

IBH 1BC3 – Fundamentals of Ethics

Fall 2024

Wednesdays 11:30-12:20 & Fridays 10:30-12:20

Room TBC

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 in order to make reasoned arguments and engage in productive discussions;
 5. Cultivate critical and thoughtful engagement practices (such as close reading, critical thinking, and communication skills) within and beyond the classroom;
 6. Develop an ability to reflect on their learning and what it means to be an ethical leader.
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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: Tuesdays 12:30 – 1:20pm

Teaching Assistant: TBC

TA Office Hours & Email: TBC

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

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:	Yes

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a general introduction to ethical theory as well as issues in applied ethics. The course is divided into two parts (a) introduction to ethical and moral theory, and (b) ethical issues and debates. In the first part of the course, students will become familiar with ethical theory. Questions to be considered include: What is the purpose of ethics? Is morality grounded in culture or religion? How can we determine right from wrong?

In the second part of the course, students will deploy their knowledge of ethical theories to examine a number of contemporary topics in applied ethics. Questions to be considered may include: When, if at all, is it morally permissible to commodify our bodies? Who, if anyone is morally obligated to respond to global poverty and climate change?

BASIC COURSE FORMAT

This course meets twice a week for seminar-style lectures and discussions (Wednesdays 11:30-12:20 & Fridays 10:30-12:20). Our meetings will involve a mix of lecture, groupwork, and discussions. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials. You should come to class with any questions and/or concerns you have about the readings. Our classes will not be recorded or provided in hybrid format. Our classroom location will be posted on Avenue in advance of our first class.

COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

There is no textbook assigned for this course. All readings will be available through 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 course, 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 your course materials and, in doing so, will provide you an

opportunity to showcase the kinds of learning and professional skills you have developed. You are encouraged to use whatever platform you prefer when designing your ePortfolio to display your learnings (e.g., ePortfolio in Avenue; an external website etc.).

For this course, rather than grinding through the conventional midterm/final/essay format, you will be expected to complete numerous small assignments and produce regular portfolio journal entries in addition to a group presentation-like assignment. The learning portfolio allows you the opportunity to consolidate your workload into a coherent package making it both easier to draw connections between various course 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 professional manner.

Each student will maintain their own portfolio. There will be regularly scheduled check-in points when your portfolio will be reviewed and assessed (see schedule below). Additional student support resources for Avenue's ePortfolio are available through the 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/letter grade based on the assessed quality of work you submit. Instead, **YOU** determine your grade for this course by fulfilling the bundle of assignments correlated to the base-grade you wish to achieve. This method aims to meet you where you are at in your learning and encourage you to set and achieve your own learning goals. The advantage of specifications grading or "specs grading" is that you, the student, decide how much work you wish to do this term. If you complete your work on time and satisfactorily, you will receive the base grade you are pursuing.

This means planning ahead, thinking about all your obligations and responsibilities this term, and also determining what grade you want or need in this course. I respect the student who only needs a C-, who has other obligations that preclude doing all the requirements to earn an A in the course, and who successfully completes the work needed to earn the C- grade. *This is a major life skill: taking responsibility for one's own project management and workflow.*

All of your assignments are graded against a specific set of specifications as either "Satisfactory" (SAT) or "Needs Improvement" (NI). There are no points or percentages allocated to any individual item of work. Specifications for each assignment are provided on Avenue.

For many of the course assignments, you have flexibility in how many you choose to complete and when you complete them. Some assignments allow you the opportunity to revise and resubmit work deemed in need of improvement. Remember, learning is not about being perfect and never making mistakes. The best learning happens when we are able to understand our mistakes and act on them. Revising one's work is a key part of learning and improving.

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

BASIC GRADE REQUIREMENTS

C-

Introductory portfolio profile
4 Satisfactory Portfolio Check-Ins and Learning Journals
4 Reading Responses
Midterm Assignment

B-

Introductory portfolio profile
4 Satisfactory Portfolio Check-Ins and Learning Journals
6 Reading Responses
Midterm Assignment

A-

Introductory portfolio profile
4 Satisfactory Portfolio Check-Ins and Learning Journals
8 Reading Responses
Midterm Assignment
Essay Proposal
Satisfactory Final Paper

Tokens

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 additional work or extended portfolio content (1 token)
- Checking in your portfolio at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline (2 tokens)
- Attending writing/academic skills workshops/appointments for coursework at the [Student Success Centre](#) (1 token per visit)

A token can be exchanged for any of the following:

- A one-day extension of the deadline for some assignments (1 token)
- A re-do of an eligible assignment assessed as Needs Improvement (1 token)
 - Not all assignments are eligible for resubmission. To resubmit an eligible assignment, you must have made a good faith attempt to complete the assignment as instructed.

You lose tokens for:

- Careless errors (e.g., broken links; failure to proofread etc.) in otherwise SAT assignments (1 token)
- Engaging in non-collegial behaviours including, but not limited to, dominating discussion; hostile behaviours; overt rudeness; bored body language; speaking over others; ideas presented demonstrate you have not done the assigned readings or prepared for class; working on coursework for other courses during seminar (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, email me before the start of our first class to claim a one token credit.

Your token balance will be released as part of the instructor feedback after Check-Ins. Contact the instructor if, at any point, you are curious about your token balance and I will provide your to-date token balance.

A note on extensions: Typically, students do not need to reach out to the instructor/TA to request an extension. Students registered with SAS or facing extenuating/emergent circumstances should contact the professor directly to request an extension.

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 will result in a final grade of F.

Assignments

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

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

*** Unless otherwise indicated, assignment dropboxes automatically close 7 days after the original due date. Assignments will not be accepted once the dropbox has closed, except with

special permission from the course instructor on **legitimate** medical or compassionate grounds. Students who are granted an extension by the instructor on medical or personal/compassionate grounds will not need to exchange any tokens to receive the extra time.

Portfolio Check-In

There will be four portfolio reviews throughout the term. The expected content to be added at each check-in varies according to your Basic Grade stream as follows:

		Reading Response			Other Entries
		A	B	C	
1	Sept. 15	1	1	1	Introductory Portfolio Profile, Learning Journal
2	Oct. 20	2	2	2	Learning Journal, Midterm Assignment
3	Nov. 17	3	3	1	Learning Journal, Essay Proposal
FINAL	Dec. 15	2	-	-	Learning Journal, Final Paper
Total		8	6	4	

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

Due at 11:59 pm on Tuesdays

The number of satisfactory reading responses you are required to produce depends upon the base-grade you want to pursue (see above). Each reading response should be no more than 500 words in length. Prompts will be posted.

NOTE: Critical reading responses **ARE** eligible for re-submission. No extensions are allowed.

Midterm Assignment

Due at Check-In 2 (Oct. 20)

Students will submit a midterm assignment in a format of their choosing (e.g., paper, video, podcast etc.) assessing the strengths and weaknesses of one of the moral theories discussed in class. Instructions will be available on Avenue.

NOTE: This assignment is eligible for extension and re-submission.

Essay Proposal

Due at Check-In 3 (Nov. 17)

This assignment is optional. It is only required if you are seeking an A-range grade. Students will submit a short essay proposal for their final paper.

Final Paper

Due at Check-In 4 (Dec. 15)

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.

EMAIL POLICY

Any questions received over email may take me up to two business days to respond. If you do not receive a response within two business 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.** Failure to include this information will result in delayed responses. According to McMaster policy, you must use your McMaster email address for these communications.

I do not respond to questions about course content via email. It is much easier to discuss these sorts of topics face-to-face. If you do email me with questions about course content, you will likely be told to drop by my or the TA's office hours.

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	Required Reading
1	Sept. 4 & 6	Course Introductions	N/A
2	Sept. 11 & 13	Challenges to Morality: God, Relativism, and Egoism	Cahn, Steven. "God and Morality." In <i>Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology</i> , 6 th ed., edited by Steven Cahn, 29-32. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Rachels, James. "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism." In <i>Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology</i> , 6 th ed., edited by Steven Cahn, 33-46. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Rachels, James. "Egoism and Moral Skepticism." In <i>Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology</i> , 6 th ed., edited by Steven Cahn, 52-64. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.
3	Sept. 18 & 20	Utilitarianism & Kantianism	Thomas, John and Wilfrid Waluchow. <i>Well and Good: A Case Study Approach to Biomedical Ethics</i> . 4 th ed., Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014. (excerpt pages 23-42)
4	Sept. 25 & 27	Social Contract Theory	DeNicola, Daniel R. "Chapter Eight: Contractarianism." In <i>Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction</i> , 153-174. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2019. Rawls, John. "A Theory of Justice." In <i>A Reader in Moral Philosophy</i> , edited by Daniel R. DeNicola, 215-223. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2022.
5	Oct. 2 & 4	Virtue Ethics & Feminist Ethics	TBC
6	Oct. 9 & 11	Indigenous Ethics	Guest Speaker: Jorge Sanchez-Perez (TBC) Ermine, Willie. "The Ethical Space of Engagement." <i>Indigenous Law Journal</i> 6, no. 1 (2007): 193-203.
7	Oct 16 & 18 (Reading Week)	N/A	N/A

8	Oct. 23 & 25	Distributive Justice	TBC
9	Oct. 30 & Nov. 1	Global Poverty	<p>Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> 1, no. 3 (1972): 229-243.</p> <p>Kate Manne. "Against Swooping In." Web log. <i>More to Hate (blog)</i>. Substack, June 20, 2022. https://katemanne.substack.com/p/against-swooping-in.</p>
10	Nov. 6 & 8	Ethical Limits of Markets	<p>Sandel, Michael. "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of the Market." Tanner Lectures on Human Values, 1998. (excerpt pages 89-103)</p> <p>Brennan, Jason and Peter Jaworksi. <i>Markets Without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests</i>. New York: Routledge, 2016. (excerpt pages 3-18)</p>
11	Nov. 13 & 15	Social Determinants of Health and Reproductive Justice	Keisha Ray, "Why Are Hospital Births Unsafe for Black People?" In <i>Black Health: The Social, Political, and Cultural Determinants of Black People's Health</i> , 23-57. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.
12	Nov 20 & 22	Ethics of Sex	Srinivasan, Amia. "On Not Sleeping with Your Students." In <i>The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century</i> , 123-148. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.
13	Nov. 27 & 29	Environmental Ethics	<p>Rieder, Travis. <i>Catastrophe Ethics: How to Choose Well in a World of Tough Choices</i>. New York: Dutton, 2024. (excerpt pages 13-52)</p> <p>Tavernise, Sabrina, host. "Who Pays the Bill for Climate Change?" <i>The Daily</i> (podcast). December 2, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/02/podcasts/the-daily/barbados-imf-world-bank-climate-change.html</p>
14	Dec. 4	New and Emerging Technologies (GenAI)	TBC

The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus. In the event of a discrepancy between the syllabus posted on Simple Syllabus and Avenue to Learn, the Avenue to Learn syllabus will be final.

Use: Ethics bowl cases; cases from “Ethical Choices” by Burnor and Raley; disputed moral issues by Timmons and Glasgow;

Ubuntu and Ermine’s “ethical space of engagement”