

Syllabus

Instructor: Brian Robinson

Class Meeting: Monday/Thursday 8:00 – 9:15; 3214N

Office Hours: by appointment (generally available after class)

Email: robinson@sci.brooklyn.cuny.edu

Website: <https://wfs.gc.cuny.edu/BRobinson/www/>

Mailbox: 2109 Ingersoll Hall

Textbooks:

Required:

- Louis P. Pojman, *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 4th Edition. Wadsworth Publishing: Belmont, CA. 2001. ISBN: 053457033X
- Richard A. Spinello, *Cyberethics: Morality and Law in Cyberspace*, Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Massachusetts, 2005. ISBN: 0-7637-0064-9

For Further Study (not required)

- Richard A. Spinello and Herman T. Tavani, *Readings in Cyberethics* (2nd ed.), Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Massachusetts, 2005. ISBN: 0-7637-2410-6

Course Description:

Ethics is the domain of philosophical study focusing on human morality and values. It is, as Socrates put it in Plato's *Republic*, the discussion of "how we ought to live," for it attempts to rationally formulate guidelines for human behavior. Therefore, any field or type of human activity is within its concern. Hence, the use of technology in any capacity, whether designing, maintaining, using, or simply being a member of a society in which it is present, warrants ethical consideration.

The goals for this course are threefold: first, to gain an understanding of ethics and its major theories; second, to consider how these ethical theories relate to, inform, challenge, and are challenged by our use of technology; and finally, to improve writing skills by reviewing and analyzing the aforementioned topics in essays and other writing assignments. For the first objective, we will examine the three traditional major ethical theories of virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism, along with feminist ethics, moral relativism, and moral nihilism. Simultaneously, for the second objective, in relation to each theory we will consider various topics in technology, including, but not necessarily limited to, privacy, intellectual property and piracy, digital divide, pornography, and free speech.

NB: A final note on writing. This is a writing-intensive class, and there will be some writing every week, ranging from a paragraph in class to a paper. Being able to write well is important not only for philosophy or academia, but for jobs as well.

Course Requirements:

1. Class participation - 20%
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Participation in discussion
 - c. In-class writing exercises
 - d. Short (1 to 2 paragraph) writing assignment outside of class
2. Three (3) papers, 3 to 4 pages in length on assigned topics - 55% total
 - a. See below for details and dates
3. Final: Essay, 4 to 5 pages in length - 25%
 - a. See below for details and dates

Participation and Attendance:

As much of the course will be discussion based, attendance is necessary for learning. Regular or repeated absences from class will be noted, with resulting detrimental effects on the class participation portion of your grade. Please provide documentation if absences are due to legitimate reasons. (That means come talk to me.) Additionally, some of the in class writing exercises will not be announced before hand. These cannot be made up.

Besides being on time, and silencing cell phones, I must stress the importance of everyone allowing for an open forum for discussion, so that we are all free to speak our minds on any topic without condemnation or hostility. Our job is to examine and evaluate ideas, not each other.

Writing Objectives:

The writing assignments are designed to develop the following abilities in the students:

1. The ability to reflect on one's learning and to understand difficult material.
2. The ability move from simpler and un-graded writing to more developed and graded writing.
3. The ability to draft and revise written material.

Essay Policy:

Essay topics will be handed out no later than two weeks prior to their due date. If a student wishes to write instead on a different topic, he or she may speak with me about it, and must have approval for it to count. The due dates are **Thursday, February 22, Thursday, March 22, and Thursday, April 26**. The final essay will be due in my box in 2109 Ingersoll Hall by 5:00 PM on the date assigned by the registrar for the final exam.

Late papers will only be accepted in cases of extenuating circumstances (i.e. severe illness, death in the family, etc.). They must be submitted in class on the assigned day, and *not* by email. Late papers may be accepted only at my discretion, and penalized in grade likewise at my discretion (generally, a letter grade a day).

All papers must be the designated length, typed in a 12 point variable width font (such as Times New Roman or Arial), be double spaced, and have standard margins of 1.5” on the side and 1” on the top and bottom.

One of the three essays may be revised and resubmitted, based on comments given. If (and only if) the revised paper is **significantly different from and better than** the original paper, then you’ll receive a higher grade that will be substituted for the original grade; otherwise your original grade will remain the same. Revised papers will be due at the same time as the final. You will need to hand in both the revised and original copy of the paper (with my notes on it, not a re-printed version).

NB: If you plagiarize a paper, you will fail the course. No exceptions.

Schedule

The schedule will be revised and updated throughout the semester. Announcements or handouts will always be given in class and on my website (see above for url).