Economics 4060
Ethics, Happiness and Choice
Spring 2023 Syllabus, Part 1

University of Colorado Boulder   Miles Kimball
Department of Economics   Spring 2020
Econ 109   miles.kimball@colorado.edu

Office Hours: MW 10-11, W 2:00-2:30, and by appointment.

Plagiarism or any other form of cheating will result in an automatic F.

Class attendance required. (>5 unexcused absences is an automatic F.) No use of electronics during an in-person class.

Description
Ethics has two major components: (a) a view of what makes for a well-lived life and (b) a view of how conflicting interests of different people should be reconciled.

On living life well, Neoclassical Economics tends to assume people know what they want out of life (their values) and what they need to do (within the constraints they face) to try to get those things. Behavioral Economics takes more seriously the idea that thinking deeply about what you want and how to get it can lead to a better life. Survey data on happiness, and on aspects of well-being more generally, can be helpful in stimulating one's thoughts about what you really want and how to get it. But values and strategies are not just about introspection. Our culture, including religion and politics, contains much accumulated wisdom about values and strategies, although it also contains some ideas about living life well that are wrong or outdated.

Neoclassical Economics, while it provides little guidance about values, contains a great deal of wisdom about optimal strategies for pursuing your values. That is, even when Neoclassical Economics fails as a "positive" (or better, "descriptive") theory trying to describe what people actually do, it can succeed as a "normative" ("prescriptive") theory about the best way to pursue your goals. Behavioral economics is at the boundary of economics and psychology. It suggests that psychological issues lead people to make many mistakes; awareness of the dangers can help reduce the number and seriousness of mistakes.

Survey data on happiness and other aspects of well-being offer the exciting prospect of constructing a national well-being index based on self-reported well-being that could function in our national decision-making as a coequal to GDP. This would provide an extra dimension of accountability for governments, to make them more responsive to the needs and desires of great masses of people. There are many challenges in achieving this goal. In this class, you will get your hands on very detailed data on well-being, survey response styles, and factors that could affect well-being. The class will also do a deep dive on statistical issues that can make it look like the data is saying things it isn't. For your final paper, you need to get beyond these illusions.

Recommended Prerequisites
Economics 3080, "Intermediate Macroeconomics," is the officially recommended prerequisite. You will also find the course easier if you have had Economics 3070 and at least one course in statistics or econometrics. But I will build things up slowly, so you can get by with having fewer previous courses.

Course Readings, etc.

- **Required Books:**
  - *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* by Richard Layard (paper due 11 PM 2/13/23)
  - *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* by Jordan B. Peterson *(Beware: This book is so successful there are many companion books. You need the original book by Jordan B. Peterson. The title here links to the right Amazon page.)* (paper due 11 PM 2/28/23)
  - *Positive Intelligence* by Shirzad Chamine (paper due 11 PM 4/4/23)
- **Reading One Additional Book for a Group Oral Presentation**

- **Other Required Reading, Listening and Watching Assignments:** There will be many other assignments posted on the course website

I recommend that you bookmark https://blog.supplysideliberal.com/ethics-happiness-and-choice

---

Course Requirements and Grading

Writing (Book Papers, Analysis Task & Term Paper) + Miscellaneous Homework Assignments	45%
Group Presentation	10%
Quizzes	20%
Class Attendance and Participation	20%

Assignments will always be due by 11 PM on their due date or by 3 minutes before class begins for assignments to be handed in in class.

Honor Code Policy: A determination of plagiarism or cheating will result in an automatic failing grade. You must clearly indicate text that is not your own. That includes text from Chat GPT or other AI.

Attendance
I expect you to attend each class. I will take attendance. In addition to attendance counting toward 20% of your grade, you will automatically fail the class if you miss more than 5 classes without an excused absence.

Quizzes
I want you to be studying all along. So I reserve the right to sometimes do short pop quizzes without advance warning. I will give you advance warning of bigger quizzes. If you have a foreseeable excused absence, do let me know early on. In addition to testing you on the statistics you will be learning, one purpose of the quizzes will be to give you incentive to do the shorter reading assignments as well as to test the depth of your reading of the assigned books. I often do multiple choice questions that test not only whether you have read something, but also whether you understand what ideas the author is for and what ideas the author is against. Students often get frustrated with the expectation that they become able to do critical reading, because many other classes do not expect it, but this is a skill you can master. For more on the critical reading expectations in this course, see "**Critical Reading: Apprentice Level**."

A Note About Politics and Religion
Because many ethical ideas and debates (including ideas about happiness) are embedded in political and religious discussions, it is not possible to get deeply into ethics without touching on politics and religion. On politics, one of my goals for this course is to develop your muscles for respectfully discussing politics (including being a good listener) with others who have very different views than you do. On religion, we will avoid any discussion of the supernatural claims of religion and talk about what religions say about how people should behave in this life. *12 Rules for Life* is on the reading list specifically to help you increase your intellectual range in relation to politics, and to a considerably lesser extent, your intellectual range in relation to religion.

My Background in Relation to this Course
- Personally, I am middle-of-the-road in relation to politics and a nonsupernaturalist who takes religion seriously. In ethical philosophy, I lean toward Utilitarianism elaborated by economic theory.
- I am a blogger. These political, religious and philosophical stances are important features of my blog.
- Research on self-reported well-being (including happiness data) is by far the biggest part of my research effort. In turn a big part of that effort is the effort to figure out the principles for national well-being indexes. Methodologically, our research team is the high-tech team in studying well-being.
- I am a certified life coach. One of my main tasks as a life coach is to help people get clear on their values. I find that people are often not clear on their values to begin with.

Syllabus, Part 2: Required Syllabus Statements: Go to

https://www.colorado.edu/academicaffairs/policies-customs-guidelines/required-syllabus-statements