

**REL 3938: ETHICS IN AMERICA**  
**FALL 2014, MWF 5<sup>th</sup> period (11:45-12:35)**

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Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays 10:00-11:30 and by appointment.

**Description**

This class has a twofold purpose: to teach crucial ways of thinking about ethics as an academic discipline while also enabling students to reflect on and analyze ethical issues facing contemporary American society. We will focus in particular on the problems and opportunities created by the diversity in different areas of American cultural and religious life.

As a foundation for thinking about ethical dimensions of contemporary issues, the course will provide an overview of ethics as an academic discipline, including introductions to major ethical theories and thinkers. We will also examine particular case studies, focusing on religious, racial, and cultural diversity in the U.S. We will explore the ways that issues such as justice, integration, cultural autonomy, and the common good shape visions of an ethical society. We will also address various obstacles – cultural, economic, and political – that make those visions difficult to achieve.

**Objectives and Goals**

General Education Humanities Objectives

1. To become familiar with diverse approaches to the study of ethics, including major religious and philosophical models;
2. To learn to identify and analyze the ethical dimensions of specific social issues, including race, cultural and religious diversity, economic disparities, and more.
3. To improve students' ability to discuss and analyze moral and philosophical claims and supporting arguments; and
4. To improve students' ability to express, in writing and orally, their own analytical arguments.

General Education Student Learning Outcomes

1. To learn the history, underlying theory and methodologies used to analyze the moral dimensions of social processes and problems;
2. To identify and analyze factors that shape scholarly thinking about ethics and their concrete application in concrete cases;
3. To approach these issues from diverse religious and philosophical perspectives; and

4. To communicate the information and analysis developed in this course in a clear, organized, and effective way in written work and in class discussions.

#### General Education Diversity Student Learning Outcomes

1. To examine and understand the moral dimensions of contemporary American society and in particular of different social structures and the relations among various ethnic, racial, and religious groups;

2. To analyze and evaluate the diverse cultural values that shape students' (and others') approaches to other cultures and social groups;

3. To identify, evaluate and compare students' social status, opportunities and constraints with those of other persons and groups with particular attention to ethical analysis of these issues; and

4. To learn about and evaluate the adequacy of different ethical frameworks used to critique social problems in the U.S. and also of diverse moral visions of what a "good society" in the U.S. would be and what obstacles prevent its realization.

#### Other Student Learning Outcomes

1. To learn about and analyze the ethical dimensions of contemporary social issues;

2. To understand the ways different approaches to these issues shape contemporary cultural and scholarly debates;

3. To read and analyze prominent thinkers in the field and to compare not only their substantive arguments but also the ways their religious, cultural, disciplinary, and theoretical backgrounds have shaped their thinking; and

4. To craft, both in writing and orally, well-informed critical analyses of the issues at hand, with a comparative perspective based on cumulative reading and comprehension of all course materials.

#### **Policies, Rules, and Resources**

1. *Handing in Assignments:* Place all papers in my mailbox in the Religion Department, 107 Anderson Hall. DO NOT slip them under the door or leave them on the door of my office, the main department office, or the teaching assistant's office. Please also keep a dated electronic copy of all your papers.

2. *Late or Make-Up Assignments:* You may take an exam early or receive an extension on an exam or essay assignment *only* in extraordinary circumstances *and* with prior approval from the instructor. If an extension is not granted, the assignment will be marked down ½ grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.

3. *Completion of All Assignments:* You must complete all written and oral assignments and fulfill the requirement for class participation in order to pass the course. I will not average a grade that is missing any assignment or requirement.
4. *Attendance and Participation:* Class attendance is required. Do not register for this class if you cannot arrive on time. Students should arrive on time and prepared to discuss the day's readings. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. After the first late arrival, the instructor reserves the right to mark you absent. The instructor will *not* provide notes or discuss material that has already been covered for students who arrive late, barring extraordinary circumstances (which do not include failing to find a parking place or sleeping in).
5. *Common Courtesy:* Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. Students who receive or make calls during class will be asked to leave. You may take notes on a laptop computer, although the instructor reserves the right to ask you to turn off the computer if circumstances warrant. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (e.g., whispering, reading a newspaper) to leave the class. If that occurs, the student will be marked absent for the day.
6. *Honor Code:* On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. For more information about the definition of these terms and other aspects of the Honesty Guidelines, see <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html>. Any student(s) demonstrated to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in *any assignment* for this course will fail the course. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action and the sanctions listed in paragraph XI of the Student Conduct Code.
7. *Accommodation for Disabilities:* Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.
8. *Counseling and Emergency Resources:* Resources available on-campus for students include the following:
  - a. University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575, personal and career counseling;
  - b. Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling;
  - c. Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual counseling;
  - d. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.
  - e. For security issues, please contact the University Police Department: 392-1111, or 911 for general emergencies.

9. *Software Use:* All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

### **Required Books**

1. Anthony Weston, *A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ethical Toolbox* (Oxford University Press, 2013).
2. James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America* (Orbis Books, 2012).
3. Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

### **Required Articles and chapters** (available on Sakai)

Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), "Introduction: We Think Through Institutions," pp. 3-18.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail,"

[http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/damon\\_horowitz.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/damon_horowitz.html) **Requirements**

*Please Note:* The requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

1. Attendance and participation in class discussions, including timely and close reading of all assigned texts (10% of final grade).

2. Two short essays (3-4 pages each) (20% of final grade each, total 40%). Due in class on Wed., Sept. 12 and Friday, November 7.

I will give you questions/prompts for these essays at least a week in advance of the due date. The essays will be based on course readings and discussions, and grades will be based on the accuracy of your understanding of the material; the organization and clarity of your writing; the persuasiveness of your arguments; and, not least, your focus on answering the questions as asked.

4. Midterm Exam (20% of final grade). In class, October 3.

The exam will cover any and all material covered in the semester up to that date. It will include short answer and short essay questions. Grades will be based on the accuracy of your

understanding of the material; the organization and clarity of your writing; the persuasiveness of your arguments; and, not least, your focus on answering the questions as asked.

5. Final exam (30% of final grade).

This exam will be cumulative. It will cover all course readings and discussions. It will include both short answer and short essay questions. Grades will, as always, be based on the accuracy of your understanding of the material; the organization and clarity of your writing; the persuasiveness of your arguments; and, not least, your focus on answering the questions as asked.

*In addition:* While it is not a requirement, students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Student feedback is very important and we appreciate your taking the time to provide it.

**Grading Scale**

A	93-100	(4.0)
A-	90-93	(3.67)
B+	87-89	(3.33)
B	84-86	(3.0)
B-	80-83	(2.67)
C+	77-79	(2.33)
C	74-76	(2.0)
C-	70-73	(1.67)
D+	67-69	(1.33)
D	64-66	(1.0)
D-	60-63	(0.67)
E	Below 60	(0)

*For information on UF grading policies, please see:*  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

*Please note:* A “C-“ will not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, General Education, Gordon Rule or College Basic Distribution credit. You must receive a “C” or better in order to receive that credit.

## Schedule

<b>Week/Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
1 M 8/25	Introduction to the class	
W 8/27	Defining Social Ethics	Weston, Ch. 1
F 8/29	Finding Ethics	Walker and Kerasote (in Weston)
2 M 9/1	Labor Day Holiday - No Class	
W 9/3	Social Ethics	Weston Ch. 2
F 9/5	The Good Society	Bellah, et al., <i>The Good Society</i> , "We Live Through Institutions"
3 M 9/8	Religious Ethics	Weston, Ch 3
W 9/10	Religious Ethics	Jamal Rahman, "Making Peace with the Sword Verse" (in Weston)
F 9/12	Taking Values Seriously	Weston, Ch. 4
* First short essay due in class on Friday 9/12 *		
4 M 9/15	Deontological Ethics	Weston, Ch 5
W 9/17	Rights and ethics	United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (in Weston)
F 9/19	Utilitarian Ethics	Weston, Ch 6
5 M 9/22	Utilitarianism	Mill, Russell, and Singer (in Weston)
W 9/24	Virtue Ethics	Weston, Ch 7
F 9/26	Virtue Ethics	Lao Tzu, <i>Tao Te Ching</i> (in Weston)
6 M 9/29	Care Ethics	Weston, Ch 8

	W 10/1	Care Ethics	Wireidi and Leopold (in Weston)
	F 10/3	** Midterm Exam - in class	
7	M 10/6	Ethical diversity	Weston, Ch 12
	W 10/8	Ethical conflict	Roger Gottlieb, "Can We Talk?" (In Weston)
	F 10/10	Homecoming: No class	
8	M 10/13	Moral Visions	Weston Ch. 15
	W 10/15	Race and moral vision	Cone, Introduction and Ch. 1
	F 10/17	Martin & Malcolm	Cone, Ch. 2
9	M 10/20	Race and the good society	Cone, Ch. 3
	W 10/22	Critique of the good society	Cone, Ch. 4
	F 10/24	Race and moral vision	M. L. King, "I have a dream" speech
10	M 10/27	Religious ethics	Cone, Ch. 5
	W 10/29	Religious ethics	Cone, Ch. 6
	F 10/31	Martin Luther King, Jr	MLK, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
11	M 11/3	Race, class, and militarism	Cone, Ch. 7-8
	W 11/5	Ideological diversity	Cone, Ch. 9: Two Roads to Freedom
	F 11/7	Malcolm X	Film: X

\* F 11/7: Short Essay Due in class: Race and Ethics in American Society

12	M 11/10	American "exceptionalism"	Wuthnow, Ch. 1
	W 11/12	The new diversity	Wuthnow, Ch. 2

	F 11/14	What diversity means	Wuthnow, Ch. 3
13	M 11/17	“Spiritual marketplace”	Wuthnow, Ch. 4
	W 11/19	The “big tent”	Wuthnow, Ch. 5
	F 11/21	Resisting diversity	Wuthnow, Ch. 6
14	M 11/24	Public goods	Wuthnow, Ch. 7
	11/26-11/28	Thanksgiving Holiday - no class	
15	M 12/1	Local congregations	Wuthnow, Ch. 8
	W 12/3	Mixed marriages	Wuthnow, Ch. 9
	F 12/5	Pluralism and the good society	Wuthnow, Ch. 10
16	M 12/8	Reframing moral dilemmas	Weston, Ch. 14
	W 12/10	Integrating values	Cone: Conclusion

\* Final exam: Date TBA (finals week)