

# **POLI 293 ETHICS AND POLITICS**

**Spring 2014/ Philip H. Jos**

12:15-1:30 TTH Maybank 207

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Off. Hrs: Mon 10:30-11:30, Wed & Thurs. 2-3:00 & by appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The common perception of politics is that if you are going to succeed you can't afford to worry about acting ethically. Politics is often regarded as a dirty, inevitably corrupt undertaking, which leaves all of us non-politicians free to be cynical ("they're all crooks anyway") and to feel good about ourselves (*they* are the one's behaving badly because *they* are irresponsible).

But this just won't do. The fact is that we can identify scandalous, illegal, and unethical behavior precisely because there *are* some shared standards for public service, standards that most citizens (and judges) insist on. Even in the rough and tumble world of politics some act responsibly while others do not. Some who behave badly are oblivious to common ethical standards because they are selfish, greedy, and intoxicated by power; others are people who are no more or less sinister than anybody else but make bad choices under pressure. Many times acting in an ethically responsible manner means choosing one principle over another, and perhaps doing harm to avoid a greater harm.

Just as importantly, "politics" is not just what elected officials do. Most of us during the course of our lives will occupy many public roles that entail ethical responsibilities as students, members of community groups or churches, and in our professional lives as teachers, attorneys, engineers, accountants, etc.. Apart from such specific roles we are citizens in local, national, and global economies and communities that shape the world we live in and promote or inhibit particular values and behaviors.

In all of these settings it is important to ask questions like: On what foundation do our judgments about right and wrong rest? What does it take to make responsible decisions even when those around you disapprove? How can we reach judgments when values and principles conflict? What does it mean to demonstrate moral integrity? How do we balance our obligations to the institutions where we work with our ethical principles? What kinds of psychological, social, and organizational pressures can undermine sound judgment? How can we sustain and pursue values and practices that are important to us when economic incentives, cultural changes, and political trends are hostile or indifferent to our values?

The course is organized to pursue these questions. The first section provides an overview of ethical theory and ethical judgment. Section Two is devoted to moral development, how our identity emerges through attachment to others and to moral ideals. Section Three explores the social psychology of ethical decision-making, in particular the tendency towards self-deception, the erosion of integrity that can result from exerting political power, and the problem of conforming to the views of others without engaging in ethical reflection. The final section of the course confronts the fact that the larger social and global context in which we live may threaten values and ways of living that are important to us and encourage cynicism and despair rather than confidence that our ethical choices matter.

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of:

- Alternative theoretical perspectives on ethical responsibilities in public life.
- The development of moral judgment and the challenges posed by multiple values, contextual complexity and factual uncertainty.
- The social, psychological, and organizational pressures that can undermine sound ethical judgment in public life.
- The influence of larger economic and cultural changes on the development and practice of ethical judgment and integrity.

## READING MATERIALS

All of the following are available in the College Bookstore.

- Anthony Weston *A Practical Companion to Ethics*. 2010.4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford University Press.
- Cass Sunstein *Why Societies Need Dissent*. 2003. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sissela Bok. *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* 1999. Vintage Books.
- Michael J. Sandel. *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. 2012. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sharon D. Welch. *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, revised edition, 2000. Fortress Press.

Other readings listed in this syllabus are available on OAKS.

## CONDUCT OF THE COURSE AND METHOD OF EVALUATION

	<u>Percent of Grade</u>
Exam #1 (2/4) . . . . .	20%
Case Paper (2/6) . . . . .	10%
Film Paper #1 ( <i>The East</i> ) (2/20). . . . .	10%
Exam #2 (3/25) . . . . .	20%
Film Paper#2 ( <i>City of Hope</i> ) (3/27). . . . .	10%
Final Exam (4/29) . . . . .	15%
Convocation Take Home Essay (4/29). . . . .	10%
Attendance/Participation (including convocation) . . . . .	5%

**Examinations.** Exams will include a mix of short essay/discussion questions and more narrowly focused questions. Each exam will be based on lectures, class discussions, and required reading. Not all readings will be extensively discussed in class. Because you are nonetheless responsible for this material you should keep up with the reading and raise questions about points you do not understand.

**Film Papers.** Each paper will identify, explore, and analyze key themes and questions raised by a contemporary film. These are not movie reviews, nor are they summaries; instead you must analyze the questions and issues raised by the film in light of class readings and materials. Papers must conform to the Departmental referencing guide and will be graded on content, clarity of argument, your use of concepts and ideas introduced in class and in required readings, organization, grammar, and style. Approximate length: 4-6 pages (typed, double spaced). Papers should be submitted on OAKS but bring a hard copy to class so that you are prepared to participate in class discussion on the day the paper is due.

**Case Paper.** The case paper will require you to apply course readings and concepts to a particular moral problem or decision. Approximate length: 4-6 pages (typed, double spaced). Papers should be submitted on OAKS but bring a hard copy to class so that you are prepared to participate in class discussion on the day the paper is due.

**Convocation Take Home Essay** should be typed (4-6 double-spaced pages, margins 1 inch or less, font 12 pt or 11 pt).

**Attendance/Participation.** The success of the course depends in large part on the students completing the assigned reading and coming to class prepared to discuss the issues that they raise. Adequate performance on exams and paper assignments depends on a knowledge of the required reading and materials presented in class. Occasional quizzes may be used as one way of fostering such preparation and performance on such quizzes may be used as one means for determining this part of your grade.

**Grading Scale/Special Needs:** 92 and above =A, 90-92=A minus, 88-89=B plus, 83-87=B, 80-82=B minus, 78-79=C plus, 73-77=C, 70-72=C minus, 68-69=D plus, 63-67=D, 60-62=D minus, 59 and below=F. Deadlines and expectations are subject to change but adequate notice of such changes will be given. If you are in the SNAPS program or have other *special needs* please let me know during the first week of class.

### ***Make ups and Honor Code***

No make-up exams will be given unless the student presents a written, bonafide excuse. In addition, the student must notify me of the difficulty before the end of the exam day (if you cannot reach me leave a phone message or email), and agree to take a make-up not later than 3 days after the scheduled exam.

The following rules will be strictly enforced during exams:

- (1) All books, notebooks, and other personal effects must be kept under the desk and out of sight.
- (2) No paper other than the exam sheet and a bluebook (provided) can be used during the exam.
- (3) No one will be permitted to take an exam if they arrive more than 30 minutes late.
- (4) No one will be permitted to leave the room during the exam.
- (5) Any student caught cheating will receive an "F" on the exam and will be immediately reported to the College's Judicial Board.

Also, students who observe others in class cheating are encouraged to bring any such cases before the College's Judicial Board. If, however, a student wishes to report an incident of cheating directly to me, our discussion will be kept in confidence.

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**1/9 Required Reading:** None.

### **I. ETHICAL THEORY AND ETHICAL JUDGMENT**

#### **1/14 Introduction: Ethics and Meta Ethics**

**Reading:** Weston, *A Practical Companion*, ch. 1 (18)  
Bok *Lying* ch. 1 and 2 (28).

#### **1/16 Appeals to Authority**

**Reading:** Weston, *A Practical Companion*, ch. 2 (21).

#### **1/21 Rule Based (Deontological) Theories**

**Reading:** Rachels, James. 1986. "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?" in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. by James Rachel. McGraw Hill (OAKS) (9).  
Weston, *A Practical Companion*, ch. 3 (18).  
Bok, *Lying*, ch. 3 (15)

#### **1/23 Assessing Consequences**

**Reading:** Bok, *Lying*, chapter 4 and 7 and 8 (42).

#### **1/28 Multiple Values, Contextual Complexity, and Factual Uncertainty**

**Reading:** Weston, *A Practical Companion*, ch. 4 (21).  
Ronald Dworkin, "Religion Without God," *New York Review of Books*, April 4, 2013 (9) (OAKS).

#### **1/30 The Case of Lies for the Public Good**

**Reading:** Dennis Thompson, "Democratic Dirty Hands," in D. Thompson *Political Ethics and Public Office*. 1987. Harvard University Press (OAKS) (28).  
Bok, *Lying*, Ch. 12 (16).

**\*Case Paper Assigned and Study Guide Out\***

**2/4 EXAM #1**

## **2/6 Lies for the Public Good Discussion**

***\*Case Paper Due\****

## ***II. MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY***

### **2/11 Empirical Perspectives on Morality**

**Reading:** Lawrence J. Walker and Jeremy A. Frimer “The Science of Moral Development,” pp. 235-262 in *Social Development*, ed. by Marion Underwood and Lisa Rosen, Guilford 2011.(OAKS)

### **2/13 Character Ethics: Reason, Habit, Creativity, and Virtue**

**Reading:** Rachels, J. 1986. “The Ethics of Virtue,” *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (OAKS) (20)  
Weston, *A Practical Companion*, ch. 5 (19).

***\*Film Paper #1 Assigned\****

### **2/13 (Thursday) Political Science Convocation of Majors, 4 pm Physician’s Auditorium**

Attendance Required/Take Notes. This year’s speaker is John Prendergast, a human rights activist and best-selling author who has worked for peace in Africa for over 25 years. He is co-founder of the Enough Project, an initiative to end genocide and crimes against humanity. His talk will be the subject of a take home essay assignment due April 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **2/17 (Monday) Film Showing: *The East***

### **2/18 Open Mind, Open Heart, and Ethical Judgment**

**Reading:** Weston, “Ethics With a Heart” from an earlier edition of *A Practical Companion* (OAKS) (12)

### **2/20 Loyalty and Obligation: *The East* Discussion**

***\*Film Paper #1 Due\****

## ***III. THREATS TO SOUND JUDGMENT***

### **2/25 Conformity 1**

**Reading:** Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Introduction, ch. 1, 2, 3 (62).

### **2/27 Conformity 2**

**Reading:** Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Introduction, ch. 4, 5, Epilogue (70).

## **March 4 and 6 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK**

### **3/11 Organizational Dissent**

**Reading:** Jeffrey W. Kassing. 2008. “Consider This: A Comparison of Factors Contributing to Employees’ Expressions of Dissent,” *Communication Quarterly* 56(3)” 342-355 (OAKS).

### **3/13 Self Deception 1**

**Reading:** Bok. *Lying*, ch. 6 (pp. 73-89).

Tavris and Aronson “Knaves, Fools, Villians, and Hypocrites,” and “Cognitive Dissonance: The Engine of Self-Justification, pp. 1-39 in Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson’s *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)* Harcourt Inc. 2007. (OAKS)

### **3/18 Self Deception 2**

**Reading:** Martin, Mike W. Evading Self-Acknowledgment,” Pages 6-18 in *Self-Deception and Morality* by Mike W. Martin. 1984. University Press of Kansas. (OAKS).

### **3/20 Temptations of Power**

**Reading:** J. Patrick Dobel “The Temptations of Power,” in *Public Integrity*, 1999. J. Hopkins (OAKS) (25).

**\*Film Paper #2 Assigned and Study Guide Out\***

### **3/20 Evening showing of *City of Hope***

### **3/25 EXAM #2**

### **3/27 Temptations of Power: *City of Hope* Discussion**

**\*Film Paper #2 Due\***

## ***IV. CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND ETHICS***

### **4/1 Markets and Morals**

**Reading:** Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Market, Intro, Intro and ch. 1* (41).

### **4/3 The Moral Limits of Markets**

**Reading:** Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy*, ch. 2 (47).

### **4/8 The Marketization of Everything: Be Not Overwhelmed (Part One)**

**Reading:** Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy*, ch. 3 (37).

Peter Singer and Jim Mason, “Food and Ethics,” pp. 3-14 *The Ethics of What We Eat*, 2006 (OAKS).

### **4/10 Ethics, Despair, Hope, and Moral Action**

**Reading:** Sharon D. Welch. *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, ch. 1 -2 (48)

### **4/15 NO CLASS (but see reading assignment for 4/17)**

### **4/17 The Persistence of Injustice**

**Reading:** Welch. *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, ch. 3-4 (33).

### **4/22 The Persistence of Injustice: Be Not Overwhelmed (Part Two)**

**Reading:** Weston *A Practical Companion*, ch. 6 (27)

**\*study guide and take home essay out**

### **4/29 (Tues., noon) Final Exam and Convocation Take Home Due**