

Contemporary Moral Problems

Phil 102: Winter 2013

Instructor: Elizabeth Scarbrough
 Class Times: M-F 3:30-5:40 pm, SAV 130
 Instructor Office Hours: Tues & Wednesdays 2:30-3:30 pm, SAV 378
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Course Description

In this course we will investigate a number of controversial moral issues from a philosophical perspective. The goals of the course are three-fold: (1) to introduce students to the fundamentals of philosophical thinking, (2) to familiarize students with several basic ethical theories, and (3) to engage students in critical reflection about a number of contemporary moral problems, including civil disobedience, animal rights, abortion, capitol punishment, and economic justice. Although the readings in this course are quite difficult and require in-depth knowledge of the English language, no prerequisite course in philosophy is required.

Required Textbook:

- MacKinnon, Barbara. *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*. Wadsworth Publishing, 7th Edition. (Bring your book to class every day!)
- Additional required readings will be available electronically via **canvas** or on the web

The readings are listed by the class dates when we will begin discussing them; you should read the assigned reading **prior** to coming to class that day.

Schedule of Topics and Reading:

Week 1: Introduction to Moral Problems, Philosophical Reasoning, Civil Disobedience

Monday	June 24	Introduction to the Course, no assigned readings, Making Good Arguments Day 1, <i>Handouts</i>
Tuesday	June 25	<i>Chapter 1: Why Study Ethics?</i> (p. 1-12), <i>Crito</i> (http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/crito.html)
Wednesday	June 26	" <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> ," Martin Luther King Jr, p. 274-277 / Start Movie Day: BLACK POWER MIX TAPE ¹ (SA#1 due midnight)
Thursday	June 27	Movie Day: BLACK POWER MIX TAPE Please read an article about Stokely Carmichael's "Black Power" Speech (29 October 1966) found here: http://archive.vod.umd.edu/civil/carmichael1966int.htm ²
Friday	June 28	Chapter 2: Ethical Relativism, p. 20-27 Recommended Reading: " <i>The Challenges of Cultural Relativism</i> ," James Rachels (http://www.nd.edu/~bgoehrin/literature/Rachels.html) DEBATE DAY! CASES WILL BE GIVEN OUT IN CLASS (SA#2 due midnight)

*Skills Assignment #1: Extracting Arguments from Philosophical texts, *Crito*³

**Skills Assignment #2: Writing an introduction to a paper (topic: cultural relativism)

+Writing topics: *Crito* vs. *MLK*⁴

¹ Interested in a history of the Black Panther Party in Seattle? http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/Panthers1_schaefer.htm

² Listen to the actual speech here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWsgT67-RM4>

Read a transcript of the speech here: <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/carmichael-black-power-speech-text/>

³ Examine the argument that Socrates gives in the *Crito* beginning at 48c in which he considers the question "whether I ought or ought not to try to escape without the consent of the Athenians."

In this assignment, state the following:

1. What are the premises that Socrates and his interlocutor accept as basic to his argument?
2. What is the argument? State the main points and how they rely upon the premises.
3. What is the conclusion? Does it follow from the premises?

Week 2

Monday	June 30	Chapter 3: Egoism, p. 32—39 Recommended reading: “ <i>Ethical Egoism</i> ” Joel Feinberg (pdf) Hobbes, “The Leviathan,” p. 97-102
Tuesday	July 1	Bentham “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” p. 62-67, Chapter 4: Utilitarianism, p. 52-62
Wednesday	July 2	“Utilitarianism” Mill, p. 67-73 “ <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i> ” Peter Singer, p. 469-476 (SA#3 Due at midnight)
Thursday	July 3	Chapter 5: Kant’s Moral Theory, p. 74-83 / DEBATE DAY! CASES WILL BE GIVEN OUT IN CLASS
Friday	July 4	NO SCHOOL - HOLIDAY

**Skills Assignment #3: exegesis (topic: utilitarianism)

+Writing topic: James Rachels on Cultural Relativism

+Writing topic: *The Dark Knight* and Utilitarianism (the ferry scene). What would a Kantian versus a Utilitarian say about the following dilemma:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEqfzr-5dBY>

Week 3

Monday	July 7	Kant “Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals” p. 85-95 O’Neill “Kantian Approaches to Famine Relief” (pdf) Recommended Reading: “ <i>Obligation to Resist Oppression</i> ” Carol Hay (pdf)
Tuesday	July 8	Chapter 16: Animal Rights, p. 375-384, “ <i>Consider the Lobster</i> ” David Foster Wallace ⁵ http://www.gourmet.com/magazine/2000s/2004/08/consider_the_lobster
Wednesday	July 9	Singer “All Animals are Equal” p. 385-393 / Movie: Earthling Suggested Reading: SEP article on “The Moral Status of Animals” http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-animal/ (SA#4 due at midnight)
Thursday	July 10	Virtue Ethics, 124-127, Aristotle “The Nicomachean Ethics” p. 128-134
Friday	July 11	“ <i>Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of the Other Animals</i> ” Rosalind Hursthouse (pdf) DEBATE DAY! CASES WILL BE GIVEN OUT IN CLASS (SA#5 due at midnight)

+Writing topic: “Obligation to Resist Oppression”

+Writing topic: “The Cove” (2009) / Emotional appeals in ethic

**Skills Assignment #4: Writing a positive argument (Kantianism)

**Skills Assignment #5: Objections and Responses (topic: Singer and Animal Rights)

Week 4

Monday	July 14	Chapter 11, p. 196-208 “ <i>A Defense of Abortion</i> ” Judith Jarvis Thomson, p. 186-196
Tuesday	July 15	“Virtue Theory and Abortion” Hursthouse (pdf)
Wednesday	July 16	“ <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i> ” Don Marquis, p. 197-205 Chapter 14: Legal Punishment, p 312-323

⁴ In *Crito* Socrates presents a certain account of political obligation, one in which civil disobedience is rarely (if ever) permitted. First, explain Socrates’ account. Second, are there cases where Socrates would permit civil disobedience? (In your answer, please provide a definition of civil disobedience.) Additionally, when does MLK allow for civil disobedience? Finally, who has the stronger argument, MLK or Socrates, and why?

⁵ Please be sure to read the footnotes as well!

		(SA#6 Due Midnight)
Thursday	July 17	“How to Argue about the Death Penalty” Hugo Bedau, p. 331-338 “ <i>The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense</i> ” Ernest Van Den Haag, p. 333-338
Friday	July 18	“ <i>Marxism and Retributivism</i> ” Jeffrie Murphy (PDF) (SA #7 Due Midnight)

**Skills assignment #6: Writing a conclusion (abortion)

**Skills assignment #7: Practice Peer review paper

+Writing topic: Discuss either case 1 or case 2 on pgs. 228-229 of your text (topic: abortion)

+Writing topic: “Vera Drake” (2004)

Week 5

Monday	July 21	Catch-up day death penalty. No additional reading.
Tuesday	July 22	PEER REVIEW PAPER DAY
Wednesday	July 23	LAST DAY OF CLASS / IN-CLASS EXAM (final writing response papers due)
Thursday	July 24	
Friday	July 25	FINAL PAPERS DUE

*Writing topic: “Into the Abyss” (2011)

*Writing topic: Discuss case 2 on page 311. Should tax dollars be spent funding public museums, public art, the opera, etc.?

GRADING PROCEDURES:

Participation (60 points)

-20 points are allocated toward active engagement in the class.

I expect students to be actively participating in class (which includes active listening). You can participate in a number of ways: asking good questions in class, participating in in-class assignments, coming to office hours, etc. The use of cell phones in class is strictly forbidden and laptop computers may only be used for academic purposes. Violating this “No surfing. No texting.” policy may result in a lowered participation grade.

-25 points are allocated toward in-class quizzes. There will be a total of 6 in-class quizzes, 5 points each – your lowest grade will be dropped. The quizzes will not be announced in advance, and cannot be made-up.

-15 points toward participation in our weekly debates (as separate from your regular participation grade)

Reading Reflection (20 points each, 100 points total)

There will be five reading response papers required for this class. Each paper should be roughly a page to a page and a half long and will be posted on go-post for your fellow classmates to read. These paper topics will give you a chance to apply the ethical concepts you are learning to real-world problems. Topics are listed on your syllabus and will be spelled out in more detail during class. Each week, except the first week of class, there will be opportunities to write a reflection paper. These papers will be due by Sunday at 9 p.m. the week they are assigned. Many of these papers will require you to read an additional article or do some additional research (such as internet research, watching a movie, etc).

Skills Assignments (10 points each, 70 points total)

There are a total of 7 writing skills assignments in this course. All 7 are mandatory and are designed to give you the necessary skills to write your final paper. The skills assignments are listed on your syllabus, but will be explained in more depth during class.

The skills assignments are due, via go-post, by 9 p.m. the following Monday after they have been assigned. For instance, your first writing skills assignment on dilemmas will be due Monday January 14th at 9 p.m. Additionally, you are required to read your fellow classmate's assignments and vote (via e-mail) on which of your classmates most successfully completed the assignment.

Paper (100 points draft, 15 points peer review, 15 points final paper revisions)

You will be required to write one short paper (3-4 pages). Your original paper draft is worth 100 points. You will be required to provide comments on another paper (peer review). You will be given 15 points for your peer review.

Final Exam

There will be a final exam the last day of class worth 40 points. It will consist of a mixture of short answer essay questions and multiple choice questions.

Total Possible Points: 400

Your total points will equal your final grade (e.g. 372 points will correspond to a 3.7)

* I do not intend to curve the grades for this course, but I will, at my discretion, give a bonus of .1 to the final decimal grade of those students who show significant improvement over the course of the term.

CLASS POLICIES

UW Policy on Workload: The official University of Washington policy for a five credit course is that for every hour of class time, students are required to do two hours of work outside of the class. For this class, students are expected to do *2 hours of work outside of class, every day for five days a week.*

Make-Ups:

Quizzes– You cannot make up quizzes for any reason.

Written Assignments – An extension for the short paper or a make-up for the final may be granted for the exam in the event of a documented emergency. Documented emergencies include (a) serious illness confirmed with a doctor's note and (b) death in the family.

Family vacations, weddings, job interviews, hangovers, mild colds, etc. are not emergencies.

Important Note about Reading Assignment Length: You will notice that your reading assignments are shorter in length than those assigned in other courses. This is because philosophical writing is dense, complicated, and challenging. If you are having a hard time with the reading, please come and talk to me during office hours. I recommend you stay away from the internet when looking for help with difficult texts; the internet tends to be more confusing and is often wrong.

Treating others with respect: The issues that we will discuss are sometimes divisive and can elicit strong responses. It is important to remember that this class is not about "being right," but rather about exploring the complexities of various contemporary moral problems. Hence, it is expected that we all approach the readings, discussions, and each other with **respect, openness, and a willingness to learn.**

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY: INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS*

* Adapted from material prepared by the UW Department of History and used with permission.

COURSES, GRADING, ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the use of creations, ideas or words of publicly available work without formally acknowledging the author or source through appropriate use of quotation marks, references, and the like. Plagiarizing is presenting someone else's work as one's own original work or thought. This constitutes plagiarism whether it is intentional or unintentional. The University of Washington takes plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism may lead to disciplinary action by the University against the student who submitted the work. Any student who is uncertain whether his or her use of the work of others constitutes plagiarism should consult the course instructor for guidance before formally submitting the course work involved. (*Sources: UW Graduate School Style Manual; UW Bothell Catalog; UW Student Conduct Code*)⁶

Incompletes

An incomplete is given only when the student has been in attendance and has done satisfactory work until within two weeks of the end of the quarter and has furnished proof satisfactory to the instructor that the work cannot be completed because of illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control. (*Source: UW General Catalog Online, "Student Guide/Grading"*)

Grade Appeal Procedure

A student who believes he or she has been improperly graded must first discuss the matter with the instructor. If the student is not satisfied with the instructor's explanation, the student may submit a written appeal to the chair of the Department of Philosophy with a copy of the appeal also sent to the instructor. The chair consults with the instructor to ensure that the evaluation of the student's performance has not been arbitrary or capricious. Should the chair believe the instructor's conduct to be arbitrary or capricious and the instructor declines to revise the grade, the chair, with the approval of the voting members of his or her faculty, shall appoint an appropriate member, or members, of the faculty of the Department of Philosophy to evaluate the performance of the student and assign a grade. The Dean and Provost should be informed of this action. Once a student submits a written appeal, this document and all subsequent actions on this appeal are recorded in written form for deposit in a School file. (*Source: UW General Catalog Online, "Student Guide/Grading"*)

Concerns About a Course, an Instructor, or a Teaching Assistant

If you have any concerns about a Philosophy course or your instructor, please see the instructor about these concerns as soon as possible. If you are not comfortable talking with the instructor or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the chair of the program offering the course (names available from the Department of Philosophy, 361 Savery Hall). For your reference, these procedures are posted on a Philosophy bulletin board outside the Department of Philosophy main office on the 3rd floor of Savery Hall.

POLICIES, RULES, RESOURCES

Equal Opportunity

The University of Washington reaffirms its policy of equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a

⁶ Elizabeth: I take academic honesty extremely seriously and will pursue sanctions against any student(s) caught engaging in any form of academic misconduct, in accordance with the University of Washington Student Conduct Code, which can be found at:

<http://www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html#020> You can find additional information about what constitutes plagiarism/academic dishonesty at:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm#plagiarism>. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me. Ignorance of policies regarding academic misconduct does not constitute a legitimate excuse for inappropriate behavior (*Ignorantia legis non excusat!*).

disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran in accordance with University of Washington policy and applicable federal and state statutes and regulations.

Disability Accommodation

The University of Washington is committed to providing access, equal opportunity and reasonable accommodation in its services, programs, activities, education and employment for individuals with disabilities. For information or to request disability accommodation contact: Disabled Students Services (Seattle campus) at (206) 543-8924/V, (206) 543-8925/TTY, (206) 616-8379/Fax, or e-mail at uwdss@u.washington.edu; Bothell Student Affairs at (425) 352-5000/V; (425) 352-5303/TTY, (425) 352-5335/Fax, or e-mail at uwbothel@u.washington.edu; Tacoma Student Services at (253) 552-4000/V, (253) 552-4413/TTY, (253) 552-4414/Fax.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as the use of one's authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to punish another for his or her refusal, or as the creation by a member of the University community of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or educational environment through verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. If you believe that you are being harassed, seek help—the earlier the better. You may speak with your instructor, your teaching assistant, the undergraduate advisor (363 Savery Hall), graduate program assistant (366 Savery Hall), or the chair of the Philosophy Department (364 Savery Hall). In addition, you should be aware that the University has designated special people to help you. They are: University Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Sexual Harassment (for complaints involving faculty members and teaching assistants) Susan Neff, 301 Student Union (HUB), 543-6028; and the University Complaint Investigation and Resolution Office, 616-2028. (*Sources: UW Graduate School, CIDR, Office of the President*)

Office of Scholarly Integrity

The Office of Scholarly Integrity is housed in the Office of the Vice-Provost. The Office of Scholarly Integrity assumes responsibility for investigating and resolving allegations of scientific and scholarly misconduct by faculty, students, and staff of the University of Washington. The Office of Scholarly Integrity coordinates, in consultation and cooperation with the Schools and Colleges, inquiries and investigations into allegations of scientific and scholarly misconduct. The Office of Scholarly Integrity is responsible for compliance with reporting requirements established by various Federal and other funding agencies in matters of scientific or scholarly misconduct. The Office of Scholarly Integrity maintains all records resulting from inquiries and investigations of such allegations. University rules (Handbook, Vol. II, Section 25-51, Executive Order #61) define scientific and scholarly misconduct to include the following forms of inappropriate activities: intentional misrepresentation of credentials; falsification of data; plagiarism; abuse of confidentiality; deliberate violation of regulations applicable to research. Students can report cases of scientific or scholarly misconduct either to the Office of Scholarly Integrity, to their faculty adviser, or the department chair. The student should report such problems to whomever he or she feels most comfortable. (*Sources: UW web page (<http://www.grad.washington.edu/OSI/osi.htm>); minutes of Grad School Executive Staff and Division Heads meeting, 7/23/98*)