

Course: Moral Problems
PHIL 20402-01
Instructor: Daniel Immerman
MWF 2:00 - 2:50 in 224 DeBartolo

Contact Info

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Office hours: 11:30 - 1:30 on Monday or by appointment
Course website: <http://www3.nd.edu/~dimmerma/teaching/20402-01.html>

Readings

You do not need to purchase any texts for this class; all readings will be available on the website.

Course Description

In this course, we will examine various practical ethical issues and what ethical theory has to say about them. The questions we will discuss are:

- Is euthanasia wrong?
- Is abortion wrong?
- Is universal healthcare a human right?
- Should medical marijuana be legalized everywhere?
- Is killing in war wrong?
- Is redistributive taxation wrong?
- Is racial profiling wrong?
- Is affirmative action wrong?
- Is homosexuality wrong?
- Is same sex marriage wrong?
- Is prostitution wrong?

Course Goals

In this course you will:

- Improve your ability to identify an author's main claims in a philosophical text and to restate them in your own words clearly and precisely.
- Improve your ability to locate and reconstruct arguments and objections from philosophical texts.
- Improve your ability to state and evaluate objections to arguments.
- Become familiar with several debates in applied ethics and some ethical theory.
- Work out for yourself your own position on several of these debates.
- Learn how to identify a philosophical topic you are interested in, find others who have written on it, identify a research question related to it, and write a paper on it.

Expectations

In order to ensure that these goals are achieved, I will need some help from you. In particular, many of the course goals require you to develop your philosophical skills, which in turn requires practice.

With each reading assignment, I will provide some questions for you to think about as you do the reading. Answering these questions will help you hone your philosophical skills.

In addition to practicing these skills at home, you will also be practicing them in class. To accommodate this, the classes will not have much lecturing in them. Because most of the time spent in class will be time when you are talking, it is integral that you come to class prepared and ready to participate.

Evaluation

Here is the breakdown of grades in the class:

- Throughout the semester, I will assign mini papers, which will usually be about a page. These will each be worth the same amount and will be worth 30 percent of your grade in total. I will drop your lowest mini paper grade.
- During the second half of the course, you will be working on a longer paper, which will ultimately be at least 1500 words. I will not assign a topic, instead, you will be responsible for selecting it. Early in the second half of the semester, you will turn in a short document called a prospectus that will describe the topic you have chosen, some relevant readings, and what you plan to argue in your paper. This will be graded good/barely pass/fail and worth 2 percent of your grade.
- Near the middle of the second half of the course, you will turn in a rough draft of your paper. This will be graded good/barely pass/fail and worth 2 percent of your grade.
- The final draft of the paper will be due near the end of the semester, and worth 35 percent of your grade.
- On at least ten days in the semester we will have pop quizzes. Each time, I will ask you two questions. One will be a reading question (or part of a reading question) from that day. The other will be a question regarding content from a previous class. They will be open note and you will have 5 minutes to do them. They will each be worth the same amount and worth 10 percent of your grade in total. They can't be made up, but if you miss one because of an excused absence, I'll drop that one from your grade. I will drop your lowest pop quiz grade.
- During the day scheduled for the exam, we will have a "salon" in which you discuss your paper with your peers. This will be graded pass/fail and worth 2 percent of your grade.
- I will also be grading you based on participation. I will pass out a rubric on the first day that indicates what you need to do to get a good participation grade. Participation is worth 15 percent of your grade. I'll check in with you regarding how you're doing on participation at some point in the middle of the semester, but you should also feel free to contact me at any point if you want to know how you're doing on participation.

- Every Monday at the end of class I'll have you jot down answers to several questions regarding what you've learned in the last week's debate, how your skills are developing, what questions you yourself have going forward, etc. For each one, failure to turn it in will result in 1 point off your participation grade.
- Two times during the semester, once near the middle and once at the end, I will have you write a brief paper reflecting on your progress. These papers will be graded pass/fail and worth 2 percent of your grade each. If you do excellent work on these, I will give you some extra points on them.

I will be using a 12 point scale:

A = 12

A- = 11

B+ = 10

B = 9

B- = 8

C+ = 7

C = 6

C- = 5

D = 3

F = 0

I may on occasion give assignments a 13, which would correspond to an A+, or a 14, which would correspond to an A++. (The highest final grade I can give is an A).

On rounding: if the first decimal of a grade is 5 or higher, I will round up, and if it is 4 or lower, I will round down. So e.g. a 9.499 is a B, while a 9.500 is a B+.

Academic Honesty

The university academic code of honor is available at <http://honorcode.nd.edu/>. The philosophy department also has a document on plagiarism, which

is available at <http://philosophy.nd.edu/assets/77703/plagiarism.pdf?>. I take issues of plagiarism very seriously. If you're ever in doubt about an issue in this area, please come talk to me.

ADA statement

If you think you might need an accommodation because of a disability, you can contact me privately. Please also contact the Office of Disability Services. Their contact information is available at <http://disabilityservices.nd.edu/about/contact>

Attendance

If you miss class, you should provide me with a University-approved excuse. In addition to these absences, I will give you two free days to miss class. After that, I will take off 1 grade point on your participation grade for every day of class you miss (see grading scale)

Late Papers

I will not accept late mini papers because we will be discussing them in class. This includes papers that you printed but forgot to hand in, papers you meant to email but forgot to attach to the email, email attachments that are corrupted, etc. (When you email me papers, I always email back to confirm that I've gotten it.) But you can turn in one other item up to 48 hours (2 days) late with no penalty to your grade. If you turn in further late items, I will take off 1 grade point for every day its late (see grading scale). I don't round down on days. That means that if you turn in a paper an hour late, that counts the same as turning it in 23 hours late.

Reading drafts of papers

I will read as many drafts of papers as you care to send me, with the following exceptions. I will not read a draft turned in less than 48 hours (2 days) before the paper is due. Also, if I send a draft with comments back to you, you should wait at least 48 hours (2 days) before sending me a new draft to look at.