

# Course Syllabus

## NEUROETHICS

PHL 402 | University of Alabama at Birmingham | Spring 2019

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Note: Print a copy of this syllabus for easy reference about due dates, policies, student support, etc. The syllabus is the ruling document, although small changes are sometimes needed. If changes are made, an announcement will be sent through Canvas.

## 1. BASIC COURSE INFO

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### Prof. Information:

**Prof:** Dr. Joshua May  
**Office:** Humanities Bldg, Rm 425  
**Email:** [joshmay@uab.edu](mailto:joshmay@uab.edu) (preferred method of contact)  
**Website:** [www.joshdmay.com](http://www.joshdmay.com)  
**Office Hours:** Tues/Thurs 12:30-1:30 (& by appt.)

### Lecture Info:

**Time:** 11am – 12:15pm (sect. 2C)  
**Location:** Heritage Hall (HHB), room 227  
**Course Website:** Canvas

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Neuroethics studies moral issues arising in connection with the sciences of the mind, particularly research on the brain. This is a relatively new interdisciplinary field covering two main areas. The first is the ethics of neuroscience, which deals with the moral issues that arise from emerging technologies and findings of neuroscience. The second is the reverse: the neuroscience of ethics, which asks what research on the brain tells us about morality.

This course will cover several topics in each area, including the following topics. Mind reading: Can neuroscientific technologies determine whether someone is lying? Can brain scan results constitute self-incrimination (thus violating the 5th amendment)? Moral enhancement: Is there something wrong with making oneself a better person (e.g. more caring and generous) by altering one's brain directly (e.g. via pills or deep brain stimulation)? Moral responsibility and free will: Does unconscious neural activity determine our behavior prior to conscious awareness? Is, e.g., a psychopath morally responsible if the behavior is the result of brain dysfunction? Is addiction a neurological compulsion? Moral reasoning: Which areas of the brain are involved in moral thought and action? (Emotional areas? Rational/cognitive areas?) Students will learn about such topics and evaluate arguments on different sides of the issues.

*Capstone*: This course covers cutting edge debates and integrates philosophical issues from across the discipline—in ethics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, epistemology, and metaphysics—and culminates in a substantial term paper and presentation. Thus, the course clearly fulfills the Capstone Requirement in Philosophy; students just have to get individual approval by the Chair near graduation since this course isn't listed as PHL 490-493.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand major theories, cases, methods, and concepts in ethics and neuroscience.
- Critically evaluate ideas and methods in ethics and neuroscience.
- Evaluate and justify one's moral beliefs.
- Clearly and carefully articulate complex ideas in written form.

### REQUIRED TEXT

*Neuroethics: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Neil Levy, Cambridge University Press, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0521687263). [Available at the book shops or online. Get the Kindle version for as little as \$60 on Amazon; paperback is about \$66 new, \$53 used].

Additional readings will be available on the Canvas course page (as PDFs).

### ASSIGNMENTS (OVERVIEW)

(For due dates, see the Canvas site or the Schedule/Calendar at the end of this syllabus.)

1. **Engagement** 15% of grade [attendance, presentation, survey, etc.]
2. **Discussion Piece** 15% of grade
3. **Tests (x4)** 40% of grade
4. **Essay** (2500 words) 30% of grade + Outline [hurdle]

**CLASS UPDATES**

Important announcements and updates will be made occasionally on the course website in Canvas (<http://uab.instructure.com/>). So do check it frequently or make sure to have it set up to email you each announcement.

**CONTENT COVERED**

We will be discussing content primarily from the assigned readings. However, we *may not cover everything in the assigned reading*. Look to the lectures for what we'll be highlighting and what you'll be held accountable for on assignments. As is typical of courses taught in a Philosophy Department, we will focus heavily on understanding and analyzing *arguments*. [Also: Given that this course covers important cases in medicine and the law, students will be tested on basic details of such cases.]

**COURSE MATERIALS: HANDOUTS, LECTURE SLIDES, ETC.**

To help students, I will provide handouts, slides, and so on. I hope providing handouts/slides in particular will allow students in class to participate in discussion rather than write down everything I say. Keep in mind, though, the handouts/slides will be rather *barebones*. You will likely want to supplement them with your own *notes* from class.

*Copyright Notice:* The course materials that I create (e.g. handouts, recordings, exams) are intellectual property. They are for you to use in this class only, during this semester. Course materials are not for others to use (e.g. they're not to be posted on other websites or otherwise shared with others).

**NO LAPTOPS, PHONES, ETC. IN CLASS**

During class, turn off and put away all computers, phones, and other electronic devices. Texting, instant messaging, web surfing, message checking, e-mailing, are all distractions to you and your fellow classmates. It's becoming so rampant that the best option at this point seems to ban it all during lecture. Think of the class meetings as a "philosophy retreat" where you focus on only philosophy. That's not too much to ask. (Of course, if you have a special need for some such device, do talk with me and we can make exceptions as needed.)

A rationale I endorse:

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/>

*Penalties:* If I catch you during class, I'll ask you to put the device away and you won't be marked as present for that lecture. If the problem persists, you will need to leave.

**2. ASSIGNMENTS**

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**ENGAGEMENT TASKS**

Your Engagement grade will primarily be determined by Attendance in class. You will also have some miscellaneous assignments, such as: posting a Profile Picture on Canvas, filling out a short online Survey, doing a brief in-class Presentation (about 5 minutes) of your essay outline during the final week of class.

*Attendance:* Students are expected to regularly attend class meetings and to do so on time. I will do roll call and you'll earn points for being present. This encourages attendance and helps

me to learn names. If you're late and miss roll call, you can receive *half the points* for the day, but *only if you inform me after class that you were late*.

Ultimately, acquiring a couple of unexcused absences isn't extremely detrimental, especially if you contribute well in class. But do note that missing numerous class meetings would likely make it difficult for you to do well in the course overall, simply because you will miss discussion of important material.

*Excused absences:* These require proper documentation for either jury duty (note from the court), military service (note from military superior), or required university-sponsored activities (documentation from UAB official or supervisor). Remember, students with excused absences are still required to complete work and readings by the required due dates.

*Participation & Disruptions:* I'm very interested in what you think about the issues we discuss in class. I encourage you to ask questions in class to *clarify* points (e.g. "What exactly is...?") but also to raise *criticism* (e.g. "Couldn't she respond by saying...?"). Outstanding participation can be like extra credit for your final Engagement grade: it can boost it. Being disruptive (e.g. talking to your neighbor during class) can negatively affect your score by losing attendance points that day.

## DISCUSSION PIECE

During the first week, you will be assigned one article to briefly summarize and provide some critical questions for discussion in the relevant class meeting. [Note: The article will be one of the PDF readings, not a chapter from the textbook.]

Discussion pieces must be *no more than 500 words* and submitted on the Canvas site by 5pm the day before the relevant meeting. Your piece will be evaluated on the quality of exposition and critical questions raised. You should demonstrate that you've done the reading and spent time thinking about it carefully. These short assignments are meant to provide a springboard for discussion during the relevant class meeting and also to help you prepare for the kind of work required for the essay (exposition and critical evaluation).

## TESTS

There will be 4 tests and—importantly—they will all be online (on Canvas). Each will be either *multiple choice*, *short answer*, or *short essay* (or some combination). I'll mix it up so there are a number of different testing methods used. So these may involve some essay writing. But they won't be especially long (15-30 minutes). Think of these as in between a quiz and a midterm exam (hence I'm calling them "tests"). *No tests can be made up without special circumstances*.

## ESSAY & OUTLINE

Your essay should be about 2500 words (between 9-11 pages if double-spaced) and will require substantial critical evaluation and engagement with the relevant literature.

*Outline:* You must submit an outline of the essay. You won't receive a grade for the outline, but it's required for passing the essay (a "hurdle requirement").

*Outline Presentation:* Students will briefly present a version of their outline to the class during the final week of lecture. In about 5 minutes, you will describe your topic, the argument/theory you'll focus on, and the weak points you intend to press on. You'll receive points for this and it will count toward your Engagement grade.

More details on the essay and outline will be provided later in the semester.

### **LATE PENALTIES & MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS**

Submit your assignments on time. Completing a college degree is partly about becoming a responsible adult. Holding a Bachelor's degree signals to others that you're capable of being relied on to meet challenges and in a timely manner.

Assignments can be made up or submitted late only if you have *extenuating circumstances* (e.g. medical, military, sports, jury duty) that you can document. Make sure you let me know *as soon as such special circumstances arise*; otherwise I might not be able to work something out with you. Moreover, make-ups are conditional on our being able to schedule a mutually convenient time for it and a time that is either soon before or after the original assignment occurred. For example, don't expect to be able to take an exam two weeks after (or before) the rest of the class takes it.

What are the late penalties? If I accept a late assignment without an agreed upon extension, a 5% penalty applies for the first day late; 2% per day is applied for the next 13 calendar days after the due date. Assignments won't be accepted after more than 14 calendar days, except in exceptional circumstances and in consultation with the professor. Late penalties are rounded down to the nearest whole point (e.g. one day late on a 10-point assignment yields one whole point off).

### **CHEATING (INCLUDING PLAGIARISM)**

Should students cheat? No, don't cheat. It's both immoral and imprudent. I warn against this at the beginning of every semester, and still nearly every time at least one person gets caught! *I take this extremely seriously.* I will give all cheaters a failing grade and report the incidents to the university.

What counts as cheating? Academic misconduct includes *abetting, collusion, plagiarism, fabrication, and misrepresentation*. But it's *your responsibility* to make sure that your work doesn't violate university policies. (Compare: Ignorance of the law is generally no excuse.)

All UAB students are expected to be familiar with the *UAB Academic Honor Code*, as well as any honor codes that are specific to their schools or disciplines. The code represents a commitment to integrity in the academic community and a respect for an individual's educational endeavors. For your convenience, here is the link to UAB's page on *Academic Integrity*:

<http://www.uab.edu/students/one-stop/policies/academic-honor-code>

If you need any help in understanding the honor code or are in any doubt about whether your work may violate it, check with me well in advance. For a tutorial on plagiarism, see:

<https://guides.library.uab.edu/academicintegrity/plagiarism>

How is cheating detected? Various ways. Note, however, that if you take this course you're agreeing to submit your work online, when instructed, to a program called *TurnItIn* that detects cheating (from plagiarism to collusion). Note that TurnItIn will retain an anonymous version of your submission as part of their database so that students who cheat from it can be detected. Because of this program, the vast majority of you who do your own work and cite the sources of your information properly will not have to compete with students who commit undetected plagiarism.

**GRADES**

All grades for assignments will be posted on the course website. Canvas automatically calculates your grade based on the weight of the assignments. Using the "What-If Grades" feature, you can see what your final course grade will be if you get a certain score on future assignments. I use a standard conversion from percents to letter grades (A=90-100%, B=80-89%, C=70-79%, etc.). Note: For final grades, UAB only uses A, B, C, D, F (no +/-).

Note Well: The default grade for any assignment is *not* an "A" with points taken away for errors. Rather, the default grade (if we must imagine one) is more like a "C" which is supposed to be the grade for average work meeting minimum expectations. Points are then taken off for doing worse than this or added for doing better.

What if you're unhappy with a grade? Ultimately, not everyone will receive the grade they wanted. But please note that I apply the usual standards in the discipline of Philosophy and I apply them fairly. That means I can't make a special exception for anyone (e.g. "I tried really hard" or "I need to get an A for a scholarship" or "I felt I did really well," etc.). Making special exceptions for some students but not others is unfair. I will amend grades only if I made a calculating error or inadvertently misapplied a standard. I will not change the grading standards or offer extra credit opportunities for only some students.

Do you offer extra credit? Rarely, and when I do the opportunity is open to the entire class. I usually only offer extra credit for attending events relevant to our course, typically only for ones organized by the Philosophy Department. Giving extra credit for events is tricky. Some people can't attend them because they have other obligations, and then they can't take advantage of the opportunity. So it's a bit of a dilemma. It's good to encourage students to support events related to our class topics, but that unfortunately leaves some others out. So what I do is make sure the extra credit isn't especially hefty. That way, for those who can't make it, you're not missing out on an amazing opportunity to radically improve your grade in our class. But it still provides an incentive for people to attend who can make it.

**3. STUDENT SUPPORT**

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**CONTACTING ME**

*Email is the preferred method of contact* for this course (I aim to respond within 24 hours on weekdays). Other ways to talk with me include: before or after class, during my regular office hours, by appointment to meet in person or chat via Skype. I encourage you to *communicate with me outside of class*. Talking to me about the material, especially in preparation for an upcoming assignment, is not just for those who fear failing the course; it's also for those who want to secure an "A" (or whatever your goal is).

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

The website for this class (and my personal website) have some links that may prove useful in the course. See also the *Library's Philosophy Guide*: <http://guides.library.uab.edu/phil>

**WRITING SUPPORT**

I'll be expecting you to do *college-level writing*. Your writing should be clear, organized, professional, and so on. Furthermore, writing in philosophy is often very different from writing in other disciplines. Since philosophy requires the clear communication of often difficult and subtle ideas, weak writing renders high level performance impossible. If you have any questions, I encourage you to see UAB's Writing Center (which also provides online tutoring for distance students): <https://www.uab.edu/writingcenter/>

**PHILOSOPHY CLUB**

At UAB's Student Fellowship of Philosophy (Phil Club), all are welcome. You don't need to be a Philosophy major or minor to attend meetings, and your friends are welcome too. Meetings each semester are either weekly or biweekly and snacks (often pizza) are typically available. The Club usually either discusses a philosophical topic, watches a video, or organizes events. Early in the semester I'll announce the meeting schedule, but you can also see their Facebook group ("UAB Philosophy Club").

**MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

The Health and Wellness Center is located at 1714 9th Avenue South. Call (205) 934-3581 for an appointment. In addition to a wide array of health services, the center offers a strong, confidential counseling program free of charge to current UAB students. Psychiatric services are also available. Call (205) 934-5816 or stop by to schedule an appointment. Stress, anxiety, and depression are the leading issues handled by our professional counselors.

**IF YOU FACE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES**

If for any reason you are struggling—due to medical issues or otherwise—get in touch with me as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully. But you must get in touch as soon as you know there's a problem. Waiting until the last minute, for example, might mean we can't work anything out. I also recommend getting in touch with UAB's *Office of Student Advocacy, Rights, and Conduct* (<http://www.uab.edu/students/sarc/>).

**DSS ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT**

If you're registered with Disability Support Services (DSS), let me know as soon as possible about requested accommodations. If you have a disability but haven't yet contacted DSS, please contact them as soon as possible (<https://www.uab.edu/students/disability/>). Accommodations are not retroactive. Students should obtain an accommodation letter from DSS at the *beginning* of each semester, get that letter to the instructor, and contact the instructor several days before the accommodation is required. Requests for reasonable accommodations involve an interactive process and consist of a collaborative effort among the student, DSS, faculty and staff.

**TITLE IX STATEMENT**

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is committed to providing an environment that is free from sexual misconduct, which includes gender-based assault, harassment, exploitation, dating and domestic violence, stalking, as well as discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. If you have experienced any of the aforementioned conduct we encourage you to report the incident. UAB provides several avenues for reporting. For more information about Title IX, policy, reporting, protections, resources and supports, please visit <http://www.uab.edu/titleix> for UAB's Title IX Policy, UAB's Equal Opportunity, AntiHarassment Policy and Duty to Report and Non-Retaliation Policy.

**4. READINGS**

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**WHEN TO READ**

Students are expected to *do the assigned reading*. You should aim to do the reading the day it's covered in class—or at least around that time. The point of this is: *don't give up on the reading*. If you didn't get to it before we covered it in class, make sure you do it after. This is especially important because philosophy involves close examination of often fairly dense arguments.

However, you aren't expected to have figured it all out before the relevant lecture. That's what we're going to try to do in class. (Notice also that I've provided the page numbers of each reading so you can see the length and plan ahead.)

**Mental Fatigue:** Don't underestimate this. When reading, if you find that you can't process it, you may be getting mentally exhausted. Try putting the reading down and coming back to it later, even the next day. It's quite likely that you'll find it much easier after a break, especially after you're well rested (and nourished).

**Pro Tip:** I don't expect you to read the footnotes or endnotes of the articles before coming to class. Just have a quick read to get an overall sense of what the author's main ideas are.

## READING LIST

All readings are in the course text unless marked "PDF" (made available on Canvas). We'll try to go through these articles following this schedule, but some minor revision may be necessary.

Note:

- 📖 = read for the corresponding lecture. 🎧 = listen
- **Levy** = our text, *Neuroethics* by Neil Levy (2007); other articles are PDFs on Canvas
- **pp.** = pages (e.g. "pp. 2-3 only"=read pages 2-3 only, while "20pp."=20 pages in length)

## SCHEDULE/CALENDAR

Wk	Date	Lecture #, Topic, & Readings	Events
<i>Introduction</i>			
1	1/8	<b>1.1 Intro: What's Neuroethics?</b> 📖 Roskies, Adina (2002). "Neuroethics for the New Millenium." <i>Neuron</i> [3pp].	Pic
	1/10	<b>1.2 Intro: Mind-Brain Relationship</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 1 "Introduction: Neuroethics...." pp. 1-43 [skipping pages 44-68]	Choose
<i>Part A: The Ethics of Neuroscience (Applied/Practical Issues)</i>			
2	1/15	<b>2.1 Manipulation: Changing Minds</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 2 "Changing Our Minds." [18pp].	
	1/17	<b>2.2 Manipulation: DBS</b> 📖 Glannon, Walter (2009). "Stimulating Brains, Altering Minds" <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> [8pp].	Ian, Trevor
3	1/22	<b>3.1 Enhancement: Worries</b> 📖 Sandel, Michael (2004). "The Case Against Perfection." <i>The Atlantic</i> [10pp].	Andrew, Samantha
	1/24	<b>3.2 Enhancement: vs. Treatment</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 3 "The Presumption Against Direct Manipulation." [45pp].	
4	1/29	<b>3.3 Enhancement: Fairness</b> 📖 Buchanan, Allen (2011). "Will the Rich Get Biologically Richer?" Ch. 5 of <i>Better Than Human</i> , OUP [30pp].	Dylan, Brook
	1/31	<b>3.4 Enhancement: Disability [Now Covering 3.3 on this day]</b> 📖 Sparrow, Rob (2005). "Defending Deaf Culture" <i>J. of Political Philos.</i> [18pp].	Test 1, Katie, Ashish
5	2/5	<b>4.1 Brain Reading: Reading Minds</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 4 "Reading Minds/Controlling Minds." [24pp].	
	2/7	<b>4.2 Brain Reading: Legal Evidence</b> 📖 Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter et al (2008). "Brain Images as Legal Evidence." <i>Episteme</i> [15pp].	Marrielle, Hanh
6	2/12	<b>5.1 Identity: Memory</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 5 "The Neuroethics of Memory." [40pp].	
	2/14	<b>5.2 Identity: Moral Traits</b> 📖 Strohming, Nina & Nichols, Shaun (2015). "Neurodegeneration and Identity." <i>Psychological Science</i> [~18pp].	Donald, Parker



<b>Part B: The Neuroscience of Ethics (Theoretical Issues)</b>			
<b>7</b>	2/19	<b>6.1 Moral Reasoning: Reason/Emotion</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 9 "The Neuroscience of Ethics." pp. 281-299 only [18pp.]	<b>Test 2</b>
	2/21	<b>6.2 Moral Reasoning: Debunking Deontology</b> 📖 Greene, Josh. (2014). "Beyond Point-and-Shoot Morality." <i>Ethics</i> [31pp.]	Mo, Nick
<b>8</b>	2/26	<b>6.3 Moral Reasoning: Methodology</b> 📖 Machery, Edouard. (2014). "In Defense of Reverse Inference." <i>British Journal for the Philosophy of Science</i> [18pp.]	Simone, Jp
	2/28	<b>6.4 Moral Reasoning: Contrary Data</b> 📖 Kahane, Guy, et al (2012). "The Neural Basis of Intuitive and Counterintuitive Moral Judgment." <i>Social Cognitive &amp; Affective Neuroscience</i> [9pp.]	Siddhu, Ankit
<b>9</b>	3/5	<b>7.1 Self-Control: Intro</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 6 "The 'Self' of Self-Control." [25pp.] 🎧 "Willful Acts" episode of <i>Hi-Phi Nation</i> . [55 mins.]	
	3/7	<b>7.2 Self-Control: Addiction w/Responsibility</b> 📖 Pickard, Hanna & Pearce, Steve (2013). "Addiction in Context: Philosophical Lessons from a Personality Disorder Clinic." In N. Levy (ed.) <i>Addiction &amp; Self-Control</i> . OUP. [20pp.]	Aleena, Alana
<i>Spring Break: 3/11 - 3/15</i>			
<b>10</b>	3/19	<b>7.3 Self-Control: Addiction w/o Control</b> 📖 Sripada, Chandra (2018). "Addiction and Fallibility." <i>J. of Philosophy</i> [19pp.]	<b>Test 3,</b> Taylor, Hayden
	3/21	<b>8.1 Free Will: Unconscious Forces</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 7 "The Neuroscience of Free Will." [36pp.]	
<b>11</b>	3/26	<b>8.2 Free Will: Implicit Biases</b> 📖 Kelly, Dan & Roedder, Erica (2008). "Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias." <i>Philosophy Compass</i> [18pp.]	Carly, Lillian
	3/28	<b>How to Write in Philosophy</b> 📖 May, J. (2016). "How to Construct an Essay" & "Writing in Philosophy" (10pp.)	
<b>12</b>	4/2	<b>8.3 Free Will: Psychopaths</b> 📖 Glenn, Andrea, & Raine, Adrian. (2014). "Neurocriminology: Implications for the Punishment, Prediction and Prevention of Criminal Behaviour." <i>Nature Reviews Neuroscience</i> [9pp.]	Kimemie, Mogilie
	4/4	<b>Catch Up &amp; Discussion</b> [w/guest Andrea Glenn!]	
<b>13</b>	4/9	<b>9.1 Self-Deception: Rationalizing</b> 📖 Levy Ch. 8 "Self-deception: The Normal and the Pathological." [23pp.] 🎥 Watch in class - <i>Dishonesty: The Truth about Lies</i> (2015). Documentary about Ariely's work. [42 mins. abridged]	
	4/11	<b>9.2 Self-Deception: Scientific Practice</b> [w/guest Alexa Tullett!] 📖 Mazar, Nina & Ariely, Dan (2015). "Dishonesty in Scientific Research." <i>Journal of Clinical Investigation</i> [-8pp.]	<b>Test 4,</b> Kaitlin, Julius
<b>14</b>	4/16	<b>Essay Outline Presentations</b> (1 <sup>st</sup> half)	<b>Outline, Present</b>
	4/18	<b>No Class</b> – Prof. traveling for a conference	<b>Survey, Evals</b>
<b>15</b>	4/22- 4/23	<b>Essay Due: Wed. April 23<sup>rd</sup></b> (Tues. of finals week) <b>Outline Presentations (2<sup>nd</sup> Half):</b> Tues. April 23 <sup>rd</sup> 10:45am-1:15pm	