

IBH 1BC3 – Fundamentals of Ethics

Term 1 (Fall) 2023-2024

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students should possess a basic familiarity with different ethical frameworks and their implications for contemporary ethical issues. Students will have developed an ability to:

1. Demonstrate their knowledge of ethical theories and frameworks;
 2. Explain how theory can help to understand complex ethical problems;
 3. Build connections between course content and current events and debates;
 4. Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments;
 5. Cultivate critical and thoughtful engagement practices (such as close reading, critical thinking, and communication skills) within and beyond the classroom;
 6. Develop individual and collaborative communication skills to produce scholarly projects.
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INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Kerry O’Neill

Email: oneillke@mcmaster.ca oneillke [at] mcmaster [dot] ca

Office Hours and Location: TBC

Teaching Assistant: TBC

TA Office Hours & Email: TBC

Course Website: <https://avenue.mcmaster.ca/>

MacPherson Institute Contact: Devon Mordell mordelld@mcmaster.ca (for ePortfolio help)

COURSE ELEMENTS

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a general introduction to ethical theory as well as issues in applied ethics. In the first half of the course, students will become familiar with ethical theory and

will then deploy that knowledge when examining ethical issues during the second half of the course. Questions to be considered include: What is the purpose of ethics? Is morality relative to culture or tied to religion? We will examine some of the most popular and influential ethical frameworks before turning to a discussion on contemporary ethical issues and case studies.

BASIC COURSE FORMAT

This course meets twice a week for lectures and discussions (Tuesdays 9:30-10:20 and Thursdays 8:30-10:20). The first 8 weeks of class will involve a mixture of lecture and discussion facilitated by the instructor.

Beginning in **Week 9**, Tuesday classes will consist of case study discussions and beginning in **Week 10** Thursday classes will be led by two small groups of students who will introduce and organize the discussion on the assigned reading(s). As discussed below, each group will be responsible for roughly 45 minutes of class on Thursdays. Students will choose their groups early in the semester and sign up for a presentation date.

Students are expected to attend class having done the assigned readings and prepared to discuss course materials. Class participation is not improv – you need to prepare for our discussions. Please do the readings and jot down ideas or questions for further discussion. Expect to be called on and be prepared to participate and contribute.

COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

There is one required textbook for this course:

Daniel R. DeNicola. *Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2019).

This book is available for purchase through the [Campus Store](#) or can be purchased directly from [Broadview Press](#). To succeed in this course, you will need to purchase this book as it will be used extensively. All additional readings and case studies will be posted on our course website.

Course Website: This course will be on Avenue to Learn (<https://avenue.mcmaster.ca/>). The Avenue to Learn course page will act as the main hub for all course information. Along with the course syllabus, all other materials and resources used in this course will be placed on the Avenue page. It is there that you will find writing advice, citation guidelines, supplemental readings, assignment instructions, discussion boards, and course announcements. You will also submit all written assignments through Avenue. Please check our Avenue page on a regular basis to ensure you are up-to-date in course material.

EVALUATION

This course uses a non-standard grading methodology.

Students with accommodations are encouraged to speak with the instructor at the start of term.

In this class, you will use a learning portfolio as a complement to Avenue to facilitate the process of knowledge integration and reflection. Your portfolio will be the forum in which you develop and present all your course material and, in doing so, it will provide you an opportunity to showcase the kinds of learning and professional skills you have developed.

For this course, you will be expected to complete numerous small assignments and produce regular portfolio journal entries in addition to a group presentation assignment. What the learning portfolio adds is that it allows you the opportunity to consolidate your workload into a coherent package making it both easier to draw connections between various classroom activities and to manage a busy workload. It gives you the tools to submit work using a variety of media so you can document your learning experience in a thoroughly professional manner.

Each learner will maintain their own portfolio. There will be regularly scheduled check-in points when your portfolio will be reviewed and assessed (see schedule below). Time will be allocated during the first week of class for you to familiarize yourself with the use of the ePortfolio platform. Additional student support resources are available through the MacPherson Institute and Devon Mordell (Educational Developer at MacPherson Institute).

Specifications Grading

Unlike other courses you take this term – and likely, most other classrooms you’ve been in – this course will NOT assign grades in the traditional mode, where you are given a number or letter grade based on the assessed quality of the work you submit. Rather, you will be evaluated on the amount of work you do in the class (based on the number of tasks you complete), including, assignment submissions and presentations. This approach is called “specifications grading” (“specs”). This method aims to meet you where you are and encourage you to set and achieve your own learning goals.

All of your assignments are graded against a specific set of specifications as either “Satisfactory” (SAT) or “Unsatisfactory (UNS). There are no points or percentages allocated to any individual piece of work. Your assignment either meets specifications (SAT) or it does not (UNS). Specifications for each assignment are provided on Avenue.

For many of the course assignments, you have flexibility in the number you choose to complete and when you complete them. Some assignments allow you the opportunity to revise and resubmit work deemed unsatisfactory.

Your final grade for the term is based upon your satisfactory completion of a bundle of assignments as follows (shading indicates additions to previous level):

BASIC GRADE REQUIREMENTS

C- Basic Grade

Introductory portfolio profile
3 Reading Responses
Term Video Assignment
Group Presentation
3 Satisfactory Portfolio Check-ins and Learning Journals

B- Basic Grade

Introductory portfolio profile
4 Reading Responses
Term Video Assignment
Group Presentation
Presentation Reflection and Group/Self Critique
1 Case Study Commentary
3 Satisfactory Portfolio Check-ins and Learning Journals

A- Basic Grade

Introductory portfolio profile
6 Reading Responses
Term Assignment
Group Presentation
Presentation Reflection and Group/Self Critique
2 Case Study Commentaries
Final Reflection
3 Satisfactory Portfolio Check-ins and Learning Journals

Final grades are computed from Basic Grades plus/minus your token balance at the end of term.

You earn tokens by:

- Demonstrating a high degree of diligence in the completion of an assignment by producing work of exceptional quality or insight (1 token)
- Completing extra assignments (1 token)
- Making contributions to the class discussions which, in the instructor's view, exceed expectations (1 token)
- Checking in your portfolio at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline (2 tokens)

A token can be exchanged for any of the following:

- A one-day extension of the deadline for some assignments (1 token per day)
- A re-do of an eligible assignment marked UNS (1 token)

You lose tokens for:

- Careless errors (broken links; failure to proofread etc.) in otherwise SAT assignments (1 token)
- Arriving late to class or leaving early (1 token)

- Non-excused absences during group presentations (1 tokens)
- Engaging in non-collegial behaviours including, but not limited to, dominating discussions; hostile behaviours; overt rudeness; bored body language; speaking over others; ideas presented demonstrate you have not done the assigned readings or preparation for class (2 tokens).

You can overdraw tokens (i.e., spend tokens you do not have), but this will factor into the calculation of your final grade.

*If you see this note, email me before the start of our first class to claim a one token credit.

Calculation of Final Grade

Your final grade is calculated from the basic grade you achieve plus your term-end token balance according to the chart below:

| Basic Grade | Token Balance | Final Grade |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| C- | <2 | C- |
| | 2 - 5 | C |
| | 6 - 8 | C+ |
| | 9+ | B- |
| B- | >4 | B- |
| | 4 - 6 | B |
| | 7 - 11 | B+ |
| | 12+ | A- |
| A- | <6 | A- |
| | 6 - 13 | A |
| | 14+ | A+ |

A failure to satisfactorily complete all the required assignments for a C- base grade will result in a grade of D. D grade standing with a negative term-end balance of tokens will result in a grade of F.

Assignments

** Detailed instructions for all assignments, including specifications, are posted to Avenue.

** Students with accommodations are encouraged to speak with the instructor at the start of term.

Portfolio Check-In

There will be three Portfolio reviews throughout the term. The expected content to be added at each check-in varies according to the Base Grade you are pursuing:

| CI | DATE | Reading Response | | | Case Study Commentary | | | Other Entries |
|----|--------------|------------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---|
| | | A- | B- | C- | A- | B- | C- | |
| 1 | Oct. 6 | 4 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | Introductory portfolio profile; Learning Journal |
| 2 | Nov. 10 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | Group Presentation (as assigned); Group/Self Critique (if pursuing a B- or A- grade); Term Assignment; Learning Journal |
| 3 | Dec. 6 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | Group Presentation (as assigned); Group/Self Critique (if pursuing a B- or A- grade); Final Reflection (if pursuing an A-grade); Learning Journal |
| | TOTAL | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | |

As a component of each check-in, all learners are required to make a Learning Journal Entry. A series of questions to be answered will be posted on Avenue.

You are encouraged to make regular entries in your portfolio to highlight specific learnings or points of interests from our discussions. In all cases, including relevant references to or artifacts from other courses, media, or current events is highly encouraged.

Extensions are allowed in exchange for tokens. You do not need to ask for an extension. Submissions received after the check-in will automatically have the tokens deducted. Learners who submit their portfolio for check-in at least 48 hours before the assigned due date will receive a two token bonus.

Reading Responses

Uploaded to your ePortfolio by 11:59 pm on Mondays of the assigned week

Depending on the base grade you wish to pursue you will have to complete a minimum of 3 Reading Reflections. Reading Response Prompts are provided for each assigned reading for Weeks 2-8. Your response should be no more than 2 pages in length (double-spaced)

NOTE: Reading Responses **are** eligible for re-submission. No extensions are allowed.

Term Video Assignment

Seminar members will complete a term assignment in a video format. In your 3-minute video, you will explain and apply one of the ethical theories discussed in class. Instructions will be posted to Avenue shortly. This assignment must be submitted with your second portfolio check-in (November 10, 2023).

NOTE: Term Assignments are eligible for extension and re-submission.

Group Presentation

As assigned

Beginning in Week 10, our Thursday classes will be led by two small groups of students. Each group will design and lead a 45-minute presentation on an assigned ethical issue.

Presentation Reflection and Group/Self-Critique

No more than 500 words posted to your portfolio learning journal no more than 3 days after your presentation.

Seminar members pursuing an A- or B- base grades are required to produce a reflective critique of both their group presentation as a whole and their individual contribution to the preparation and delivery of the presentation. A series of questions to be addressed in the reflection exercise and assessment specifications will be posted to Avenue. The group assessment portion of this exercise may be completed either individually or together with your group.

NOTE: Presentation reflections are eligible for extensions and re-submission.

Case Study Commentaries

Uploaded to ePortfolio at Check-ins 2 and 3 (if pursuing B- or A- base grade)

Students pursuing a B- or A-base grade are required to produce at least one case study commentary. Beginning in Week 9, Tuesdays will be spent discussing assigned case studies. Students will be required to choose a case study to comment on for this assignment.

Each Case Study Commentary should be no more than 3 pages in length (12 pt. font, double-spaced, regular margins). In each assignment, you will briefly present the key details of the case study AND the ethical issues it raises before offering your own critical analysis.

NOTE: Case study Commentaries are eligible for extension and resubmission.

Final Reflection

Submitted to ePortfolio by Check in 3 (Dec. 6, 2023)

This assignment is optional. It is only required if you are seeking an A-range grade. Consequently, the expectation for a SAT is very high – an A grade assignment or better. You will be provided a question prompt to answer. See detailed instructions posted to Avenue.

NOTE: The Final Reflection is eligible for extension but **not** resubmission.

EMAIL POLICY

Any questions received over email may take me up to 2 days to respond, but usually less. If you do not receive a response in 2 days, please send your question again. When writing to me, please use the course title as the subject line and use your full name to identify yourself. According to McMaster policy, you must use your McMaster email address for these communications.

TURNITIN

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity

GENERATIVE AI: USE PROHIBITED

Students are not permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with McMaster academic integrity policy, it “shall be an offence knowingly to ... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source”. This includes work created by generative AI tools. Also state in the policy is the following, “Contract Cheating is the act of “outsourcing of student work to third parties” (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment.” Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

In our structured and unstructured discussions and dialogues, we will have many opportunities to explore some challenging, high-stakes issues and increase our understanding of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy; we will sometimes make mistakes in our speaking and our listening; sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. Always we will need respect for others.

All students are expected to help create an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning for **all** participants. Behaviour that disrupts teaching and learning is unacceptable; accordingly, all face-to-face or online interaction should be civilized, respectful, and relevant to the topic. Diverse opinions and engaging argumentation are critical to the higher learning endeavour, but inappropriate behaviour that disrespects others (e.g., instructor, TA, classmates etc.) or inhibits learning will result in sanctions, including but not limited to removal from the classroom and/or the course.

Inappropriate behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Disrespecting others (e.g., personal attacks, offensive/demeaning comments of any kind, snide remarks, disrespectful facial expressions, eye-rolling, frequent swearing etc.)

- Loud and/or frequent side conversations
- Dominating classroom discussions
- Frequently interrupting others
- Aggressively challenging others (e.g., yelling, cursing, or engaging in otherwise aggressive behaviours)
- Appearing under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Sending multiple emails with one sentence; emails in all capital letters or that use name-calling, profanity, snide remarks, or rants.

Serious or habitual offenses will result in referral to the Chair/Director, the Associate Vice-President (Students and Learning) and Dean of Students, Student Affairs, Security Services, and/or Student Wellness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your enrollment in IBH 1BC3 will be considered an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies above or of policies announcement during lecture and/or on Avenue. 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

| Week | Class Dates | Topic and Required Reading |
|-------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 | September 5 & 7 | Course Introduction and Syllabus Overview |
| 2 | September 12 September 14 | <u>Introduction to Ethics</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 1 <u>Morality and Religion</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 2 |
| 3 | September 19 September 21 | <u>Relativism</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 3 <u>Egoism</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 5 |
| 4 | September 26 & 28 | <u>Utilitarianism</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 6 |
| 5 | October 3 & 5 | <u>Kantianism</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 7 |
| 6 | October 10 & 12 | READING WEEK |
| 7 | October 17 & 19 | <u>Social Contract Theory</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 8 |
| 8 | October 24 October 26 | <u>Virtue Ethics</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 9 <u>Feminist Ethics</u> DeNicola 2019 – Ch. 11 |
| 9 | October 31 November 2 | Case Study: Should Canada Abolish the Monarchy? TBC |
| 10 | November 7 November 9 | Case Study: Do We Need Billionaires? Student Presentations (Poverty; Universal Basic Income) |
| 11 | November 14 November 16 | Case Study: Prenatal Testing & Screening Student Presentations (Reproductive Ethics x2) |
| 12 | November 21 | Case Study: Food Distribution and Global Health |

| | | |
|----|----------------------------|---|
| | November 23 | Student Presentations (Gene Editing; Climate Change) |
| 13 | November 28 November 30 | Case Study: Ownership, Authenticity, and the End of Art Student Presentations (Organ Sales; Plasma Sales) |
| 14 | December 5 | Case Study: How Should We Cover Crime? |

**See Group Presentation Sign-Up Sheet and Avenue for week 10-13 readings*