my informal assessment of whether the student is doing the reading assignments, and grades achieved through other assessments (such as the section tests).

The e-mails sent to the student with EAS in the subject line do not come from me but from the EAS office. These e-mails contain information to assist the student with the difficulties s/he may be experiencing.

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<b>Day</b>	<b>Required Assignments</b>	<b>Additional Materials</b>
<b>Section 1: Meta-ethics</b>		
<b>Day 1.</b> Syllabus Overview		<a href="#">CMI Specific Paper Guidelines</a> <a href="#">Writing a Philosophy Paper - General Recommendations</a>
<b>Days 2 - 4.</b> A Little Bit of Logic	<a href="#">"Asking Questions That Lead to Good Thinking"</a> <a href="#">W.K. Clifford <i>The Ethics of Belief</i></a>	<a href="http://www.fallacyfiles.org/">http://www.fallacyfiles.org/</a>
<b>Days 5 - 6.</b> Auxiliary Issues: Neurological underpinnings of normative reasoning	Elements: Chapter 12 <a href="#">Neurological Basis of Ethics</a>	Highly Recommended but Optional: Patricia Churchland readings on free will in the Intro to Phil course
	<b>TEST 1</b>	
<b>Day 8.</b> What is morality? Basic elements of normative theory	Elements: Chapter 14 Elements: Chapter 1	
<b>Days 9 - 12.</b> <i>How Not To Evaluate Ethics:</i> Egoism Subjectivism Emotivism Cultural Relativism Religious-based Ethics?	Elements: Chpts. 2 - 6	
	<b>TEST 2</b>	
<b>Section 2: Applied Ethics</b>		
<b>Days 14 - 16.</b> Animal Rights	Bonevac: 84 - 90 Kant: <a href="#">"Why We Have No Obligations to Animals"</a> Bonevac: 91 - 94	Case Study: Oneself <a href="#">The Meatrix</a> (not required)
	<b>TEST 3</b>	

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<b>Days 18 – 24.</b> Euthanasia	James Rachels: " <a href="#">Active and Passive Euthanasia</a> "  Palmer: <a href="#">Calculus of Felicity</a>  Bonevac: 323 - 329  Dyck: " <a href="#">An Alternative to the Ethic of Euthanasia</a> "  Bonevac: 319 - 321  Greg Pence: " <a href="#">Arguments Against Physician Assisted Suicide</a> "	Case Study 1: Bonevac 314 – 318 Case Study 2: Jack
	<b>TEST 4</b>	<b>Paper Rough Draft Due</b>
<b>Days 26 – 28.</b> Abortion	Bonevac: 277 – 287; 288 - 294	Case Study 1: Star Trek TNG: "Measure of a Man" (In-class video) Case Study 2: <a href="#">Nine-year-old Brazilian Girl</a> Case Study 3: <a href="#">Pam Tebow</a>
<b>Days 29.</b> Abortion	Bonevac: 295 - 303	
	<b>TEST 5</b>	
<b>Days 31 - 33.</b> Social Justice	Bonevac: 472 – 476  <a href="#">Singer "Rich and Poor"</a>  Bonevac: 477 – 484; 493 – 498	Case Study: Village of 100 People
	<b>Paper Due Last Day of Classes</b>	
	<b>Test 6 (date of final exams)</b>	