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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

# Introductory Ethics (Phil 241)

**Course Description:** An exploration of the nature of moral problems and of ethical theory, varieties of moral skepticism, practical ethics and the evaluation of social institutions. This semester we will think a lot about social problems and their rectification. Five broad topics will occupy our attention: poverty and inequality, racism, sexuality, social change, and (as a bonus) the nature of morality. These topics will lead us to talk about things like social justice, poverty and its causes, inequality, public policy, U.S.-based racism and its legacy, reparations, ethical sex, pornography, sexism, the ethics of protest and resistance, peacemaking, backlash to social justice movements, identity politics, and more. My own view is that a good ethics class should not stop with theory and argument. This class is also an opportunity for *moral growth*. Together, we have the chance to shake off a bit of apathy and journey deeper into a life characterized by peacemaking, conscientiousness, and justice.

**Instructor:** Joel Ballivian
**Email:** ballivian@wisc.edu
**Meeting time:** MWF 11:05PM - 11:50PM
**Location:** Education Sciences 228.

**Office hours:** 5th floor of Helen C. White, Wednesdays, 12:15pm-2:15pm (or by request)
**TA:** Alec Michael
**Email: amichael3@wisc.edu**
**Office hours:** Friday, 1-3pm.

## ❦ Overview of Requirements and Grading:

Socratic Note Taking (20%)
Class Debates (20%)
Midterm (15%)
Final (15%)
Participation (30%)

93-100% - A
88-92.9% - AB
83-87.9% - B
77-82.9% - BC
70-76.9% - C
60-69.9% - D
0-59.9% - F

*Optional final paper for med students or Phil majors

## ❦ Assignments in Detail:

**Socratic Note Taking (20%):** For each section of the class (there are 5), you will pick a reading and do Socratic note taking on it (SNT). This involves picking a passage, statement, or argument from an assigned text, asking **two** substantive questions about it, and then answering those questions for yourself as you continue reading (~250 words per answer). The turned-in assignment should include: (a) the title of the paper/article you're reading, (b) your questions, and (c) your answers. These will be turned in on Canvas.

> **Due:** each SNT must be turned in before we discuss the topic/reading in class. In other words, if you do an SNT on paper x, and the syllabus (or a class email) says that we'll discuss paper x on Monday, you must turn in your SNT *before class on Monday*. You can't do an SNT on a paper that has already been covered in class.
>
> **Total number of Socratic notes**: 5 (1 per unit).
>
> **Important**: You may do Socratic note taking for any of the readings below that have this caption: "[SNT option]"

**Class Debates (20%):** Don't be triggered by the word "debate." These are friendly, staged discussions where you will have the chance to hone your reasoning and communication skills. By working together with your team, you will put together a set of arguments in favor of a view (perhaps a view you don't agree with) and then "debate" your position with an opposing team. Debates will take place in discussion sections, and there will be at least *one* debate per unit (one on poverty, one on racial justice, and so on). There will be two debate teams and a group of student judges for every debate. Preparing for the debate outside of class (with your team) is expected. There will be 4 debates throughout the semester.

**Final and Midterm Exams (15% each):** nothing special here. The exams consists of short-essay questions that ask you to define key terms, re-formulate arguments, evaluate arguments, and respond critically to positions. I always assign these as take-home exams.

**Participation (30%):** philosophy is done best in community and through dialogue, but good dialogue is something that requires cultivation and virtue. We will attempt to develop the skills and virtues necessary for sustaining good philosophical discussion. Hence, a large part of your grade consists of your participation in class. To effectively participate, come to each class having studied the assigned readings and ready to discuss them. Throughout the term you will complete in-class reflection assignments that will also count toward your participation grade. I will do my best to create a class environment that conduces to good discussion, charitable disagreement, and freedom to speak up. Class surveys: I will also send out periodic class surveys; taking the surveys is required and counts toward your participation grade.

**Note on Attendance:** Attendance in lecture and discussion section is expected but will not be graded directly. Instead, absences from lecture or discussion sections will count against your *participation grade*. We will use the app **Arckaive** to keep attendance. Log in at the start of each class and mark yourself present. If your attendance rate is below 90% (by the end of the semester), you start to lose participation points––5 points for every 5% dip below 90% attendance. To illustrate:

If 90% > your attendance > 85%, your participation grade < 25/30.
If 85% > your attendance > 80%, your participation grade < 20/30.
If 80% > your attendance > 75%, your participation grade < 15/30.
If 75% > your attendance > 70%, your participation grade < 10/30.
If 70% > your attendance > 65%, your participation grade < 5/30.
If 65% > your attendance > 60%, your participation grade < 0/30.

Hence, your final grade can be no better than a C if your attendance is at 65% or below. Please contact me or Alec if you need to miss class (I'm very lenient here).

## ❦ Readings and Texts

**Required texts** (available at the University Book Store, or you can purchase online):

Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter From Birmingham Jail* (Penguin UK publisher version).

All other readings and resources will be posted on Canvas.

## ❦ Course Objectives:

From the university template:
1. Ability to think critically about arguments.
2. Ability to interpret complex texts accurately and analyze them logically.
3. Ability to communicate precisely and concisely in both writing and speech.
4. Ability to exchange reasons about controversial matters respectfully and with the aim of uncovering the truth.
5. Interpretive charity and intellectual honesty, which includes appropriate attribution others of their ideas, and recognition and frankness about the limitations of one's own ideas.

My (Joel's) additions:
6. Increased conscientiousness (about social problems and their causes).
7. Increased care (about social problems and their rectification).
8. Increased creativity and wisdom (about the rectification of social problems).
9. Increased collaboration (across political and ideological divides, and especially with under-represented voices).

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# Course Schedule

1. Intro
2. Moral Theory 1
3. Poverty 1
4. Poverty 2
5. Poverty 3
6. Moral Theory 2
7. Racism 1
8. Racism 2
9. Racism 3
10. Sex 1
11. Sex 2
12. Moral Theory 3
13. Social Change 1
14. Social Change 2

| | M | W | Th (Discussion) | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Intro** | | (1/ 25) FIRST DAY!<br><br>Syllabus and welcome | (1/26)<br><br>In-class reading: bell hooks, "Democratic Education," from *Teaching Critical Thinking*. | (1/27) Critical Thinking<br><br>Method for philosophical analysis |
| **Moral Theory** | (1/30) Ethical Relativism<br><br>Shafer-Landau, ch. 19, "Ethical Relativism" (sections: "Doubts About Objective Morality, "Two Kinds of Ethical Relativism," "Moral Progress"). | (2/1) <<< | (2/2)<<< | (2/3)<<< |

| | M | W | Th (Discussion) | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Poverty and Inequality** | (2/6) How much wealth is permissible?<br><br>Introduce Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty." | (2/8) Singer continued<br><br>Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty." [SNT option] | (2/9) In-class: Singer, *The Life You Can Save"* (excerpts; see discussion handout) | (2/10) Is aid just a bandaid? The structural objection to aid.<br><br>Optional: Ben Davis, "Dependency is Dead!" |
| | (2/13) Poverty & Corruption<br><br>In-class: Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid* (excerpt). [SNT option]<br><br>In-class: Larry Temkin, *Being Good in a World of Need*. What's wrong with inequality? (Excerpt) | (2/15) Why is there poverty?<br><br>Rank et al, "From high hopes to low wages: What happened to the American Dream?" [SNT option] | (2/16) Policy Solutions<br><br>In-class: Rank et al, "Solutions." | (2/17) Why is there poverty? Some myths<br><br>In-class: Mark Rank, "How Important is Hard Work for Avoiding Poverty?" |
| | (2/20) What's wrong with inequality?<br><br>When is inequality bad?<br><br>Introduction to Sufficientarianism | (2/22) What's the problem: disparity or deprivation?<br><br>In-class reading: Frankfurt, "The Moral Irrelevance of Equality." [SNT option] | (2/23) **Class Debate: Poverty & Inequality** | (2/24) The consequences of poverty<br><br>Rank et al, *Poorly Understood,* Ch. 11 [SNT option] |
| | **M** | **T** | **Th (Discussion)** | **F** |
| **Moral Theory** | (2/27) Consequentialism | (3/1) Consequentialism | (3/2) TBD<br><br>Reading: Gronholz, "Consequentialism and Utilitarianism." | (3/3) Consequentialism<br><br>Consequentialism and global poverty |
| | **M** | **W** | **Th (Discussion)** | **F** |
| **Racial Justice** | (3/6) The end of slavery (forty acres and a mule) | (3/8) What is reparations? | (3/9) The case for reparations?<br><br>Joseph Frigault, "Reparations for Historic Injustice." [SNT option] | (3/10) Reparations continued... |
| **Don't forget spring break.<br>This week jumps head** | (3/20) "40 Acres and a Mule" + Reconstruction<br><br>Listen: NPR interview with Richard Rothstein on *The Color of Law*. [SNT option] | (3/22) Historic racism<br><br>In-class: Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (excerpt). Exercise: "Mapping Inequality" | (3/23) In-class: Darity and Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21st Century* (excerpts from ch. 12) [SNT option] | (3/24) Objections to reparation<br><br>Loury, "Transgenerational Justice." |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (3/27) Another objection to reparation<br><br>Reading: Ballivian, "is Reparation Unfair?" | (3/29) The objection continued...<br><br>Reading: Ballivian, "Is Reparation Unfair?" [SNT option] | (3/30) **Class Debate: Reparations** | (3/31) Systemic Racism & Color-Blind Approaches<br><br>Tricia Rose, "How Structural Racism Works" [SNT option] |
| | **M** | **T** | **Th (Discussion)** | **F** |
| **Moral Theory** | (4/3) Moral realism vs. moral nihilism | (4/5) Moral factionalism<br><br>Richard Joyce, "Moral Fictionalism." | (4/6) | (4/7) Moral abolitionism<br><br>Richard Garner, "Morality: the Final Delusion?" |
| | **M** | **W** | **Th (Discussion)** | **F** |
| **Sexual Ethics** | (4/10) The ethics of pornography<br><br>Begin Amia Srinavasin, "Talking to my students about sex," from *The Right To Sex,* excerpt. Sex & Social Scripts | (4/12) <<<<br><br>Amia Srinavasin, "Talking to my students about sex," from *The Right To Sex,* excerpt. [SNT option] Sex & Social Scripts | (4/13) <<< | (4/14) Anti-porn feminism: final thoughts<br><br>Ley, "Misogyny in Porn: It's Not What You Think," and Jonah Mix, "New study says porn users have 'egalitarian attitudes' — so what?" [The reading by Jonah Mix is an SNT option] |
| | (4/17) Wrap up Srinivasan on the ethics of pornography | (4/19) Kate Manne, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Harms Women,* chapter 4, "Unwanted–On the Entitlement to Consent." [SNT option] | (4/20) **Class Debate: the ethics of pornography** | (4/21) Wrap up |
| | **M** | **W** | **Th (Discussion)** | **F** |
| **Social Change** | (4/24) MLK<br><br>Documentary on civil rights movement | (4/26) MLK, *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, pp. 1-16 [SNT option] | (4/27) MLK, *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, pp. 16-30 [SNT option] | (4/28) Is direction action anti-democratic? |
| | (5/1) Identity politics & targeted policy | (5/3) Identity Politics and targeted policies<br><br>Read and/or listen: (1) Naomi Zack, "Government Should be Boring," (*Examining Ethics* podcast). [SNT option] (2) Obama & Springsteen, "Race in the U.S.A" (*Renegades: Born in the U.S.A.* podcast). Readings available in the pdf titled, "Perspectives on Identity Politics and Universal Policy." | (5/4) The ethics of protest revisited | (5/5) Class wrap up<br>(1) Comparing class polls (beginning of semester vs end).<br>(2) AMA: "Ask me anything" |

❦ **PRIVACY OF STUDENT RECORDS and the USAGE of AUDIO RECORDED LECTURES.**

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Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

❦ **ELECTRONICS:** No electronics for face-to-face meetings—unless permitted by the instructor (say, for in-class surveys, or unless special accommodations are required).

❦ **COURSE CREDITS AND SATISFACTION:** 4 credits. The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (45 hours per credit), which includes time spent in class, reading, writing, posting on the course website, and other student work as described in this syllabus.

❦ Students' Rules, Rights & Responsibilities

❦ **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

❦ **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.** The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible af-

ter a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: McBurney Disability Resource Center)

❦ **DIVERSITY & INCLUSION. Institutional statement on diversity:** "Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world." https://diversity.wisc.edu/