

Contemporary Moral Problems
Phil 118 (22252941)
Spring 2014, Central Michigan University



Instructor: Dr. Aaron M. Griffith

Day/Time: Monday/Wednesday/Friday 1:00pm – 1:50pm

Classroom: Anspach 167

Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 9:00am – 10:00am; Friday 2:00pm – 3:00pm; by appointment

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Course Description:

Ethics is the field of philosophy that deals with the nature of right and wrong, good and evil, moral obligation, justice, value, and happiness. In this course we will be considering the major ethical theories of the western philosophical tradition and the application of these theories to topics such as hate speech, racism, cloning, extreme poverty, and animal rights among others. If issues like these keep you up at night, then this course is for you! If not, this course will still give you the opportunity to think about some really interesting ideas and improve your reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills.

Course Objectives and Assessment:

Course Objective 1: Develop the ability to comprehend, analyze, and scrutinize philosophical texts. Relevant Assessment: Course readings, in-class quizzes, discussions/group work, and tests.

Course Objective 2: Demonstrate skill in ethical reasoning, problem-solving, and using relevant ethical principles. Relevant Assessment: In-class discussions/group work, in-class debate, and assigned essays.

Course Objective 3: Develop skills in writing clearly and precisely. Relevant Assessment: In-class writing assignments and assigned essays.

Course Objective 4: Learn to apply the critical skills gained in this course to one's life; learn to identify one's ethical commitments and carefully consider one's reasons for those commitments. Relevant Assessment: Assigned, essays, and in-class writing/discussion/group work.

Course Objective 5: Learn to engage in charitable and rigorous dialogue with the classroom community. Relevant Assessment: In-class debates, discussion, and group work.

Required Textbook:

Disputed Moral Issues: A Reader. 2nd Edition, Mark Timmons, ed. Oxford University Press.

Requirements:

Your grade will be based on the following factors:

- (1) Attendance (5%)
 - Attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken at random points during the semester. More than 5 documented absences will result in a 0 for the attendance grade; more than 8 documented absences will result in 1/3 of a letter grade off of your overall grade; more than 10 absences will result in your failing the course. Please be on time to class. But if you are late to class, please enter the room quietly and unobtrusively.
- (2) Homework, In-class assignments, and Quizzes (5%)
 - Periodic homework, in-class assignments, and quizzes will be given throughout the semester.
- (3) Presentation (10%)
 - You and your group will be responsible for presenting one of the assigned papers during the semester.
- (4) Debate (5%)
 - There will be two debates held in class during the semester. You will be a participant in one debate and a judge for the other. Your grade for the debate will be based on the quality of your prepared arguments and responses as well as your cooperation in your group.
- (5) Two In-class Exams (15% and 15% respectively)
 - Two tests will be given in class and contain combination of multiple choice and true/false questions based on course readings and discussion.
- (6) Two Papers (20% and 25% respectively)
 - The first paper will be 3 pages long and the second will be 5 pages long. Each paper will be based on a prompt given in class. **You are required to turn in both a hard copy in class and an electronic copy on Black Board.**

Grading Scale:

A: 90-100 (90-93: A-, 93.5-100: A)
B: 80-89 (80-83: B-, 83.5-86: B, 86.5-89: B+)
C: 70-79 (70-73: C-, 73.5-76: C, 76.5-79: C+)
D: 60-69 (60-63: D-, 63.5-66: D, 66.5-69: D+)
E: 0-59

Of Special Note:

Missed Tests:

Make up or alternative tests will not be granted without documented proof of either (a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty. If you miss a test and do not have documented proof of these cases, you will receive a 0 (zero) as your score. (Alternate tests should be scheduled ahead of time for reasons (c) through (e).)

Papers:

Papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late. I am happy to help you get an early start on your written assignments. You are responsible for backing up texts composed on a computer, and failures of software or hardware are not acceptable reasons for a late assignment. I highly recommend using Dropbox to back up your files: <http://www.dropbox.com/>. All assignments written outside of class *must* be typed and in proper format: Times New Roman, double space, 12pt font, 1-inch margins.

If you do not understand why you received the grade you did, please come see me. Under no conditions will your grade be lowered if you do come see me to discuss a grade you received. **However, if you do want clarification you must submit to me in writing your question or concern before we meet in person.**

I also encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources on campus. The **Writing Center** in Park Library offers free feedback on your written work, including help with drafting, organizing, and editing your assignments. Contact them by email at writcent@cmich.edu or submit your work online at <http://global.cmich.edu/writingcenter/submission/>.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a serious matter and will be handled by the appropriate authorities. According to official CMU policy, "Plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of another in your research without properly acknowledging the source. If you use the work of someone else and **either knowingly or inadvertently** claim it as your own creation you are committing an act of plagiarism." Turning in any work which is not your own and not properly acknowledged as such will result in a recommendation for failure in the course and subject you to further action by the university. Please review the university policy on academic dishonesty and speak to me if you have questions. See: <https://www.cmich.edu/copyright/usage/Pages/Plagiarism.aspx>

Class Behavior:

You are responsible for being prepared for each class session, which means having carefully read the assignment for each day of class and thought of questions you would like to discuss. You are responsible for all material covered in both lecture and the required readings.

I ask that all members of the class conduct themselves in a respectful manner. Respect for others takes a number of forms in this class, and in academic life generally. In the first place, it means that we need to be sensitive to how our behavior in class affects others. For example, I ask that students be conscientious about how your use of technology affects others in class. Take conversations and phone calls outside. Please do not text, chat online, or surf the net in class. If your behavior becomes problematic or disruptive, I will ask you to leave. I ask that you have intellectual respect for others, as well. This means that if you disagree with a position that

someone holds, you should assume that the person is at least as smart as you are, and that the person probably has good reasons for thinking as he or she does. Your job is to be a good listener and exchange ideas, not to attack and degrade others.

Students with Disabilities:

This class complies with CMU policies on disabilities, which states that “CMU provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodations to participate in educational programs, activities or services. Students with disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with the Office of Student Disability Services (120 Park Library, telephone 989-774-3018, TDD #2568), and then contact the professor as soon as possible.” You can contact SDS by email as well: sds@cmich.edu.

Additional Resources:

Not all resources (especially those online) are created equal! You will not need to read or research any other material than the required readings to succeed in this course. However, you may be interested in pursuing our topics further. In addition to the optional readings I will provide on our course website, I recommend two websites in particular:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.plato.stanford.edu/

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.iep.utm.edu/

Reading Schedule:

The following schedule is may be *amended* during the course of the semester.

Unless otherwise indicated by a designation of “PDF”, all readings are in the Timmons text. PDF readings are available from the course web page.

Week	Date	Readings	Assignments
1	1/13	INTRODUCTION Syllabus; Diagnostic on Topics	
	1/15	Introduction to Philosophy	
	1/17	Introduction to Moral Theory A Moral Theory Primer, pp. 1-6.	
2	1/20	MORAL THEORY NO CLASS MLK DAY	
	1/22	Consequentialism, pp. 6-11.	
	1/24	Kantian Moral Theory, pp. 15-20.	

3	1/27	Natural Law Theory, pp. 12-15. Rights-Based Moral Theory, pp. 20-25.	
	1/29	Virtue Ethics, pp. 25-26.	
	1/31	Ethics of Prima Facie Duty, pp. 27-29.	
4	2/3	Coping with Many Moral Theories, pp. 29-33. Rachels, (PDF on BB)	
	2/5	Review	
	2/7	TEST #1	TEST #1 (2/7)
5		APPLIED ETHICS <i>The Ethical Treatment of Animals</i>	
	2/10	Introduction; Matheny, pp. 330-341.	
	2/12	Regan, pp. 342-348.	
	2/14	Cohen, pp. 348-355.	
6	2/17	Curnutt, pp. 362-371. <i>Racism and Reparation</i>	
	2/19	Lawrence III, pp.	
	2/21	Philips, pp. 252-261.	PAPER #1 DUE (2/21)
7	2/24	Corelett, pp. 262-273.	
	2/26	Pojman, pp. 274-282. <i>War, Terrorism, and Torture</i>	Presentation Group 1 (2/26)
	2/28	Wasserstrom; Khatchadourian, pp. 512-523.	Presentation Group 2 (2/28)
8	3/3	Walzer, pp. 524-530.	
	3/5	Shue, pp. 540-549.	Presentation Group 3 (3/3)
	3/7	Dershowitz, pp. 549-559.	

	3/10	SPRING BREAK	
	3/12	SPRING BREAK	
	3/14	SPRING BREAK	
9	3/17	<i>Cloning and Genetic Enhancement</i> Kass, pp. 437-446.	Presentation Group 4 (3/17)
	3/19	Pence, pp. 446-454.	
	3/21	Sandel, pp. 455-463.	
10	3/24	Caplan, pp. 463-470. <i>Performance Enhancing Drugs in Sports</i>	Presentation Group 5 (3/24)
	3/26	Ryan (PDF on BB)	
	3/28	Petersen (PDF on BB)	
11	3/31	Movie, <i>Gattaca</i>	
	4/2	Movie, <i>Gattaca</i>	
	4/4	Movie, <i>Gattaca</i>	
12	4/7	<i>World Hunger and Poverty</i> Hardin, pp. 565-570.	Presentation Group 6 (4/7) PAPER #2 DUE (4/11)
	4/9	Singer, pp. 571-585.	
	4/11	Arthur, pp. 585-593.	
13	4/14	<i>The Environment, Consumption, and Global Warming</i> Baxter; Leopold, pp. 614-624.	Presentation Group 7 (4/14)
	4/16	NO CLASS	
	4/18	NO CLASS	
14	4/21	Sinnott-Armstrong, pp. 642-657.	Presentation Group 8 (4/21)
	4/23	Lomborg, pp. 658-663.	

	4/25	Debate Prep.	
15	4/28	Debate 1	DEBATE: Team 1 vs. Team 2 (4/28)
	4/30	Debate 2	DEBATE: Team 3 vs. Team 4 (4/30)
	5/2	NO CLASS	
16	5/5	FINALS WEEK	TEST #2 (5/7 12:00pm)
	5/7		
	5/9		