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# PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY

## SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS

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“You must be the change that you wish to see in the world.”  
— Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948)



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*PHILOSOPHY 250 Ethics & Society (Spring 2008)*

*Class hours:* Monday and Wednesday from 7:00–8:15 PM in Room HW506

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*Instructor:* David Morrow

*Instructor's office hours:* Monday 5:45–6:45 PM, or by appointment, in Room HW1447

*Instructor's office phone:* 212.772.5085     *Instructor's email:* [david.morrow@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:david.morrow@hunter.cuny.edu)

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*Prerequisites:* To take this class, you are required to have taken one philosophy class and ENGLISH 120.

*Distribution credits:* This course counts toward the Writing Requirement for graduation and satisfies the GER 3/B (Social or Natural Science/Mathematics) requirement.

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### **WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?**

This course is about how you ought to live. In particular, the course will address ethical questions raised by social problems. The course is not, however, primarily about social policy. That is, it focuses on what you should do in response to these problems, not on what “society” or the government should do. The primary goal of the course is to help you develop justifiable personal responses to those questions.

During the first third of the semester, we will survey important contemporary theories of ethical decision-making, with an emphasis on applying these theories to ethical problems. During the rest of the semester, we will explore empirical and ethical questions about poverty in its local and global contexts, environmental destruction, and consumption. We will cover both contemporary philosophical arguments and readings from the natural and social sciences.

### **WHAT WILL I LEARN IN THIS COURSE?**

The goal of this course is to get you to:

1. Understand several major kinds of ethical theories and how they relate to ethical problems.
2. Understand basic concepts related to and facts about poverty, environmental destruction, and material consumption, including the connections between these phenomena and your own life.
3. Understand important ethical arguments related to poverty, the environment, and consumption.
4. Apply ethical theories to specific ethical problems in order to develop and articulate justifiable personal responses to those problems.

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## PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS

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### WHAT TEXTBOOK WILL I NEED FOR THIS COURSE?



You will need one textbook for this course:

Frankena, William K. *Ethics*, 2nd edition. Prentice-Hall, 1988.

This textbook is available at Shakespeare & Co. on Lexington Ave. between 68th St. & 69th St. You can find cheaper, used copies online. The reading material for the first week only will be available on Blackboard, for the benefit of those who order the textbook online.

Additional readings will be assigned from various other sources. These readings will be available through Blackboard. For more information on Blackboard, see page 3 of this syllabus.

### WHAT WILL I BE EXPECTED TO DO IN THIS COURSE?

In order to achieve the learning objectives described above, you are expected to come to class regularly, participate in class, complete the assigned readings before class, and complete the following assignments.

There will be three “take-home” online midterms, which you will take on Blackboard. (See the section on page 3 for information on Blackboard.) These tests will consist of multiple choice questions. The purpose of these midterms is to get you to synthesize the course material in order to improve your understanding of course content. There will also be an in-class, cumulative final exam, which will be similar to the midterms. The purpose of the final exam is to give you a chance to demonstrate your understanding of the course content.

You will be expected to write three short papers of 900–1,200 words each (roughly 3–5 double-spaced pages). The purpose of these papers is allow you to develop and demonstrate your ability to apply ethical theories to specific ethical problems in order to develop justifiable personal responses to those problems. You will be expected to bring a rough draft of each these papers to class on the assigned days in order to have your paper reviewed by your peers. You will receive more information about each paper two weeks prior to the paper’s due date.

You will be expected to complete a service learning assignment, which will involve participating in and writing about a volunteer project of your choosing related to poverty or the environment. The project will be at your convenience, and will generally take two or three hours to complete. You are encouraged, but not required, to volunteer through New York Cares, a non-profit organization that connects volunteers with a wide range of agencies in New York City. If you prefer to volunteer through another organization, you are required to discuss your plans with me first so that I can verify that the project is an acceptable substitute.

After you volunteer on your project, you will be required to answer a series of short essay questions about the project.

For more details and additional requirements for this project, please see the Service Learning assignment sheet. This assignment sheet is available on Blackboard.

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## **PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS**

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### **HOW WILL MY FINAL GRADE BE DETERMINED?**

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>% of Final Grade</u>
Service Learning	10%
First Paper	10%
Second Paper	20%
Third Paper	20%
Midterm Exams (combined)	25%
Final Exam	15%

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF I MISS AN EXAM?**

You may make up a missed exam only if you have a valid, written excuse for missing the exam or if you make arrangements with me prior to the exam date (or prior to the due date for take home exams).

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHEAT?**

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

In other words, if you cheat, you will fail the assignment or the course. There may be other penalties, as well. Cheating undermines your education, and I will not tolerate it. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes cheating. For details, see the [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity](#), which you can find by Googling `cuny policy on academic integrity`.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS?**

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room EI 124 to secure necessary academic accommodations.

In other words, if you have emotional, medical, physical, or learning disabilities, please visit or call the Office of AccessABILITY in Room EI 124.

For further information and assistance please call (212-772-4857)/TTY (212-650-3230).

### **WHAT'S BLACKBOARD? HOW DO I GET TO IT?**

Blackboard is a web application that allows you to interact with your instructors and access course materials. To sign up for or log in to Blackboard, go to <http://bb.hunter.cuny.edu>. If you are new to Blackboard, please read the "Bb6 Information for Students" on the left side of that web page.

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# PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY

## SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS

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### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

The following schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to keep up to date on changes to the schedule. This means that if you miss class, you should check Blackboard for any changes to the schedule.

Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are available through Blackboard. To access Blackboard, go to <http://bb.hunter.cuny.edu>.

Readings marked with a dagger (†) are also available freely online. For URLs, see the List of Assigned Readings on the last page.

You will receive more details about each assignment at least one class session before it is due.

----- **Introduction** -----

**Monday, January 28**

Course introduction

----- **Unit I: Ethical Theories** -----

**Wednesday, January 30**

*Topic:* Consequentialism

*Reading Due:* Frankena, beginning of Ch. 2, pp. 12–16; beginning of Ch. 3, pp. 34–43\*

**Monday, February 4**

*Topic:* Deontology

*Reading Due:* Frankena, selections from Ch. 2, pp. 16–17, 23–33

**Wednesday, February 6**

*Topic:* Virtue ethics; ethics of care; Randian egoism

*Reading Due:* Frankena, selection from Ch. 4, pp. 61–71; selection from Ch. 2, pp. 17–23

**Monday, February 11**

*Topics:* Pragmatism

*Reading Due:* *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Dewey’s Moral Philosophy,” Introduction, §2\*†

**Wednesday, February 13: PAPER SEMINAR; ROUGH DRAFT OF PAPER #1 DUE**

*Topic:* In-Class Peer-Review Paper Seminar

*Reading Due:* None

**Monday, February 18: NO CLASS (President’s Day)**

**Wednesday, February 20: FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #1 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD**

*Topic:* Review of ethical theories

*Reading Due:* None

----- **Unit 2: Poverty** -----

**Monday, February 25: MIDTERM #1 DUE BY BEGINNING OF CLASS TODAY**

*Topic:* Poverty as an ethical issue

*Reading Due:* None

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# PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY

## SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS

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### **Wednesday, February 27**

*Topic:* Poverty in New York City

*Reading Due:* Levitan, *Poverty in New York City, 2005*\*†

*Recommended Reading:* Reiss, Press release data for the *2007 Unheard Third Survey*\*†

### **Monday, March 3**

*Topic:* Poverty in America

*Reading Due:* Iceland, *Poverty in America*, Ch. 4, "Characteristics of the Poverty Population," pp. 38–69\*

### **Wednesday, March 5**

*Topic:* Global poverty

*Reading Due:* Chuhan, "Poverty and Inequality"\*†

*Recommended Reading:* World Bank, *World Bank Atlas—Measuring Development*\*†

### **Monday, March 10**

*Topic:* Should you contribute to poverty relief?

*Reading Due:* Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"\*

### **Wednesday, March 12**

*Topic:* Is there a limit to what morality demands?

*Reading Due:* Wolf, "Moral Saints"\*

### **Monday, March 17: PAPER SEMINAR; ROUGH DRAFT OF PAPER #2 DUE**

*Topic:* In-Class Peer-Review "Paper Seminar"

*Reading Due:* None

### **Wednesday, March 19: FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #2 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD**

*Topics:* What can you do about poverty?

*Reading Due:* None

### **Monday, March 24: NO CLASS (Easter Monday)**

----- **Unit 3: Environmental Destruction - -**

### **Wednesday, March 26: MIDTERM #2 DUE BY BEGINNING OF CLASS TODAY**

*Topic:* Environmental destruction as an ethical issue

*Reading Due:* None

### **Monday, March 31**

#### **GUEST LECTURE: DR. ROBERT KOPP OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**

*Topic:* Climate change

*Reading Due:* TBD\*

### **Wednesday, April 2**

*Topic:* How humans and the environment affect each other

*Reading Due:* United Nations Environment Programme, *GEO-4: Summary for Decision Makers*\*†

*Homework Due:* Worksheet for online "ecological footprint" quiz\*

### **Monday, April 7**

*Topic:* Is environmental degradation your fault?

*Reading Due:* Narveson, "Collective Responsibility"\*

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**PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY**  
**SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS**

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**Wednesday, April 9**

*Topic:* Should you become a vegetarian?

*Reading Due:* Wenz, "An ecological argument for vegetarianism"\*†

*Recommended Reading:* Bittman, "Rethinking the Meat-Guzzler"\*†

**Monday, April 14: PAPER SEMINAR; ROUGH DRAFT OF PAPER #3 DUE**

*Topic:* In-Class Peer-Review "Paper Seminar"

*Reading Due:* None

**Wednesday, April 16: FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #3 DUE VIA BLACKBOARD**

*Topics:* What can you do about environmental destruction?

*Reading Due:* None

**Monday, April 21: NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

**Wednesday, April 23: NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

----- **Unit 4: Consumption** -----

**Monday, April 28**

*Topic:* Consumption, poverty, and the environment

*Reading Due:* Diamond, "What's Your Consumption Factor?\*"†

**Wednesday, April 30: MIDTERM #3 DUE BY BEGINNING OF CLASS TODAY**

*Topic:* Consumption in America

*Reading Due:* None

**Monday, May 5**

*Topic:* Do we consume more than we should?

*Reading Due:* Sagoff, "Do We Consume Too Much?\*"†

**Wednesday, May 7**

*Topic:* Consumption and the good life

*Reading Due:* Frankena, Ch. 5

**Monday, May 12**

*Topic:* What can you do about consumption?

*Reading Due:* None

----- **Review for Final Exam** -----

**Wednesday, May 14: SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT DUE BY TODAY**

*Topic:* Review for final exam

*Reading Due:* Review your lecture notes from past classes

----- **Final Exam** -----

**TBD: FINAL EXAM IN OUR NORMAL CLASSROOM**

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## PHILOSOPHY 250: ETHICS & SOCIETY SPRING 2008 SYLLABUS

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### LIST OF ASSIGNED READINGS

For your convenience, all of the assigned readings listed above are arranged alphabetically below with full citations, in case you want to find them later or on your own. All online sources were last accessed between January 19 and January 26, 2008.

- Bittman, Mark. "Rethinking the Meat-Guzzler." *New York Times*, January 27, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/weekinreview/27bittman.html>.
- Chuhan, Punam. "Poverty and Inequality." In *Global Issues for Global Citizens: An Introduction to Key Development Challenges*, edited by Vinay Bhargava. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2006. Also available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTABOUTUS/Resources/Chapter2.pdf>.
- Diamond, Jared. "What's your consumption factor?" *New York Times*, January 2, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/opinion/02diamond.html>.
- Frankena, William. *Ethics*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973. Reprinted 1988.
- Leviton, Mark. *Poverty in New York City, 2005: More Families Working, More Working Families Poor*. New York: Community Service Society, September 2006. <http://www.cssny.org/pdfs/Poverty-in-NYC-2005-FullReport.pdf>.
- Narveson, Jan. "Collective Responsibility." *Journal of Ethics* 6, no. 2 (2002): 179–198.
- Reiss, Jeremy. Press release data for the 2007 Unheard Third Survey of Low-Income New Yorkers: Health, Income Inequality, Low Wage Work, and Policies to Advance Economic Security. New York: Community Service Society, January 7, 2008. [http://www.cssny.org/pdfs/UT\\_Press\\_Release\\_Data.pdf](http://www.cssny.org/pdfs/UT_Press_Release_Data.pdf).
- Sagoff, Mark. "Do We Consume Too Much?" *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1997, 80. Also available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/97jun/consume.htm>.
- Singer, Peter. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–243.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Dewey's Moral Philosophy" (by Elizabeth Anderson). 2005. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey-moral/>
- United Nations Environment Programme. *Global Environment Outlook: Environment For Development (GEO-4); Summary for Decision Makers*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2007. [http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/GEO4%20SDM\\_launch.pdf](http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/GEO4%20SDM_launch.pdf)
- Wenz, Peter. "An Ecological Argument for Vegetarianism." *Ethics and Animals*, 5, no. 1 (1984): 2–9. Also available online at <http://www.animal-rights-library.com/texts-m/wenz01.htm>.
- Wolf, Susan. "Moral Saints." *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (1982): 419–439.
- World Bank. *World Bank Atlas: Measuring Development*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2004. Also available online at [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/11/03/000012009\\_20041103155503/Rendered/PDF/302590PAPER0VB0Atlas.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/11/03/000012009_20041103155503/Rendered/PDF/302590PAPER0VB0Atlas.pdf).