

Condensed Web Version
(Students: should use syllabus on LMS)

Department of Social Sciences and Critical Studies
School of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Pratt Institute
Spring 2015

Course Syllabus

ETHICS

& SOCIAL ISSUES

PHIL 210, Credits: 3

Monday 2-4:50pm in Engineering Building 311

Instructor: Eric Godoy

Office Location: DeKalb 103

Office Hours: Tue. 12-2pm, or by appointment



EricSGodoy



718.687.5976



EGodoy2@pratt.edu



@EricDoesEthics (#PrattEthics)



NYC Climate March, November 21, 2014

Course Description

Catalog Description: Ethics and Social Issues brings moral and ethical reflection to bear on concrete moral problems in public and private life. When philosophy engages practical and social issues, it puts into question the distinction between the political and the personal, between controversy and consensus. Debates may change but the problems of justice, duty and fairness continue to arise, demanding not partisanship but rigorous investigation, conceptual clarity, and self-examination, all of which philosophers from antiquity to the present attempt, with varying degrees of success. Issues discussed in this course may include violence and war, human and animal rights, sexual freedom, giving and taking life, censorship and resistance, duties to other species, cultural and religious conflict, poverty and famine.

Section Description: Attached is a list of topics. The class will be divided into groups. Each group will be responsible for choosing a topic, presenting the philosophical arguments in the associated readings, and defending a position. It need not be the position with which you most agree. Our approach to ethics will not be systematic, but over the term will we build a bank of moral concepts, ethical arguments, conceptual tools, and philosophical frameworks that can be useful for examining any number of ethical issues. Our aim is to better understand how ethical arguments are constructed and how we can best evaluate them.

Course Goals:

- Become familiar with the philosophical debates surrounding a number of different ethical and social issues.
- Develop your abilities to critically read, write, and speak about philosophical ethics.
- Develop an understanding of how ethical arguments are constructed and establish a firmer grounding for your own ethical beliefs.

Learning Objectives:

- Distinguish between normative and descriptive claims.
- Analyze various ethical frameworks employed in normative arguments (e.g., deontological, consequential, virtue, and care ethics).
- Explain the difference between ethical relativism, absolutism, nihilism, egoism, and pluralism.
- Evaluate normative arguments of others while constructing and defending your own.

Course Requirements

Readings: All reading assignments are required unless otherwise noted. We will choose groups during the first class. The calendar [below](#) indicates when each group will discuss each topic, so be sure to read everything listed in a given week before we meet. Don't expect to understand everything after the first reading. I recommend leaving enough time to re-read each article at least once. Always bring a copy of the reading to class each week as we will refer to them often during discussion. You are expected to keep current with the websites and periodicals distributed through LMS, email, and Twitter (#PrattEthics). New postings will be discussed in class.

Assignments: During the first class, we will divide everyone into four groups. Roughly the first half of each class is loosely structured as if it were a news or talk show featuring experts on the topic for the week. Each group will have one of three activities assigned to them (On Air, On Deck or In Audience). Each activity will have a number of roles that need to be played. Each role gives you different and important ways of responding to and discussing the reading for the week. It's important that you work as a team and take your role for the week seriously. Your classmates will rely on you to do so.

Posted on LMS, you will find separate handouts for each activity, the roles that groups and members will need to play, and what work is expected from you. For the most part, **you are graded as a group**. Some roles require more work than others, so I expect you to divide up the work evenly and fairly according to your talents and interests. I also include a rubric that shows how I will evaluate your group and each activity.

Note: The news or talk show format is a suggestion. If your group is feeling creative, your presentation could take other formats: Ted Talks, podcasts, scenes from a movie or play,

documentaries, reenactments, etc.). You could even record the event in advance for us to screen in class. The point is to open up our class discussion. Talk to me if you have questions.

Lectures: Each week, I will present a brief lecture after the “show”. During this lecture, I will highlight some important philosophical features of the arguments given in the reading. I may have handouts, present slides, or put notes on the board. This part of the course will be just as important as the first, especially for clarifying ideas you’ll be writing about for your exams. In fact, you may even be able to determine your own exam questions based on our discussions. The course will really depend on how much thought we all put into our roles, so if you have any questions about how to best fulfill yours, don’t hesitate to ask.

Field Trip: On Monday, April 13th, instead of meeting for class, we will attend a live, in-studio taping of the new program [Democracy Now!](#) You will need to be at the studios, located 207 W. 25th Street between 7th and 8th avenues in Manhattan by 7:30am sharp. We should be finished by 10:30am. If you foresee problems attending this session, please contact me as soon as possible for an alternative assignment.

Attendance & Participation: Since we meet only once each week, it is extremely important that you attend every session, arrive on time, and actively contribute to the class. This means you should:

- Come prepared with a copy of the readings, your notes and questions, and whatever is required to preform your role for the week.
- During class, you should take notes, raise questions, and participate in discussion in a way fitting for your role.
- Follow all course and university policies discussed below.
- Check and respond to course email frequently. Check LMS frequently for updates and your classmates’ assignments.

Class may include short writing exercises, group work involving specific sections of the text, brief quizzes, or group discussion. I will base your evaluation on how much effort you put into your roles each week, how well you can demonstrate your understanding of the text, and your ability to engage its ideas and communicate that insight to the rest of the class. Be sure to read the detailed grading rubrics for each assignment.

If you miss a class, keep in mind that we will all suffer, especially your group, since we will be missing the person playing your role for the week. None of the roles can be made up after class has taken place. You are expected to post your work on LMS before it is due, even if you are absent.

If you know you will be absent in advance, you’ll have to let your group know so that they can compensate. **If you miss class unexpectedly, you will have to contact me before the end of the day for a make-up assignment. This will be based on the activity your group was required to complete, plus an extra writing assignment due the following week.**

I do not make a distinction between kinds of absence (i.e., excused, unexcused). If you miss class, you must either contact me in advance, or before the end of the day for a make up assignment. No exceptions.

Exams: There will be an in-class midterm and final exam consisting of short answer and essay questions. A list of possible questions will be revealed one week in advance. The actual questions will be randomly selected from this list on the day of the exam.

Grading & Policies

Omitted in sample syllabus.

Calendar

date	Description	on air	on deck	in audience
1. Jan. 26	Intro, Overview, Assign Groups, Choose Topics	-none-	-none-	-none-
2. Feb. 2	Species of Ethical arguments	All groups read: Rachels-Challenge of Cultural Relativism Pojman-On Utilitarianism O'Neill-Simplified Account of Kantian Ethics Foot-Virtues and Vices File Held-Ethics of Care Be prepared to discuss them in class.		
		-none-	Group 1	-none-
3. Feb. 9	Topic 1	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
4. Feb. 16	No class: President's Day	-none-	-none-	-none-
5. Feb. 23	Topic 2	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1
6. Mar. 2	Topic 3	Debate: Group 1 & Group 2	Group 3	-none-
7. Mar. 9	Topic 4	Group 3	Group 2	-none-
8. Mar. 16	No class: spring break	-none-	-none-	-none-
9. Mar. 23	Midterm essay	-none-	-none-	-none-
10. Mar. 30	Topic 5	Group 2	Group 1	Group 3
11. Apr. 6	Topic 6	Debate: Group 2 & Group 3	Group 1	-none-
12. Apr. 13	Visit to Democracy Now!	-none-	-none-	-none-
13. Apr. 20	Topic 7	Group 1	Group 3	Group 2
14. Apr. 27	Topic 8	Group 3	Group 2	Group 1
15. May. 4	Topic 9	Debate: Group 1 & Group 3	-none-	Group 2
16. May. 11	Final essay	-none-	-none-	-none-

Topics: The order to be decided after group assignments.

- **Should a state have the authority to put convicted criminals to death?**
 - Pojman, "Wisdom of Capital Punishment"
 - Reiman, "The Folly of Capital Punishment"
 - Justice Scalia, "Callins v. Collins (Concurring)"
 - Justice Blackmun, "Callins vs. Collins (Dissenting)"
- **Should governments use remotely piloted drones to carry out military strikes?**
 - Strawser, "Moral Predators"
 - Galliot, "Uninhabited Aerial Vehicles and the Asymmetry Objection"
 - Wounds of Waziristan* (documentary on the victims of drone strikes)
 - "Karim Khan, Anti-Drone Activist Who Lost Family Members to U.S. Strike, Goes Missing in Pakistan" (Democracy Now! Interview; Tune in about 18 minutes into the interview; also check out 28 minutes in.)
- **What are our duties to the environment? Should I reduce my carbon footprint?**
 - Broom, *Climate Matters*
 - Maniates, "Plant a Tree, Ride a Bike, Save the World?"
- **Can things like racism sexism exist without racists or sexist people?**
 - Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"
 - Baily, "Privilege"
- **Should you boycott goods produced in sweatshops?**
 - Young, "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice"
 - Kristof and WuDunn, "Two Cheers for Sweatshops"
 - Kristof, "My Sweatshop Column"
 - Kristof, "Where Sweatshops Are a Dream"
- **Do we have an obligation to assist other countries that are in need?***
 - Miller, *On Nationality*
 - Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*
- **What is a just way of distributing wealth in our society?***
 - Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"
 - Nozick, "Anarchy, State, Utopia"
- **Are their moral problems with cloning and human enhancement?***
 - Anstey, "Are Attempts to have Impaired Children Justifiable?"
 - Sandel, "What's Wrong with Enhancement?"
 - Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection"
- **What makes abortion controversial?***
 - Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"
 - Warren, "Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"
 - Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

* Possible debate topics

GROUP ROLES AND ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Remember that although each person in the group takes on a role, everyone should be helping will all aspects of assignments. Except when your group is “In Audience”, you are graded collectively, not individually. That means the Host should help the Expert, Fact-Checkers should help Commentators, and vice-versa. You are encouraged (but not required) to draw from your own background, major, or interests to present the readings. Whatever you do, stay on topic and make it interesting!

On Air Roles:

When your group is “on air”, you’ll be presenting the topic to the class. You can choose the format for this presentation, but the default suggestion is to mimic a news or talk show. The show should be informative, entertaining, and present a clear position with respect to the topic. You want to give your audience a clear overview of what ethical issues are at stake and some sense of what your group thinks about the topic. If you like, you can model your show after an actual show and role-play the actual people in the show. You can certainly have fun with it; just make sure that you keep it relevant.

1. Host – The Host is responsible for leading the conversation, incorporating the points raised by other class members, and prompting the Expert to address specific questions prepared in advance. Your goal is to help keep the discussion interesting and relevant.

- a. Prepare five questions that you will ask the Expert during class. Bring a hardcopy to class for your reference.
- b. Your five questions should be based on at least five different type of the questions listed on the Socratic Questions handout (see LMS). You can also watch a few news shows to get a feel for what types of questions open up dialogue.
- c. Your goal is not to stump or quiz the Expert, but to open up discussion, foresee and ask questions that others might have about the readings, and to integrate the information offered by other class members into the discussion. Be fair, be clear, and be provocative! Don’t let the audience get bored, but don’t sacrifice intellectual rigor. (You wouldn’t want to be canceled by the network).
- d. The best questions may be selected as exam questions.

2. Expert – You are one of the invited Experts for our week’s topic. In many ways, this role will require more work than others, so be sure everyone in the group helps prepare it. Your task is to present the readings in a fair and interesting way to the class. Remember that everyone has read the same articles for the week, so your task is to take a position with respect to the ideas and defend it.

- a. Highlight the major steps of the argument: its assumptions, its conclusions, its strengths and its weaknesses. Define the key terms clearly and explain the work they do in the argument.
- b. Defend, to the best of your abilities, a position with respect to the readings. Feel free to play the devil’s advocate if you disagree with the authors. This doesn’t stop you

- from pointing out weak points, but you must offer responses to the objection they might arouse.
- c. You'll respond to questions from the Host. Remember it's not a quiz, but a discussion. However, you'll have to know your position in order to have a meaningful conversation about it.
 - d. Remember to *act like* you're an Expert! Dress the part or role play it if you think it will help.
 - e. If you have two Experts, you should each take a contrary position and have a staged debate. Of course, the debate is prepared in advance. One side should come out ahead, or, if it's a tie, the specific sticking point should be clearly defined.

3. Information Coordinator – The Host and the Experts will be having a conversation about the topic. Your job will be to help present that information in alternative forms: infographics, clips, diagrams, or samples from fine art to pop culture.

- a. Chose a medium you feel comfortable with (for example, make diagrams, handouts, charts, posters, slide presentations, paintings, movies clips, commercials, TV shows, etc.) to present the ideas to the class.
- b. You will be in the background during the show, but be sure to rehearse all your cues. Information is meant to enhance the conversation and understanding of the topic. Fumbling at the controls can distract rather than add to the presentation.
- c. Make it creative and interesting, but make sure it's relevant. You can even bring some relevant theme music for your show.
- d. Leave the journalism to the Field Reporter.

4. Field Reporter – The topics we discuss in this class all receive attention in the media today. The Report's goal is to find and report on articles, interviews, podcasts, or blog postings that pertain to the topic for the week.

- a. Find two recent news articles (published in the last two months) that discuss the issue. They must be from a reputable news source.
- b. During your presentation, the Host will ask you to give your report on these recent events. You should explain the articles to the class and then explain why it is relevant or interesting given our topic.
- c. Look for items that do a good job of discussing the same topics as the reading, but in a non-philosophical, non-technical way. News articles are good at this since their authors have to assume that the reader doesn't have much familiarity with the topic. What are the ethical concepts that are being left underdeveloped or implicit?
- d. Good reporting might help shape exam questions!

What your group hands in: The following should be posted to LMS as one document before the beginning of class on the day of your presentation. If your group was too small to have all these roles, you don't have to hand in that section. Name the file "Group [#] On Air: [Topic]" (e.g., Group 2 On Air: Sweatshops). Label each section accordingly (i.e., Talking points, Info synopsis, Reports from the field).

- a. **Contract:** Signed by all members of your group indicating each of your roles and that you all agree you divided the work evenly and fairly.

- b. **Talking points:** Post the five questions that the Host will ask and, in a few sentences, the answers that the Expert will give. It doesn't have to be the entire script, but feel free to contribute that if you like.
- c. **Information synopsis:** A paragraph summarizing the information presented by the Information Coordinator including any relevant links or references. In what sense is the information relevant? Why did you choose it? Cite your sources.
- d. **Reports from the field:** A paragraph explaining each article you found (two for each reporter in the group). Include one or two sentences summarizing the ethical issues discussed, one or two sentences comparing it to the readings, and one or two sentences on what you think the article adds to the discussion. Also include a title, author, date, and link to each of the articles.

On Deck Roles:

Your group prepares the class for the upcoming show or debate. Research the topic within the context of the current social event chosen for the semester. This will help readings from seeming too abstract or theoretical. Since some readings were written decades ago, this will also help update any details that have changed since then. You should meet with the instructor the week before you go On Deck.

1. Fact-Checker – The Fact-Checkers responds to series of prompts from the course instructor to create a list of relevant information.

- a. List 10 facts that are relevant to the topic, citing your reputable sources. Wikipedia may be a good starting point, but you should track down and read references yourself.
- b. Bring a copy of your factsheet for each class member. Walk us through the sheet and be prepared to answer questions about your sources.
- c. You may use bullet points, as long as you write clearly using complete sentences/thoughts. Note that it may take more than just a sentence to fully discuss a fact.

2. Commentator – The Commentator flags controversies or tension points within the topic that we should track in the readings.

- a. Just like the Fact-Checker's notes, yours must be written in such a way that anyone can understand them. You may write in bullet point format as long as you use complete sentences/thoughts.
- b. Write a 300-word summary of the different positions that come up with respect to the issue. You will present your findings to the class. Most often you will find these positions articulated in recent news articles about the issues.

3. Freelance Reporter – This role is exactly like the Field Reporter above. Refer to it for a discussion of the assignment.

What your group hands in: The following should be posted to LMS before the class for which you are On Deck. If your group was too small to have all these roles, you don't have to hand in

that section. Name the file "Group [#] On Deck: [Topic]" (e.g., Group 3 On Deck: Cloning). Be sure to label each section clearly (i.e., Fact-sheet, Review, Reports from Field.)

- a. **Contract:** Signed by all members of your group indicating each of your roles.
- b. **Fact-sheet:** Post ten facts for each Fact-Checker in the group.
- c. **Review:** Post 300 words for each Commentator in your group.
- d. **Reports from the field:** A paragraph explaining each article you found (two for each reporter in the group). Include one or two sentences summarizing the ethical issues discussed, one or two sentences comparing it to the readings, and one or two sentences on what you think the article adds to the discussion. Also include a title, author, date, and link to each of the articles.

In Audience Roles

Audience Member: Every show has an audience. Your job is to be the best audience member that you can be. You're not required to hand in anything.

- a. Be present. Be attentive. Be respectful.
- b. Bring a copy of the readings and your notes.
- c. Be prepared to ask questions, make comments, and contribute to the discussion in some form.
- d. Audience members are graded individually for their participation.

Group Size and Roles

Refer to this chart to determine how to divide up the roles based on your group size.

Group Size	Roles On Air	Roles On Deck	Roles In Audience
1	Expert	Fact-checker	Be present, attentive, courteous, and ask questions
2	Expert, and Host	Fact-checker and Commentator	Be present, attentive, courteous, and ask questions
3	Expert, Host, and Information Coordinator or Field Reporter	Fact-checker, Commentator, and Freelance Reporter	Be present, attentive, courteous, and ask questions
4	Expert Host, Information Coordinator, and Field Reporter	Two Fact-checkers, Commentator, and Freelance Reporter	Be present, attentive, courteous, and ask questions
5	Two experts, Host, Information Coordinator, and Field Reporter	Two Fact-checkers, two Commentators, and Freelance Reporter	Be present, attentive, courteous, and ask questions
6	Two experts, Host, Information Coordinator, and two Field Reporters	Two Fact-checkers, two Commentators, and two Freelance Reporters	Be present, attentive, courteous, and ask questions

On Air Evaluation

Task	Points possible	Points earned	Notes:
Your team was well-prepared; presentation was organized	10		
Made use of the readings; showed familiarity with their content	10		
Made clear the ethical stakes of the argument	10		
Stayed relevant and on-topic	10		
Creative and interesting	10		
All members of the team contributed	10		
All details of the assignment based on roles and groups numbers were followed	40		
TOTAL	100		

On Deck Evaluation

Task	Points possible	Points earned	Notes:
Brought hard copy of Fact-sheets for all class members	20		
Fact-sheet clearly organized and legible	10		
All members of the team contributed	10		
Team had useful feedback for our discussion during the second half of class. Articulated the tension points.	10		
Stayed relevant and on topic	10		
All details of the assignment based on roles and groups numbers were followed	40		
TOTAL	100		