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## **ETHICS 101: ETHICS & SOCIETY**

This course supports student development of Critical Thinking,  
Written & Oral Communication and Multicultural & Global Literacy  
Course Prerequisite: Placement above or successful completion of ENG 060

### **Section Information**

Spring 2015  
Section Number: 01  
Meeting Times: MW 1:30-2:45pm  
Meeting Location: HH 116  
Bedford Office: NA 212

### **Instructor Information**

Instructor: Carlos Brocatto  
E-Mail: brocattoc@middlesex.mass.edu  
Office Hours: MW 10:30am-1pm  
TR 1:30-3pm  
Phone: 323-333-3848

### **Course Materials**

Texts: Forrest E. Baird, *From Plato to Derrida* 6<sup>th</sup> ed., New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010.  
Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, New York: Verso, 2001.  
Film: *The Act of Killing* (2010)

Supplementary material will also be available on Blackboard (BB).

### **Course Overview**

An introductory study of traditional and contemporary ethical philosophies and an analysis of how they apply to the chief moral issues of our time. Students in the course explore such moral virtues as courage, compassion and generosity, as well as moral vices like greed, envy, and hypocrisy. Relevant moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and our obligation to feed the poor are discussed. *Prerequisite*: Placement above or completion of ENG 060.

In this class we will analyze and assess arguments and approaches to these questions from a variety of perspectives. *You will be required to articulate and defend a personal stance on a current ethical/moral issue while drawing on one of these perspectives.* As an introductory course in ethics we will identify and analyze moral language and value judgments, evaluate ethical theories and assertions. We will also identify the difference between ethical theory and practical ethics while noting the challenges of bridging theory and practice in everyday life. This course will challenge the student to compare and contrast different philosophical approaches to similar philosophical problems such as the nature of obligation, the nature of “the Good,” the role of the sentiments in assessing moral behavior.

### **Credit Hour Policy**

Middlesex Community College follows the Carnegie Unit for credit. Students are expected to spend a minimum of 45 hours of work for each credit. The most common breakdown for one credit is one hour of class instruction and two hours of homework for 15 weeks each semester. A three credit course demands nine hours each week.

This means that, because we spend three hours (rounded up) per regularly scheduled week in class, you are each charged with studying for six hours on a weekly basis. The credit hour policy means to communicate the lowest expectation of the engaged student. A student actively engaged with the material for this course will spend even more time than the credit hour policy indicates studying for this course. At minimum they should divide their time reserving two thirds for active reading and research. Active reading includes, but is not limited to, taking reading notes to summarize or interpret material, identifying and defining unfamiliar terms, analyzing what the material communicates while developing your own perspective. So, 1) be prepared to work hard for five hours outside of class on a weekly basis, 2) show up consistently and on time to class ready to discuss assigned material, 3) turn in all required work on time, 4) turn off or silence all electronic devices and 5) be courteous and respectful at all times. If you can do ALL five of these (and see me as soon as possible should you recognize you are having difficulties with any material) you will do well in this course. If you cannot do ALL five of these, you are hereby strongly encouraged to take some other course instead of this one.

### **Grades, Assignments, and Policies**

<i>Course Points</i>		<i>Grading Scale</i>	
Midterm Exam	20	A	90 - 100 points
Final Project	20	B	80 - 89 points
Essay	20	C	70 - 79 points
Blackboard Discussions (4)	20	D	60 - 69 points
Participation & Attendance	20	F	0 - 59 points
Possible Course Points	100		

### **Midterm Exam**

There will be one in-class midterm exam. It will consist entirely of short answer and essay questions and will cover all material worked through by the time of the exam. Comprehensive study questions are given out prior to the exam and we review extensively in class.

### **Final Project**

For your final project you will be asked to produce four Case Studies on global issues. Each one must emphasize at least one ethical orientation (e.g., virtue ethics, Kantian perspective, feminist ethics, utilitarian considerations, etc.) previously explored in the course. Each case study must at the same time relate your personal take on the issue and why you chose the ethical orientation employed. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Detailed instructions will be made available after spring break.

### **Essay**

The essay paper is to be typed, double-spaced, and up to five pages in length. Essay topics will be provided two weeks prior to the due date. The essay is a combination of exposition/summary and original analysis; it will be judged according to coherence, clarity (including grammar/spelling), accuracy, structure, argumentative strength, and originality. Detailed instructions on how to construct a philosophy essay will be

presented in class. No late work will be accepted under any circumstances.

### **Blackboard Discussions**

There will be five group conversations held on our online class discussion boards on blackboard—*worth 4 points each*. Each of you must post a response/reflection stating, and justifying your view(s) on the discussion board topic—*worth 2 points*. You must then respond to at least one post left by someone else in the group—*worth 2 points*. When responding to other posts, you may agree or disagree (politely) but your message should advance the conversation in some way providing additional specific information from course materials or related personal experiences.

Acceptable postings will (1) be clear and easy to understand by employing good English grammar—please refrain from using emoticons and text messaging abbreviation (2) incorporate supporting information from relevant course materials. (3) Remain on task and discuss the specific facts and ideas from the course text and/or related websites. Personal experience(s) can be relevant and enlightening but should be used only to supplement your well thought-out response(s). The availability of Discussion Boards is indicated on our “Course Schedule” below as “DB” followed by the topic. Please use proper “netiquette” (see blackboard for details) throughout our discussions. *You will not receive credit if your post lacks relevancy to the topic or is executed haphazardly.*

### **Participation & Attendance**

Class participation will be determined by discussion raised through careful reading of the material, and by demonstrating careful consideration and respect of various in-class positions and ideas whenever communicating your own. If quizzes (in-class or online) are assigned, they will count toward participation.

*All electronic devices are to be off during class unless otherwise instructed—no exceptions.*

You may miss up to four classes without penalty. This is meant to eliminate the need for “(un)excused absences” as you will not need to explain to anyone why you have to miss class. This means you will never be excused for absences for any reason, you are asked to simply plan ahead. Students absent for more than four classes will be ineligible for any extra credit offered. *Students will lose 5 points for absences after the fourth one (up to 20 points).*

Please be on time—*two late arrivals will count as a class absence.*

### **Extra Credit**

Students with less than five absences may be given opportunities for extra credit work. Ineligible students who turn in extra credit work will not receive any credit for said work. Any extra credit assignments will be announced in class.

### **Late Essays and Make-up Exams**

No late work or make-up exams will be accepted for this course unless there is a valid reason preapproved by the instructor. Approved late assignments are still subject to penalties.

### **Plagiarism and Cheating**

The Middlesex Community College student handbook defines plagiarism as “taking and using the ideas, writings, or data of another without clearly and fully crediting the source. Examples include: not citing another person’s actual words or replicating all or part of another’s product; using another person’s ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories without reference, even if they are completely paraphrased in one’s own words; borrowing facts, statistics, or other illustrative materials without giving credit to the source; unauthorized collaboration with others on papers or projects.” Plagiarizing or cheating on any assigned coursework will result in failure of the assignment, and possible failure of the course. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating may also be subject to further college disciplinary sanctions.

### **Blackboard Course Website**

Course documents, assignments and supplementary materials will be made available online at the course’s accompanying Blackboard website. They are indicated on the course schedule as (BB).

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:**

Students with verifiable disabilities who want to request academic accommodations are responsible for notifying their instructor and Disabled Support Services Department (DSS) as early as possible in the semester.

### **Course Schedule (subject to change if circumstances warrant).**

*All assigned readings must be completed prior to attending the corresponding class. This means that if a text and page number is indicated on a specific day, everyone who enters the class does so ready to discuss their understanding of the material indicated.*

#### **Week 1: Class Introduction, Philosophy & Ethics**

Wed., 1/21 – Class Introduction: Why Study Ethics?, Preamble

#### **Week 2: *Parrhesia* (Fearless Speech)**

Mon., 1/26 – The Pre-Socratics, Plato, Socrates and his *Apology* (21-37)

Wed., 1/28 – *Apology* (21-37); **(DB-Plato)**

#### **Week 3: The Contract & Laws**

Mon., 2/2 – Plato’s *Crito* (38-46)

Wed., 2/4 – Plato’s *Republic* (Book IV, 427c-445e)

#### **Week 4: The Contract & Laws**

Mon., 2/9 – Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (424-460)

Wed., 2/11 – Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (762-774); **(DB-Social Contract Theory)**

**Week 5: “Human Nature”**

Mon., 2/16 – **No Classes (President’s Day)**

Wed., 2/18 – Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Sections 1-5)

**Week 6: Moral Principle**

Mon., 2/23 – Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Sections 1-5)

Wed., 2/25 – Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Appendix 1)

**Week 7: Moral Duty**

Mon., 3/2 – Kant’s *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (851-894)

Wed., 3/4 – Kant’s *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (851-894); **(DB-Kant)**

**Week 8: Midterm**

Mon., 3/9 – Kant’s *On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives* (894-897),  
Midterm (Course) Review; **Essay Due**

Wed., 3/11 – **Midterm**

**Spring Break (No Classes 3/16 through 3/20)**

**NOTE: You are hereby advised to read Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” and all of Badiou’s *Ethics: On the Understanding of Evil* over the break—twenty percent of your course grade depends on your understanding of this text! The Final Project Will be assigned Week 9 when we return from spring break**

**Week 9: Virtue & Happiness**

Mon., 3/23 – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books I-II)

Wed., 3/25 – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book X: 6-8)

**Week 10: Happiness & The (Greatest) Good**

Mon., 3/30 – Epicurus’ *Letter to Menoeceus & Leading Doctrines* (230-238),  
Mill’s *Utilitarianism* (920-961)

Wed., 4/1 – Mill’s *Utilitarianism* (920-961); **Final Project Assignment**

**Week 11: Social Responsibility**

Mon., 4/6 – Singer’s “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (BB),  
Arthur’s “Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code” (BB)

Wed., 4/8 – Film: *The Act of Killing* (2012); **(DB-Happiness & Utility)**

**Week 12: Being Towards Death**

Mon., 4/13 – Plato’s *Phaedo* (114e-118b), Hume’s “On Suicide” (BB),  
Foot’s “Killing and Letting Die” (BB)

Wed., 4/15 – **No Classes (“Professional’s Day”)**

**Week 13: Berlin’s Concepts of Liberty**

Mon., 4/20 – **No Classes (Patriot’s Day)**

Wed., 4/22 – Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” (BB)

**Week 14: Taylor’s Liberty & Badiou’s Ethics**

Mon., 4/27 – Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” (BB), Badiou’s *Ethics* (1-91)

Wed., 4/29 – Badiou’s *Ethics* (1-91), **Project Work, (DB-Global Issues)**

**Week 15: Badiou’s Ethics**

Mon., 5/4 – Badiou’s *Ethics* (1-91)

Wed., 5/6 – Badiou’s *Ethics* (1-91), **Project Work**

**Week 16: Final Project Presentations**

Mon., 5/11 – 3:30pm – 5:30pm