

PHL 103: Moral Problems

July 1-26 1:00pm-4:00pm (MTWR)

Course Description:

In this course, we will explore moral controversies. Is abortion morally permissible? Is eating meat ethical? What duties do we have to act in the face of climate change? Together, we will examine and discuss what philosophers have to say about these and other contemporary moral issues and some more general problems in ethics, as well as touching on some more abstract questions about morality. As part of the course, students will also develop their abilities to think, read, and write argumentatively about philosophical issues.

Instructor: Kelley Annesley

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Office: Lattimore 537

Office hours: Tuesday 11-12, and by appointment

Textbooks:

“College Ethics,” Bob Fischer. (Abbreviated CE)

“The Ethical Life: Fundamental Readings in Ethics and Moral Problems,” Russ Shafer-Landau. 4th edition. (Abbreviated TEL)

Attendance and participation:

Given the compressed nature of our course, attendance is key. Any student who misses more than 1 full class will be likely to miss out on material necessary for success in the class. Absences can of course be excused in case of illness or emergency. If you need to miss class, please inform me as soon as possible. Full credit for attendance includes being punctual for class and punctuality when returning from breaks.

Participation in this course is weighted heavily, due to the small nature of our class, and the importance of discussion for the success of our class. Active listening, preparation for class, and participating in discussions are all required for full marks in the participation and attendance category. If you have any concerns about participating adequately in class, please feel free to contact me.

Informal assignments:

The purpose of informal assignments is to give you practice writing concisely in a philosophical style, and to help you to gather your thoughts prior to class to help facilitate class discussion. They are graded on a complete/incomplete basis—if you complete the assignment and turn it in via Blackboard before the deadline, you will receive full credit.

Respect:

I expect that we will discuss issues on which we disagree, and will have strong opinions about those disagreements. It is absolutely crucial that our disagreements are respectful. Respectful engagement with our peers includes actively listening, refraining from distracting behaviors in class, taking others seriously, and respecting each others' time.

Inclusivity:

Please know that this classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities, and that I invite you to talk with me about any concern or situation that affects your ability to complete your academic work successfully.

Content warning:

Please note that we will be discussing some controversial and potentially upsetting material as a part of this course, including, but not limited to, abortion. If you have any concerns about this content or anything else on the syllabus, please contact me as soon as possible.

Late work:

Late informal assignments and in-class writing will not be accepted, except in cases of emergency or otherwise unavoidable absences. If this applies, you must contact me in order to have the late penalty waived, and to make up the work missed in class.

For writing assignments, each day the assignment is late results in a 1/3 grade penalty. (For example, if the paper earned an A, but is turned in after the deadline, but on the day of the deadline, it will earn an A-. If the paper is two days late, it will earn a B+... etc.) If you suspect that you cannot turn in an assignment by the deadline, it is crucial that you reach out to me ahead of time to arrange an extension. Except in cases of true emergencies, it is unlikely that late penalties for work turned in after the deadline will be waived without a previously arranged extension.

Discussion leadership:

On at least one day of the course, students will volunteer to lead the discussion about one (or more!) of the articles assigned. On the day you lead discussion, be sure to be prepared to walk your classmates through the most important parts of the article, review the argument of the piece, and prepare questions to kick start our discussion of the topic. Your performance as discussion leader will be graded on your preparation for the task, your clear presentation of the main points and arguments of the piece, and the quality of your questions. Please feel free to meet with me in advance of your discussion leader day to go over any questions you may have about the material, or how to successfully lead a discussion.

Academic Honesty:

Any form of academic dishonesty is unacceptable in this course; it will not be tolerated. This includes (but is not limited to) plagiarizing by failure to include proper citations on a written work, cheating on exams/assignments, and acquiring pre-written essays. To ensure that you know what exactly will be counted as academic dishonesty, I encourage you to go to <http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/> and view the university's policy on academic integrity.

At the end of each exam and paper, the university requires you to write and sign the following U of R Honor Pledge:

"I affirm that I have not given or received any unauthorized help on this assignment, and that this work is my own."

Electronic Devices:

Devices will be allowed for **proper use** in class. You have a good sense already about what counts as proper use in class. Because this class is so small, your improper use of electronic devices will distract your classmates, and impair your ability to participate in class and understand course material. Improper use of electronics during class, especially cell phones, **will result in a deduction of your participation/attendance grade.**

I also reserve the right to instate a ban on **all** electronic devices in the case of widespread improper use. In the case of a blanket ban on devices, exceptions will be granted for those with written confirmation of need from CETL, or on the basis of individual permission granted after a conversation with me. I'm happy to talk through any questions about device use on an individual basis!

Grading scheme:

- Participation and attendance: 15%
- Quizzes, in-class writing and informal assignments: 15%
- Weekly writing assignments: 55%
 - Week 1: 10%
 - Week 2: 10%
 - Week 3: 15%
 - Week 4: 20%
- Presentation/discussion leadership: 15%

Your final grade in this class will be assigned using letter grades A-E:

95 - 100 = A	73 - 76 = C
90 - 94 = A-	70 - 72 = C-
87 - 89 = B+	67 - 69 = D+
83 - 86 = B	63 - 66 = D
80 - 82 = B-	60 - 62 = D-
77 - 79 = C+	Below 60 = E

Letter grades are converted to numerical scores using the following scheme:

A = 97	
A- = 92.5	C- = 71
B+ = 88	D+ = 68
B = 85	D = 64.5
B- = 81	D- = 61
C+ = 78	E = 58
C = 74.5	No submission = 0

Course Schedule:

Our course schedule is tentative—all readings, topics and informal assignments are subject to change. Any updates will be communicated via email and posted on Blackboard. Days with content marked TBA will be determined in accordance with student interest.

Monday, July 1: Introduction to course, philosophical argument and course content

Reading due: *College Ethics*, "Introduction."

Homework due: First Day Survey

Tuesday, July 2: Normative ethics: Consequentialism, Deontology, Virtue Ethics, Feminist Ethics

Reading due:

- "Utilitarianism," Mill in TEL.
- "The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative," Kant in TEL.
- "Nicomachean Ethics," Aristotle in TEL.
- "What is Feminist Ethics?" Lindemann in TEL.

Homework due:

Informal Assignment 1: Summarize the main ideas of utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics and feminist ethics in one to two sentences each. Which do you find the most plausible, as of now? Why? Which one do you find least plausible, as of now? Why?

Wednesday, July 3: Finish normative ethics, metaethics, writing philosophy

Reading due:

- "Moral Distinctions Not Derived From Reason," Hume in TEL.
- "Cultural Relativism," Gensler in TEL.
- "The Subjectivity of Values," Mackie in TEL.
- "Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)" Enoch in TEL.

Homework due:

Informal Assignment 2: Start collecting your thoughts on the following question: why is metaethics important? Or, why should we care about metaethics (if at all?)

****Week 1 writing assignment distributed**

Thursday, July 4: No class, university holiday

Monday, July 8: Metaethics, The Good Life, Writing Group

Reading due:

- "What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For?" Appiah in TEL.
- "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life," Wolf in TEL.
- "The Experience Machine," Nozick in TEL.

Homework due: Week 1 writing assignment due @ 11:59 pm

Tuesday, July 9: Trolley Problems and Charitable Giving

Reading due:

- "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" Singer in TEL.
- "Feeding the Hungry," Narveson in TEL.
- "The Trolley Problem," Judith Jarvis Thomson. Available via Blackboard.
- **Skim** "Double Effect, Triple Effect and the Trolley Problem," Michael Otsuka: Focus on previewing the different versions of the trolley problem. Available via Blackboard.

***Week two writing assignment distributed**

Homework due:

Informal Assignment 3: What would you do in the bystander version of the Trolley Problem? (ie. You are a bystander, and you see a train on a track heading toward five people, which it will hit and kill. You can pull a lever to change the train to another track, where it will hit and kill one person.) Why?

Wednesday, July 10: The ethical status of abortion

Reading due:

- "A Defense of Abortion," Judith Jarvis Thomson in TEL.
- "Why Abortion is Immoral," Marquis in TEL.
- "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," Foot in TEL.
- "Is Abortion a Question of Personal Morality?" Kirsch in CE.

Thursday, July 11: Continue abortion, discuss climate change/antinatalism

Reading due:

- "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," Hill in TEL.
- "It's Not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations," Sinnott-Armstrong in CE.
- Harrison, "Antinatalism, Asymmetry, and an Ethic of Prima Facie Duties." (PDF available via Blackboard.)
- Explore: <http://www.vhemt.org/>

Homework due:

Informal Assignment 4: Were you harmed or benefitted by being born? Why?

Monday, July 15: Anti-natalism, start animal ethics, writing group

Reading due:

- Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People..." in TEL
- Re-read Harrison "Antinatalism, Asymmetry, and an Ethic of Prima Facie Duties." (PDF available via Blackboard).

Homework due:

Informal Assignment 5: Is it morally permissible to eat animals? Why or why not?

What about eating or using animal products (eg. dairy, honey, leather)?

**** Week 2 writing assignment due Tuesday, July 16 @ 11:59am (by noon)**

Tuesday, July 16: Continue animal ethics/animal rights, background for IVF/PGD

Reading due:

- Frey, "Moral Standing, the Value of Lives, and Speciesism," in TEL
- "The Case for Animal Rights," Regan (available via Blackboard).

Homework due: Week 2 writing assignment due @ 11:59 am (by noon).

**** Week 3 writing assignment distributed**

Wednesday, July 17: Bioethics: IVF/PGD

Reading due:

- Bortolotti, "Do We Have an Obligation to Make Smarter Babies?" (Available via Blackboard).
- NYT article on Sperm Donors (Document available via Blackboard).
- "Implications of Prenatal Diagnosis for the Human Right to Life," Leon Kass (PDF available via Blackboard).
- "Genetics and Reproductive Risk: Can Having Children be Immoral?" Laura Purdy (Available via Blackboard).

- NYT opinion piece “The Ethical Case for Having a Child with Down Syndrome” (PDF available via Blackboard).

Homework due:

Informal assignment 6: Imagine you’re participating in IVF. Would you make decisions about what embryos to implant based on PGD? What decisions seem permissible to make? Are there some that don’t seem permissible? (ie. is sex selection impermissible but selecting embryos without Huntington’s disease permissible? If so, why is there a difference? If not, why not?)

Thursday, July 18: Gender and race: lecture on development of feminist epistemology as a case study, plus bring in Mills’ critique from “White Ignorance.”

Reading due: (Subject to change in accordance with student interest)

- “Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias,” Kelly and Roedder in CE.
- “Sexism,” Cudd and Jones in CE.
- “Trans Persons, Cisgender Persons, and Gender Identities,” Overall in CE.

Homework due: Informal Assignment 7: Should we alter our behavior if we get evidence that people in general have implicit biases, like implicit racial or implicit sexist biases? When can we blame people for having implicit bias? Is implicit bias ever non-culpable (ie. not blameworthy)?

Monday, July 22: Academic honesty, cheating and enhancement

Reading due:

- University of Rochester Academic Honesty Policy
 - U of R WSAP handout on Group Work (available via Blackboard)
- “Why is Cheating Wrong?” Bouville in CE. **Mike**
- “Enhancement and Cheating” Roache in CE.
 - “The Role of Cultural Values in Plagiarism and Higher Education,” Heckler and Forde in CE.

****Week 3 writing due Tuesday, July 23 by 11:59am**

Tuesday, July 23: Data ethics

Reading due:

- “Critical Questions in Big Data,” boyd and Crawford (available via Blackboard).
- “Ethical Aspects of Information Security and Privacy,” Brey (available via Blackboard). : focus especially on content on the right to privacy
- “Search Engine Bias and the Demise of Search Engine Utopianism,” Eric Goldman (available via Blackboard).
- Further readings TBA

**** Week 4 writing assignment distributed**

Wednesday, July 24: Gun Control and Free Speech (topic selected in accordance with student interest)

- “Why Gun ‘Control’ Is Not Enough,” McMahan in TEL.
- “Is There A Right to Own a Gun?” Huemer in TEL.
- “The Coddling of the American Mind,” Lukianoff and Haidt in CE.
- “Campus Speech Restrictions,” Martin Golding in CE.
- “Why No-Platforming is Sometimes a Justified Position,” Neil Levy (available via Blackboard)

Informal Assignment 8: Is there any value in allowing campus speakers who have views most people find abhorrent (racist, homophobic, etc)? Is this different than speakers who, for example, think that trans women aren't women in certain senses (eg. TERFs), or that psychological realities mean that women and men should be treated differently?

Thursday, July 25: Organ Markets and Legalizing Drugs (topic selected in accordance with student interests)

"Is it ethical to purchase human organs?" Samuel Kerstein (available via Blackboard)

"Ethicists, philosophers discuss selling of human organs." (available via Blackboard)

"An Argument for Drug Prohibition," de Marneffe in CE.

"Drug Prohibition is Both Wrong and Unworkable," Machan in CE.

****Week 4 Writing Assignment due Saturday, July 27 by 9am**