

Course Information

Semester & Year: Fall 2021

Course ID & Section #: V1963

Instructor's name: Johnston

Course units: 3

Instructor Contact Information

Office location or *Online: AT 110

Office hours: Online according to your needs and schedule.

Phone number: 707-476-4375

Email address: john-johnston@redwoods.edu

Catalog Description

An introduction to major ethical theories and the practice of moral reasoning and decision making. Students will practice using ethical theories and methods of moral reasoning to reach justified ethical conclusions in response to a variety of current ethical issues. Topics may include ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, the treatment of animals and the environment, political violence, freedom of speech, abortion, etc.

Course Student Learning Outcomes (*from course outline of record*)

1. Use the principles of major ethical theories to develop and defend ethical conclusions.

Prerequisites/co-requisites/ recommended preparation

None

Accessibility

College of the Redwoods is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please contact your instructor or [Disability Services and Programs for Students](#) (DSPS). Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS based on their campus location:

- Eureka: 707-476-4280, student services building, 1st floor
- Del Norte: 707-465-2324, main building near library
- Klamath-Trinity: 530-625-4821 Ext 103

Philosophy 20: Introduction to Ethics Fall 2021

Instructor: John Johnston
Email: John-Johnston@redwoods.edu

Office hours: Online according to your needs and schedule
Phone: 707-476-4375

Contacting your instructor: Email is the only way for you to contact me, and you can easily do so from the Canvas course site.

What you need for this course:

- Vaughn, Lewis. *Beginning Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* 2015. ISBN: 9780393937909.
- Sandel, Michael J. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* 2009 ISBN: 9780374532505.
- Obsessive commitment to being on time and prepared.
- Burning curiosity.
- Boundless enthusiasm.
- An unquenchable thirst for knowledge.
- Steadfast dedication to your learning.

IMPORTANT NOTE: I assume part of the reason you are in college is that you know that you don't know what you don't know (if you knew what you didn't know, you could just hit up Google to learn). The process of discovering what you don't know you don't know can be scary, especially when this process happens in front of other people. It requires that you take risks, make yourself vulnerable, be prepared to discover you might be wrong about some of your beliefs, and live with the discomfort of uncertainty. My hope is that our class will approach issues with intellectual humility and that we will support one another as we try to figure out what seems true. Ideally, we'll focus on learning why others and you think the way they and you do and avoid burdening ourselves with the job of proving to someone else that we're right and they're wrong.

Of course, I am aware that classmates (and teachers) who are extremely confident they've got it all figured out and know exactly what they and you should think about a topic can be a little nerve-wracking and may cause your defenses to kick into gear. And believe me when I say that I am acutely aware of how deeply frustrating and downright scary it can be in our current culture to even raise questions about orthodoxies held by the political far left and far right. Just asking a question earnestly can result in the questioner being shamed and labeled something terrible. Unfortunately, the extremes have managed to get us so wrapped into their power struggle over competing oversimplifications that the very purpose of college is increasingly threatened—that is, the extremes are much, much more concerned that you know what to think and much less concerned that you know how to think. This is why our current culture is often called “Shut Up Culture,” “Call out Culture,” “Culture of Outrage,” “Cancel Culture,” and so on.

Hopefully, you're getting a sense of how I roll. I detest fundamentalisms, and orthodoxies are extremely dangerous, in my opinion. I find people who are certain about much of anything to be completely boring and obnoxious (and usually not very self-aware). I find that most people who are willing to label someone they know little about anti-American or a Nazi or a fascist or a communist or man-hater or -ist or -phobe or bigot of some sort or close-minded or ignorant or.....well, you get the idea.....I find people who use these labels to demonize people they disagree with to be intellectually weak and uninteresting, bad at engaging in productive discussion but good at intimidation. So that's where I'm coming from. I'm interested in what you think, but I am much, much more interested in the thought processes that lead you to your insights and conclusions, and I love few things more than seeing someone comfortable enough in my class to admit that he or she hadn't thought of something I or a classmate says or to celebrate a moment of changing one's personal beliefs on a topic. After all, I've been seriously thinking about things for 30 years, and I'm less confident I've “got it all figured out” now than I was at 20 (I was embarrassingly certain I knew how the world should be ordered then—you're lucky I didn't get my way then). Now, I find myself profoundly grateful every time a student raises a question or an idea that causes me to see things differently or see different things. All this is to say that if it seems like my personality is going to grate on you or frustrate you so much that you won't be able to focus on the material we're going to study, you should talk with me so we can figure out a path to success for you.

Now, until I see evidence to the contrary, I will regard you as tough, resilient, curious, willing to take risks, willing to admit you're wrong, and willing to allow others to have their stupid thoughts. I am going to think of you as strong, not weak. And just like your immune system gets stronger when exposed to manageable biological challenges, your mind will get stronger by exposing yourself to manageable intellectual challenges. If you don't agree, then you probably don't belong in a philosophy course. In order to think, you have to be willing to risk offending people and you have to risk being offended. My hope is that at least a few times during this class, you walk out unsettled and uncertain (as well as satisfied and inspired). I hope you lie awake some nights thinking about what we've discussed. I hope you feel the discomfort that comes when you realize that something you've always believed is, actually, not worth believing and that an idea you've previously rejected is probably worthy of more consideration.

Now, all that said, I'm not going to tolerate you being a jerk. If you intentionally insult someone or try to make someone feel "less than" for who they are or what they think or what they say or try to shame someone into silence, then we're gonna have a problem. So don't be a jerk. Be cool. Assume that your classmates are trying to figure things out and may not say things exactly as they should. Give them the benefit of the doubt. If someone says something that offends you, assume that the person's intentions were good and that they made a mistake. If it turns out that the person's intentions were not honest or good, then we'll deal with it. It is especially important to be patient and kind and forgiving of one another this semester because, as you know, we're all trying to get back into the social setting of college. So let's be chill with one another until someone makes clear they really are a jerk, and then we'll deal with them (and we'll deal with them in a very medieval fashion, I promise).

Course Description (from the CR Catalog)

An introduction to major ethical theories and the practice of moral reasoning and decision making. Students will practice using ethical theories and methods of moral reasoning to reach justified ethical conclusions in response to a variety of current ethical issues. Topics may include ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, the treatment of animals and the environment, political violence, freedom of speech, abortion, etc.

Course Outcomes:

1. Use the principles of major ethical theories to develop and defend ethical conclusions.

A More Detailed Description of this Particular Course

Let's assume from the fact that you are sitting in this room reading this syllabus that you think being a good person and doing the right thing are important—that morality matters and is worth thinking about and discussing. Let's assume, further, that you believe it is possible for a person (even you) to perform an immoral act (i.e. do the "wrong" thing); for a person (hopefully not you) to be an immoral person (i.e. a "bad" person); for a person (hopefully you) to perform a moral act (i.e. do the "right" thing); and, finally, for a person (even you) to be a moral person (i.e. a "good" person). If you share these assumptions, then you probably believe that the questions "what make some actions right and other wrong?" "what should I do?" "what kind of person should I be?" are questions that have real answers, answers that may be elusive, but answers that are, nonetheless, worth searching for.

If you don't share these assumptions, then you'll likely find this course boring and irrelevant because ethics is the philosophical study of morality, and for the study of some "thing" to be exciting and relevant, the "thing" under study needs to exist in some way. Otherwise, what's the point? Of course, ethics certainly exists in a very real way for anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. However, in these fields, ethics exists as a "descriptive" phenomenon. This means that anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists are concerned primarily with what a person or a group of people does and what a person or a group of people believes is the moral act or the criteria for defining a "good" person. They seek to "describe" these things.

Ethics as a philosophical pursuit is "normative"—that is, it seeks to identify what people should do. Philosophical ethics is concerned with questions of value and judgment, and it uses the principles of logic and argumentation to discover not what is the case but what should be the case.

Course Requirements (the things you need to do in order to succeed in this course)

Thought Primers: The purpose of Thought primers is two-fold: one, to explore your thoughts about a topic BEFORE you watch the week's video lecture; two, to explore and share with your classmates ideas, questions, or responses that come up DURING or AFTER you watch the week's video lecture. Each Thought Primer receives credit as follows: 1 point for your written responses to the question(s) I've posed to you before the video lecture; 1 point for any ideas, questions, or responses you post to the course discussion board after you watch the video lecture.

Exam Parts: There is one exam that you'll complete in parts—one part each week (you can think of these as weekly quizzes). Each part typically consists of between 5-15 multiple choice questions that you'll complete via Canvas, and you will have unlimited time and two attempts for each of these exam parts. Each attempt offers the same questions in the same order, you can review which questions you answered correctly and incorrectly on your first attempt before your second attempt, and you are encouraged to consult your textbook, class notes, and class mates to make sure you score as high as you can on each exam part. So really, the only way to boff the exam parts is to simply not do them. **IMPORTANT:** Once a question set closes, it can be reopened only with an NQA slip. See below for more information.

Ethical Inquiries: We will write two short inquiries that allow you to offer short responses to a variety of questions about ethics and ethical dilemmas. The inquiries are an opportunity for you to apply what we're discussing and reading and to practice approaching ethical problems in a consistent, thoughtful manner.

Each inquiry will be scored 1-100 according a rubric in Canvas. You can submit drafts for feedback and are encouraged to meet with me in my office outside of class to discuss your inquiry's strengths and areas for improvement before you submit it for a score.

No Questions Asked (NQA): Attached to this syllabus are two "No Questions Asked" slips. Each one can be used as follows: 1 slip equals 1 thoughts primer point. So, for example, let's say we get to the end of the semester and you did all the thought primers but 1.

You can use two NQA slips (each worth 1 point) to make up all the points of that missing thought primer. It's that easy. You don't even have to do the Thought Primer. The slips "make up" the missing thought primer points. Alternatively, you can use an NQA slip to request that a multiple-choice online exam part you missed or performed poorly on be reopened. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Use your NQAs wisely. You have only 3, and there will be lots of opportunities for things to go wonky this semester in ways that interfere with your ability to get all your assignments done the way you want them done. So use NQAs strategically.

Attendance: I am well aware that we're living in super weird times and that your life may be a difficult one to manage these days, especially if you have kids or work a lot. I'll do everything I can to work around your schedule and extend due dates if necessary. My goal is to do whatever we have to to get you to complete the course successfully. But you have to meet me halfway by staying in contact with me when things get tough. The worst thing you can do is "check out" of the class for weeks at a time, so don't do that. And remember, if you simply stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to protect your transcript and initiate an official withdrawal. Any student who is not withdrawn is still enrolled, and I am required to issue grades for all enrolled students at the end of the semester.

Academic Honesty: "Academic honesty" is a term that refers to your relationship to your college learning. It's pretty simple: don't cheat. What that means is that you should avoid sharing answers on exams, presenting someone else's work as your own....you know, all the stuff you know you're not supposed to do.

Grading: There are three categories of assignments that constitute your course grade, and each category is equally weighted:

- Thought Primers
- Ethical Inquiries
- Exam

None of your work in this course will receive a traditional letter grade or percentage (i.e. no "A, B, C" etc. or 92%, 77%, etc.). Instead, your work will be judged as "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," or "does not meet expectations." What follows is the part of the syllabus I indicated above that you need to read carefully and ask questions about:

THOUGHT PRIMERS

Your collection of **Thought Primers** will be judged "exceeds expectations" if

- The average of your Thought Primers is at least 80%.

Your collection of **Thought Primers** will be judged "meets expectations" if

- The average of your Thought Primers is between 70% and 79%.

Your collection of **Thought Primers** will be judged "nearly meets expectations" if

- The average of your Thought Primers is between 65% and 69%.

Your collection of **Thought Primers** will be judged "does not meet expectations" if

- The average of your Thought Primers is less than 65%.

ETHICAL INQUIRIES

Your **Inquiries** will be judged "exceeds expectations" if

- The average of your two inquiries is at least 80%.

Your **Inquiries** will be judged "meets expectations" if

- The average of your two inquiries is between 70% and 79%.

Your **Inquiries** will be judged "nearly meets expectations" if any of the following apply:

- The average of your two inquiries is between 65%-69%.

Your **Inquiries** will be judged "does not meet expectations" if any of the following apply:

- You did not submit one or more of the Inquiries.
- The average of your two inquiries is less than 65%.

EXAM

Your **Exam** will be judged "exceeds expectations" if

- Your combined score on the exam parts is 80% or higher.

Your **Exam** will be judged "meets expectations" if

- Your combined score on the exam parts is between 70% and 79%.

Your **Exam** will be judged “nearly meets expectations” if

- Your overall score on the exam parts is between 65%-69%.

Your **Exam** will be judged “does not meet expectations” if

- Your overall score on the exam parts is less than 65%.

Course Grades

Let “exceeds expectations” = E

Let “meets expectations” = M

Let “nearly meets expectations” = N

Let “does not meet expectations” = D

EEE= A

EEM=A-

EMM=B

MMM=C

An “N” in any one area drops your course grade to C as long as one of the other two areas is an “E.”

An “N” in two or more areas OR an “N” in combination with two “M’s” drops your course grade to D.

A “D” in any one area drops your grade to D.

A “D” in two or more areas drops your course grade to F.

Extra Credit: There is NO extra credit available in this course. But hey, just look at all the opportunity for credit you have available in the required assignments. Work hard not to be that student who emails me during finals week saying something like this: “Please, is there anything I can do to make up for all those thought primers I missed or exams I bombed.....etc. This was my favorite class and you’re the absolute greatest person on earth and I know I really screwed up, but PLEASE!!! I’ll do anything!!” You look like kind of a tool when you do that.

Special Needs: If you have special needs due to a verifiable physical, psychological, or learning disability, you are legally entitled to appropriate accommodations. The college offers a variety of services to support students with special needs, and you should talk with me as soon as possible if you would like my help with arranging accommodations to ensure your success in this course. I’m eager to help in whatever ways I can.

No Questions Asked #1

Name:

Date:

☐ Apply to thought primers

☐ Reopen Exam Part #

No Questions Asked #2

Name:

Date:

☐ Apply to thought primers

☐ Reopen Exam Part #