

Philosophy 1320: Ethics and Society

Academic Semester/Term: Spring 2017

Course description (from catalog): Study of ethics, its recent focus on social problems and new fields of inquiry, including environmental ethics, ethics in business, professions, technology and sport. Also such global issues as poverty, minority rights, and stem cell research. Emphasis on development and application of principles of critical thinking and moral reasoning.

Instructor: Anthony Cross

Course section number, classroom & meeting time: 1320.028 MW 2:00 pm - 3:20 pm, ED 04005

Instructor's Office: 220 Derrick Hall

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Office hours: MW 11am-1:30pm, 220 Derrick Hall, or by appointment

General Education Core Curriculum (Code 040)

Language, Philosophy and Culture Component Outcomes

Students will explore behavior and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, and events, examining their impact on the individual, society, and culture.

Core Objectives/Competencies Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking:** Students will demonstrate creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
- **Communication:** Students will effectively develop, interpret and express ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
- **Social Responsibility:** Students will demonstrate intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
- **Personal Responsibility:** Students will relate choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

Departmental Learning Outcomes for PHIL 1320:

1. After completion of PHIL 1320, students will be able to demonstrate improvement in critical thinking skills.
2. After completion of PHIL 1320, students will be able to demonstrate improvement in their understanding of the major approaches to ethics and their application to contemporary moral problems in society.

Course Description

This course presents a broad introduction to ethical theory. Our goal will be to develop a toolkit for thinking clearly and systematically about contemporary ethical issues. We'll do this by reading and reflecting on a number of historical and contemporary works in moral philosophy, with the goal of using them to learn how to *do* some moral philosophy ourselves.

We begin by tackling some foundational questions about the status of morality: Is there a fact of the matter about what's right or wrong? Is morality dependent on God? Do different cultures have different and incompatible moralities? Is there any reason to be moral? Answering these questions will help us to get clearer on what it is that we're investigating when we do moral philosophy.

We'll then turn to the substance of morality. What does morality require of us? We'll try to give a systematic answer in the form of a *moral theory* which provides us with a framework for determining which actions are morally right or wrong in particular situations. We'll look at the three most prominent moral theories—utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics—and gauge the strengths and weakness of each approach.

Finally, we'll apply these moral theories to help us determine what's morally appropriate in particular circumstances: What are our moral obligations as citizens? Do we have a duty to obey the law? Is killing always morally wrong—even in war, or in cases of voluntary euthanasia? Is it always wrong to have an abortion? What about eating meat? We'll aim to get clearer on these substantive issues while at the same time testing our more general moral theories.

Along the way, we'll also work to develop some basic methodological skills for doing philosophy generally: we'll learn to reconstruct, analyze, and evaluate philosophical arguments; to discuss difficult philosophical questions with our peers; and to craft our own arguments through philosophical writing.

Texts

There is one required textbook for the course:

- Anthony Weston. *A Practical Companion to Ethics*, 4th Edition. Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780199730582

Additional readings will be posted on TRACS.

Course Expectations

You will complete a set of short writing assignments, two midterm exams, and a final exam. Final grades will be calculated according to the following distribution:

1. Short Writing Assignments- 30%
2. Midterm Exam - 15%
3. Paper - 20%
4. Final Exam - 25%
5. Participation - 10%

Readings

You are responsible for completing course readings *before* coming to class. You should also plan to have a copy of the readings with you in class—either the NITP, or a printout of the readings posted on TRACS—as we will often discuss specific passages of the readings in detail. The readings are generally quite difficult; be sure to give yourself plenty of time to complete them.

Short Writing Assignments

Each week, I will post a worksheet containing several questions concerning the week's readings on TRACS. These will usually be straightforward questions about content, asking you to (for example) identify the main claims of a philosophical argument, explain some aspect of the reading in your own words, or provide an example illustrating some distinction. Completing each worksheet should require about a page of writing. You will be responsible for completing **eight** of these worksheets; you will upload your completed responses via TRACS. (You do not need to submit a physical copy.) The worksheets will be due each Sunday before midnight. The responses will not be graded individually; completing eight will result in an A; seven an A-; six a B+; and so on. Completing no responses will result in an F. Late assignments and email submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances. Turning in anything other than your own good-faith attempt to answer the questions will earn an F for the category (and may result in further disciplinary action).

Paper

You will complete one 3-5 page paper in response to one of a set of prompts that I will distribute via the course website. Papers are to be submitted electronically through TRACS; you do not need to submit a physical copy. Unexcused late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day late. Papers will be graded according to a rubric that I will distribute in class.

Midterm and final exam

Both the midterm and final exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, short-answer questions and/or mini-essays. The midterm exam will be an in-class exam, held on **02/13/17**. The final exam will be held on **05/08/17** from **2-4:30PM**.

Participation

Your participation grade will be determined by your attendance and participation in class. I will take attendance every class via a sign-in sheet. Attendance is mandatory; however, you are each allowed two no-questions-asked absences per semester. Each unexcused absence *beyond the second absence* will result in a letter-grade deduction from your participation grade. If for some legitimate reason you cannot attend class, please notify me about it as soon as possible; you will be able to make up your attendance requirement by e.g. attending office hours. (You may be asked to provide appropriate documentation of your reason for missing class.)

Course Policies

Communication

The best way to reach me is by email at the address listed on the first page of this syllabus. Please be sure to include your course number and section in the subject line of your email. I will do my best to respond to all student emails within 48 hours of receipt; if I have not acknowledged your email within 48 hours of your sending it, please follow up. You can also meet with me in person during office hours at the time listed on the first page of the syllabus, or by appointment.

Classroom Civility

In this course, we'll be discussing a range of difficult and often controversial materials; as partners in learning, our success will depend on a shared and ongoing commitment to classroom civility. This means that all of our behavior should demonstrate respect and tolerance both for one another, and for the shared project of philosophical inquiry. Please refrain from behavior that is disruptive or disrespectful.

Religious Holy Days

If you must miss class or an examination for a religious holy day, please notify me in writing prior to your absence. You will be responsible for making up any material or assignments that you've missed within a reasonable time window. The full statement of university policy is available on-line: <http://www.txstate.edu/effective/UPPS/UPPS-02-06-01.HTML>

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by Texas State's Honor Code. This means that any work you submit in this class must be your own—using other people's ideas or words (even if you make changes to them) without giving them credit is a violation of the code and may lead to severe punishment, including failing either the assignment or the course. It is your responsibility to know precisely what counts as a violation of the Honor Code. If you are unsure whether some behavior violates the Code, please read the Code. If you are still unsure, ask me. The full Honor Code can be found here: <http://www.txstate.edu/honorcodecouncil/Academic-Integrity.html> You may also find the following guide to avoiding plagiarism helpful: <http://guides.library.txstate.edu/c.php?g=184035&p=1215349>

Students with Disabilities

Your well-being and success in this course is important to me. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class or complete course requirements, please notify me as soon as possible. To receive academic accommodations, you must be appropriately registered with the Office of Disability Services. You can contact the ODS by phone at (512) 245-3451 or via their website: <http://www.ods.txstate.edu/>

Student Resources

Philosophy can be challenging. Many of the readings for this course are difficult; they may involve dense argumentation and unfamiliar terminology. Philosophical writing may be quite different from the writing you've done previously. I'd encourage you to consult the glossary in NITP, as well as the section titled "Some Guidelines for Writing Philosophy Papers." I have also posted several philosophy-specific online resources on TRACS. Beyond this, I encourage you to make use of the following university academic resources:

- Student Learning and Assistance Center (SLAC) - SLAC is an academic support program for all Texas State students. They provide tutoring services (individual, group, online), supplemental Instruction, learning and study skills workshops, and learning specialist consultations free of charge. <http://www.txstate.edu/slac/>
- The Writing Center can work with you to improve your writing skills and help you become a better editor of your own papers. To learn more, visit their website: <http://www.writingcenter.txstate.edu/>

Course Outline

Week 1: Course Introduction

01/18/17 Course introduction; syllabus overview. *Reading:* None.

Unit 1: Foundational Questions

Week 2: Introduction; Objectivity in Ethics

01/23/17 An Introduction to ethics and critical thinking. *Reading:* Weston, ch. 1, "Getting Started."

01/25/17 Is there a fact of the matter about what's right and wrong? *Reading:* David Enoch, "Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)".

Week 3: Ethical Reasoning; Ethics and Religion

- 01/30/17** Ethical reasoning and the question of authority. *Reading:* Weston, ch. 2, "Beyond Authority"
02/01/17 Does morality depend on God? *Reading:* Philip Quinn, "God and Morality."

Week 4: Relativism and Egoism

- 02/06/17** Is morality culturally relative? *Reading:* James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism."
02/08/17 Why be moral? The Challenge of Egoism. *Reading:* Plato, "The Ring of Gyges" from *Republic*.

Unit 2: Ethical Theories

Week 5: Midterm; Intro to Ethical Theory

- 02/13/17** **MIDTERM 1**
02/15/17 Introduction to Ethical Theory. *Reading:* Weston, ch. 3, "Ethical Theories"

Week 6: Ethical Theory, pt. 1

- 02/20/17** Utilitarianism. *Reading:* John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" Chs. 2, 4;
02/22/17 Kantian Ethics. *Reading:* Russ Shafer-Landau, "The Kantian Perspective: Justice and Fairness."

Week 7: Ethical Theories, pt. 2

- 02/27/17** Kantian Ethics, cont. *Reading:* Russ Shafer-Landau, "The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect."
03/01/17 Virtue and the Good Life. *Reading:* Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics."

Unit 3: Applications

Week 8: Introduction; Civil Disobedience

- 03/06/17** Introduction: Ethical Problem Solving. *Reading:* Weston, ch. 4, "When Values Clash"
03/08/17 The Ethics of Civil Disobedience. *Reading:* Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Week 9: The War on Drugs, Mass Incarceration, and Punishment

- 03/20/17** Moral Justifications for Punishment. *Reading:* Kant, Stephen Nathanson, "An Eye for an Eye?"
03/22/17 The War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration. *Reading:* Michael Huemer, "America's Unjust Drug War"; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, ch. 5.

Week 10: Global Poverty

- 03/27/17** What should we do about global poverty? *Reading:* Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality,"
03/29/17 Paper writing workshop. *Reading:* None.

Week 11: War, Killing, and Torture

- 04/03/17** War and Civilian Death. *Reading:* Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre."
04/05/17 The Morality of Torture. *Reading:* Alan Dershowitz, "Should the Ticking Bomb Terrorist Be Tortured?"
04/09/17 **PAPER DUE**

Week 12: Euthanasia and Abortion

- 04/10/17** Euthanasia. *Reading:* James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia."
04/12/17 Against Abortion. *Reading:* Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

Week 13: Abortion (cont.); Obligations to Animals

- 04/17/17** Abortion, cont. *Reading:* Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
04/19/17 What obligations do we have to animals? *Reading:* Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases."

Week 14: Sex and Sexuality

- 04/24/17** Homosexuality. *Reading:* John Corvino, "Why Shouldn't Tommy and Jim Have Sex? A Defense of Homosexuality."
04/26/17 Sex and Consent. *Reading:* Mappes, "Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person"

Week 15: Course Wrap-up

- 05/01/17** Course Wrap-up. *Reading:* No additional reading.
05/08/17 **FINAL EXAM 2-4:30PM**