

IBH 1BC3: FUNDAMENTALS OF ETHICS
Term 1 (Fall) 2020-21

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and explain a range of positions on the nature and status of ethics, on what makes a life go well, and on the basis and scope of our ethical obligations to others.
 - Articulate and defend, both orally and in writing, their own positions on the merits and flaws of different ethical theories and on selected contemporary ethical problems.
 - Constructively and respectfully discuss ethical issues with their peers.
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INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Mark Johnstone

E-mail: mjohnst@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: Mondays 10:30-11:20am (via Zoom, just for this class), or by appointment

Teaching Assistant: TBC (@mcmaster.ca)

TA Office Hours: TBC

Course website: <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/>

COURSE ELEMENTS

Credit Value:	3	Leadership:	Yes	IT skills:	No	Global view:	Yes
A2L:	Yes	Ethics:	Yes	Numeracy:	No	Written skills:	Yes
Participation:	Yes	Innovation:	No	Group work:	Yes	Oral skills:	Yes
Evidence-based:	Somewhat	Experiential:	No	Final Exam:	Yes	Guest speaker:	No

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a general introduction to ethical theory and to thinking systematically about ethical problems. In the first part of the course, we will consider such questions as: Is all morality relative to culture? What is the relationship between morality and self-interest? Or between morality and religion? In the second part of the course, we will consider what kinds of things contribute to or detract from living a good life. For example, does everything that is good for us reduce to what makes us feel good, or to getting what we want? In the third part of the course, we will examine some of history's most influential normative ethical theories – that is, theories that aim to provide us with systematic guidance about how we should act and live from an ethical point of view. These theories include utilitarianism, Kantianism, social contract theory, virtue ethics, and care ethics. In the fourth and final part of the course, we will consider a small selection of contemporary ethical issues.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, you will be broadly familiar with many of the main issues, theories, and lines of argument in contemporary ethical theory. You should also have developed your ability to:

- Think deeply and reflectively about complex ethical issues
 - Read and understand complex and challenging texts
 - Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments
 - Appreciate unfamiliar ideas and points of view
 - Engage constructively with those with whom you disagree
 - Express yourself clearly in debate and discussion
 - Write clearly, concisely, and effectively in support of your claims
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BASIC COURSE FORMAT

This course is divided into one-week units. In the first half of each week (Monday to Wednesday), you will be asked to complete the assigned readings, and, in conjunction with them, to watch some short videos prepared by me. A short quiz (ten questions, multi-choice) should be completed by the end of each Wednesday evening. In the second half of each week, you will be invited to discuss the readings and the ideas they contain. Discussion will take place in two formats. First, you will be asked to contribute to asynchronous discussions with your classmates on discussion boards on Avenue. These discussions will be organized in small groups (max. ten students in each group), will be moderated by an instructor, and will extend through to each Sunday evening. Second, each Thursday morning (10:30–11:20am) you will be invited to participate in a live, discussion-focused class on Zoom. These meetings will utilize “breakout rooms” to enable discussion in small groups. Further details will be provided on Avenue (further information is also found below).

COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

There is one required book for this course:

- Daniel DeNicola, *Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (Broadview Press, 2018).

This is available in both digital and print formats, as you prefer. Both formats are available for purchase through the campus store by following this [link](#). Note that print format books may be collected on campus or delivered to you (there is free delivery for textbook orders totaling over \$75).

Please do purchase this book: it is modestly priced, and we will use it extensively. Additional readings and resources will be placed on Avenue.

Course Website: I will be using a website on Avenue to Learn (<http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/>) as the main “hub” for this course. In addition to this outline, you will find there: regular announcements about what is happening in the course, lecture videos (and associated slides), supplementary readings, links to additional resources, and information and advice about assessment. Weekly discussions will take place on discussion boards on Avenue, and you will submit your written assignments there.

EVALUATION

1. Essays (50%: 24% + 25% + 1% for submitting a draft introduction/outline for essay 1)

You will be asked to write two short essays for this course. These will be argumentative essays: you will be asked to take and defend a position on the essay's topic and will be graded on how well you make your case. The purpose of the essays is to provide you with an opportunity to engage in depth with the issues and theories covered in class and to formulate and articulate your own ideas about them, while developing your skills in critical thinking and persuasive writing. Further information about the essays, and a description of the criteria for assessment, will be provided on Avenue.

- Essay One: max. 1200 words, due at 11:59pm on Saturday, October 24 (24% + 1%)
- Essay Two: max. 1500 words, due at 11:59pm on Saturday, November 28 (25%)

In addition to the essays, you will be asked to submit a draft introduction (one paragraph) and outline (bullet points) for your first essay. About a page in total is fine. This draft outline and introduction is **due by 11:59pm on Saturday, October 10**: two weeks before the essay due date. It should be submitted through Avenue. Completion is worth 1% of your final grade.

2. Take-Home Final Examination (30%)

The final exam will follow a “take-home” open-book format. It will be in two equally weighted parts: short answer questions based closely on the required readings and spanning the whole course, plus a single essay on one of the ethical problems covered in the final three weeks of the course (you will have a choice of topics). Further information about the exam will be provided closer to the time.

3. Contributions to Discussion Boards (16%)

Each week you will be asked to contribute to an online discussion of the assigned readings and of the issues they raise. These discussions will take place in small groups (max. ten students in each) on discussion boards on Avenue and will be moderated by me or the TA. The normal expectation is that you will make at least one original post and comment on at least two other students' posts each week. Your total contributions to each week's discussion will be assigned a single grade on a scale of 1-5, with 4/5 set as the default grade for satisfactory participation and 5/5 reserved for excellent work (a rubric will be provided). Your best 8 scores (out of 11 discussions) will count towards your final grade. Further information about the discussions and my expectations for them will be provided on Avenue.

4. Short Quizzes on the Readings (4%)

There will be weekly low-stakes online quizzes, designed to test your basic comprehension of the assigned readings. These are to be completed on Avenue by 11:59pm each Wednesday evening. Your best 8 scores on these quizzes (out of 11 weekly quizzes in total) will count towards your final grade.

5. Attendance and Participation at Thursday Classes (encouraged, not assessed)

We warmly encourage attendance and participation at the Thursday morning classes: the only synchronous (live) component of this course. These classes will take place from 10:30–11:20am each Thursday on Zoom (see the schedule below). Since not every student has equally good and reliable internet access, no assessment will be tied to your attendance and participation at these meetings. However, we will keep track of attendance (this can be done automatically on Zoom), and will be in touch with anyone who misses several meetings to check what barriers to attendance and participation there may be. If you are unable to attend classes on Zoom, for whatever reason, you will not be penalized in terms of assessment – but please do let me know at the start of the term.

Summary and Overview of Assessment:

Grade Component	Weight	Description
Outline for Essay 1	1%	About one page. Due 11:59pm on Saturday, October 10. Submitted via Avenue
Essay 1	24%	Max. 1200 words. Due 11:59pm on Saturday, October 24. Submitted via Avenue.
Essay 2	25%	Max. 1500 words. Due 11:59pm on Saturday, November 28. Submitted via Avenue.
Take-Home Final Exam	30%	Part A is cumulative, Part B is focused on work from the final three full weeks of classes. Submitted via Avenue. See above.
Contributions to Discussion Boards	16%	Contributions to weekly discussions on Avenue. Rubric to be provided. Best 8 weeks count for 2% each. See above.
Short Quizzes	4%	Quizzes to check basic comprehension of the weekly readings. Best 8 scores count for 0.5% each. See above.
Attendance and Participation	0%	Encouraged but not assessed. See above.

Summary and Overview of Tasks:

Activity	Delivery	Description	Tool
Readings	Asynchronous	Tied to weekly discussion prompts	Readings from course text or on Avenue
Lecture content	Asynchronous	Short, instructor-recorded videos tied to weekly readings	On MacVideo, links posted on Avenue
Quizzes	Asynchronous	Short, low-stakes weekly quizzes testing basic comprehension of readings	Avenue
Group discussions	Asynchronous	Weekly asynchronous discussions in small groups (max. ten students)	Discussion boards on Avenue
Lecture/discussion	Synchronous	1-hour live session: opportunity to elaborate on content, field questions, discuss theories and issues	Zoom, using breakout rooms. Links supplied on Avenue.

Instructions for Submitting Written Assignments

- You will be asked to submit both of your essays and also the final exam electronically, using the “Assignments” tool on Avenue. Folders will be set up there with labels and instructions.
- **Your essays** should include your student number and discussion group number, but *not* your name (this is to facilitate anonymous grading). They should use 12-point font and be double-spaced, with regular (1 inch) margins. Please number your pages and include an accurate word count (excluding your bibliography). Please identify the questions you are answering.
- **Your exam** should include your student number and discussion group number, but *not* your name (this is to facilitate anonymous grading). It should use 12-point font and be double-spaced, with regular (1 inch) margins. Please include an accurate word count for each response (word limits to be provided). Please identify the question you are answering in each part of the exam.
- Please submit all files in one of only two formats: MS Word or pdf. Word format is slightly preferred, since this makes commenting on your work a bit easier, but pdf is also fine.
- Assignments submitted on Avenue may be checked automatically by Turnitin.com to reveal plagiarism. If this check occurs, it will be added to the Turnitin database. If you do not wish to have your work added to the Turnitin database, please send it to your instructor as an e-mail attachment instead. No penalty will be assigned if you submit your work this way. To see the university’s Turnitin.com policy, click [here](#).

Policies on Late Work, Extensions and Accommodations

- **Late essays** will be penalized at the rate of 4% for the first day or part day late, then 2% for each subsequent day or part day (this includes weekend days), up to a maximum total penalty of -10% for essays up to one week late. Essays more than one week late will not be accepted, except where there are appropriately documented compassionate or medical grounds or with special prior permission from me (please don’t hesitate to ask!).
- I understand that students are sometimes unable to complete a piece of assessment on time (or at all) for **legitimate medical or personal/compassionate reasons**. If you find yourself in such a situation, please contact your TA or me (whoever is grading the essay in question) as soon as possible to let us know. Once we have been made aware of the situation, we can grant an extension or take other steps to ensure you are not unduly penalized for the late or missed work. Supporting medical documentation, if required, may have to be provided to your home faculty or program office. It should not be given directly to me or your TA. The office in question will contact me in due course, to let me know this documentation has been received.
- Please make all requests for **extensions** before the essay’s due date. You should make your request by email (so there is a written record) and explain your reasons.
 - If you suffer a minor illness during the term and need a short extension (up to three days), please simply contact me or your TA to explain the situation and to request one. We will be generous with short extensions for this course. Note that if you need longer than three days, documentation may be required. You may use a **McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)** for assessment worth less than 25% of your grade (technically, that includes essay 1). However, feel free just to email one of us for a little extra time if that’s easier for you.
- Students registered with **Student Accessibility Services (SAS)** are welcome to contact me early in the semester to discuss accommodations. I would be happy to meet with you (over Zoom), or to correspond with you via email, as you prefer.

COURSE SCHEDULE

	Week Begins	Topic and Required Reading¹	Assessment
Week 1	Tue. Sept. 8	Introduction to the course	
Week 2	Mon. Sept. 14	Part 1: Foundational Questions Morality and Religion (D: Ch. 2) Cultural Relativism (D: Ch. 3)	Discussion 1
Week 3	Mon. Sept. 21	Morality and Self-Interest (D: Ch. 5)	Discussion 2
Week 4	Mon. Sept. 28	Part 2: Value and the Good Life Pleasure and Pain (Fletcher*, Nozick*) Getting What You Want (Heathwood*)	Discussion 3
Week 5	Mon. Oct. 5	Flourishing (Kraut*) Achievement (Bradford and Keller*)	Discussion 4. Draft outline for Essay 1 due Sat. Oct. 10.
		--- Mid-Term Break ---	
Week 6	Mon Oct. 19	Part 3: Normative Ethical Theories Utilitarianism (D: Ch. 6, Mill*)	Discussion 5. Essay 1 due 11:59pm on Sat. October 24.
Week 7	Mon. Oct. 26	Kantianism (D: Ch 7, Kant*)	Discussion 6
Week 8	Mon. Nov. 2	Virtue Ethics (D: Ch. 9, Aristotle*)	Discussion 7
Week 9	Mon. Nov. 9	Social Contract Theory (D: Ch. 8, Hobbes*) Feminist Ethics and Care Ethics (D. Ch. 11)	Discussion 8
Week 10	Mon. Nov. 16	Part 4: Ethical Problems² 1. Topic 1 (TBC)	Discussion 9
Week 11	Mon. Nov. 23	2. Topic 2 (TBC)	Discussion 10. Essay 2 due 11:59pm on Sat. November 28.
Week 12	Mon. Nov. 30	3. Topic 3 (TBC)	Discussion 11
Week 13	Mon. Dec. 7	Last class: Conclusion and review: Zoom: Monday, Dec 7, 10:30-11:20am	
	<i>exams</i>	Take-home final exam	Exam (due 11:59pm Tuesday, Dec. 15).

¹ D = Daniel DeNicola: *Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (the course text). Items marked with an asterisk (*) are provided on Avenue. Optional additional readings on each topic are also provided there.

² Topics for the “ethical problems” part of the course will be chosen from a list of options. Students will have the opportunity to vote for their preferred topics during the first week of classes.

Useful Links:

- [Student Accessibility Services](#)
- The [Student Wellness Centre](#)
- The [Student Success Center](#)

Additional Official Policies:

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Students who wish to correspond with instructors or TAs directly via email must send messages that originate from their official McMaster University email account. This protects the confidentiality and sensitivity of information as well as confirms the identity of the student. Emails regarding course issues should NOT be sent to the Area Administrative Assistants. All students must receive feedback regarding their progress prior to the final date by which a student may cancel the course without failure by default.

- *For Level 1 and Level 2 courses, this feedback must equal a minimum of 20% of the final grade.*
- *For Level 3 courses and above, this feedback must equal a minimum of 10% of the final grade.*

Instructors may solicit feedback via an informal course review with students by Week #4 to allow time for modifications in curriculum delivery.

REQUESTING RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC WORK

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work” and the link below;

<http://ug.degrootemcmaster.ca/forms-and-resources/missed-course-work-policy/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY/PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course.

The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation **or** to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

RESEARCH USING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All researchers conducting research that involves human participants, their records or their biological material are required to receive approval from one of McMaster's Research Ethics Boards before (a) they can recruit participants and (b) collect or access their data. Failure to comply with relevant policies is a research misconduct matter. Contact these boards for further information about your requirements and the application process.

McMaster Research Ethics Board (General board): <https://reo.mcmaster.ca/>

Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (Medical board): <http://www.hireb.ca/>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your enrolment in IBH 1BC3 will be considered to be an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies outlined above, or of any other that may be announced during lecture and/or on A2L. **It is your responsibility to read this course outline, to familiarize yourself with the course policies and to act accordingly.**

Lack of awareness of the course policies **cannot be invoked** at any point during this course for failure to meet them. It is your responsibility to ask for clarification on any policies that you do not understand.