

## Phil XX: Moral Philosophy

Instructor: Joshua Kissel

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Office Hours: XXX

Class Meeting: XDAY and XTIMES.

Class Location: XXX

### Course Description:

This is an introductory level philosophy course in moral philosophy for majors and nonmajors. This course deals with normative questions around what is (morally) valuable and how we, individual agents, ought to act in response to these values.

This course begins by jumping right into ethical thinking. We will begin by trying to answer whether it is ever ok to judge others morally. We will then look at what moral responsibilities some philosophers argue we have to the global poor. These discussions will help us see the need for theories to answer moral questions and so in our next set of classes we will consider three sorts of ethical theory: consequentialism, virtue ethics, and Kantian deontology. With these tools in hand, we will look at the scope of morality and ask 'who' or 'what' matters morally via a discussion of nonstandard moral subjects including non-human animals, Artificial Intelligence, and even future people. In the final section of this course, we'll devote our attention to important questions related to oppression. We'll ask how individuals might be oppressed as members of certain groups based on sex, gender, race, and economic class. We'll then conclude our course with a topical discussion touching on the legitimacy of protest or riot.

### Course Objectives: this course enables students to:

- (1) Evaluate the validity and soundness of arguments.
- (2) Contrast competing normative theories.
- (3) Interrogate and identify the moral thinking underlying their own positions on several questions of applied ethics.
- (4) Assess the justifiability of these claims.

In addition, students will acquire a background in important areas of philosophy including; critical reasoning, normative ethical theory (including consequentialism, virtue ethics, and deontology), the scope of ethics and moral status, and applied questions dealing with oppression especially as it relates to sex, gender, race and economic class.

### Office Hours:

During my office hours I will be sitting quietly behind a desk, staring at a wall unless students come to meet with me. This time is meant for you to ask questions, discuss philosophy, or just hang out. It is *your* time, and you do not need an excuse or any clarity about what you want to do. I request, but do not require, that you send me an email alerting me to when you want to come, and if you happen to know, what you plan to discuss.

If for whatever reason you cannot make my regular office hours, please send me an email asap with a range of time that you could meet, and we will try to work something out!

Absences:

I trust all of you to make rational decisions with respect to attendance in accord with your own best reasons. You are each **permitted 2 totally unexcused absences** without any requirement to email or in any other way alert me to your absences. You can use these absences to miss class for any reason (e.g., your being sick, tired, wanting to binge a new show or play your favorite video games, to attend some internship or work-related activity, or whatever else.)

Absences beyond this number will amount to a 1/20<sup>th</sup> reduction in your participation grade for this class.

I try not to allow any extra excused absences beyond your freebies. However, I encourage all students to reach out if you run out of freebies but believe you have some special excuse (like a health issue) that might warrant extra accommodation or special exemption without requiring me to disadvantage your peers in this class. These *can and do* sometimes happen.

Screen Policy:

This class is a screen-free environment. This means no computers, tablets, phones, or other such devices. This is because I have found students participation and discussion is best when they are undistracted by their own screens or those of their peers. I share all my PowerPoints to make note-taking less laborious. If you violate the policy, you may be marked absent for the day. Special accommodations are exempted. [E.g., medical exemptions.]

Students with Disabilities:

Any student needing accommodations should speak directly to AccessibleNU ((847) 467-5530 or [accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu)) and to me as early as possible in the quarter. Be aware that AccessibleNU will help arrange reasonable accommodations for both physical and mental health concerns. Barring unforeseen circumstances, any necessary arrangements should be made within in the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

General Grading Schema:

1. Participation and Attendance 15 % of total. Pass/Fail
2. Ten Reading Responses: 10% of total. Check + (100)/Check (92)/Check -(85)
3. Take Home Ethical Theory Quiz 10% of total. A-F
4. Three Scaffolding Paper Outlines: 35% of total. A-F
  - a. First 5%
  - b. Second 15%
  - c. Third 15%
5. Final Paper (1200-1500 words) 30% of total. 'A'-'F'

A 94-100	A- 90-93	B+ 87-89	B 84-86	B- 80-83	C+ 77-79	C 74-76	C- 70-73	D 60-69	F 60-0
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Assignment Due Dates [Details for Particular Assignments to Come]

Assignment	(Some) Details	Due Date [Examples]
Reading Responses:	Each response is due on Canvas 2 hours before the relevant class takes places. And each must be on a different week. EX: Responses to Srinivasan must be submitted <i>before</i> our discussion of her paper on <b>XXX</b>	Through-out
First Paper Outline	This outline must be on a topic from week 1 or 2	Early
Take-Home Quiz	This is a short quiz on ethical theory.	Early-Mid
Second Paper Outline	This outline must be on a topic from class 4-6	Mid
Third Paper Outline	This outline must be on a topic from class 6-9	Mid-Late
Final Paper	Paper of 1200-1500 words on any topic in this course. You may choose to use any paper outline or to start from scratch	End

General Course Outline:

Based on a course with 15; one hour and 50-minute sessions meeting three times a week for 5 weeks. Naturally, the course might be altered to meet less frequently over a longer period.

Class	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1 – Week 1 Introduction to Course	Validity and Soundness Thought Experiments	WATCH: <a href="#">“The Simulation Argument”</a> What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For? – Kwame Anthony Appiah (3 Pages)	Icebreaker Discussion
2 – Week 1: Motivating Moral Philosophy	Judging Others and Moral Relativism	Mary Midgley – Trying Out One’s New Sword (7 pages) Martha Nussbaum – Judging Other Cultures (12 pages)  Optional: Susan Moller Okin – Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women (20 pages)	
3 – Week 2 Motivating Moral Philosophy	Global Poverty and Individual Moral Wrongs	Peter Singer – Famine, Affluence, and Morality (16 pages)	
4 – Week 2	Against Singer	Mathew Snow – <a href="#">Against Charity (~2500 Words)</a>	First Paper Outline

		Amia Srinivasan – <a href="#">Stop the Robot Apocalypse (10 Pages)</a>	
5 – Week 3: Ethical Theory	Consequentialism	John Stuart Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> ; Excerpts of Chapter 2. Read pages 4-8, 11-13, 16-18 [Optional to read sections "Happiness as an Aim", "Is Utilitarianism Chilly?", "Utilitarianism as 'Godless'", and "Expediency"] (10 pages)  Mozi and Mohist Consequentialism excerpts from Bryan Van Norden – <i>Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy</i> : Read: 'Mohist Consequentialism' pages 142-151 (10 pages)  Optional Video: <a href="#">Utilitarianism: Crash Course Philosophy</a> (10 minutes)	
6 – Week 3: Ethical Theory	Virtue Ethics	Rosalind Hursthouse – Normative Virtue Ethics (8 pages)  Aristotle – <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> excerpts from Book 1 Read chapters 1-5 (pages 2-6), 7-8 (pages 8-13) (11 pages)	Early-Term Teaching Evaluations Circulated
7 – Week 4: Ethical Theory	Kantian Philosophy and Deontology	David Velleman – A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics (33 pages)  <a href="#">Kant &amp; Categorical Imperatives: Crash Course Philosophy</a> (10:28 minutes)  Optional: The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative from Russ Shaffer-Landau – <i>The Ethical Life</i>	Take-Home Quiz Assigned
8 – Week 4: Nonhuman Moral Subjects	Anthropocentrism	William Baxter – People or Penguins (7 pages)  Rolston Holmes III – Feeding People vs Saving Nature (20 pages)	
9 – Week 5: Nonhuman Moral Subjects	Animal Ethics	Alastair Norcross – Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases (17 pages)	

		Tom Regan – <a href="#">The Case for Animal Rights</a> (11 Pages)	
10 – Week 5: Nonhuman Moral Subjects	Holist Environmental Ethics and It's Critique	Aldo Leopold – <i>The Land Ethic</i> (excerpt 14 pages)  Ramachandra Guha – Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation (7 Pages)	
11- Week 6: Nonhuman Moral Subjects	Artificial Intelligence  Future Generations	Bostrom and Yudkowsky – the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (20 Pages)  Derek Parfit on Future Generations (Excerpts from <i>Reasons and Persons</i> )	2 <sup>nd</sup> Paper Outline Due
12 – Week 6: Oppression	Oppression and the Political	Iris Marion Young – Five Faces of Oppression (20 Pages)	Midterm Teaching Evaluations Circulated
13 – Week 7: Oppression	Philosophy of Sex and Gender	Simone de Beauvoir – <a href="#">Introduction to the Second Sex</a> (16 pages)  Sally Haslanger – <a href="#">Social Construction: Gender and other Social Categories</a> (20 Pages)	
14 – Week 7: Oppression	Philosophy of Race	Appiah – On Racisms (10 Pages)  Alcoff – Racism and Visible Race (8 Pages)	
15 – Week 8: Oppression	Why Not Socialism?	G.A. Cohen – <i>Why Not Socialism</i> (23 Pages)  Milton Friedman – The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits (6 Pages)  Optional: Richard Arneson – Why not capitalism? (28 Pages)	
16 – Week 8: Oppression	Oppression and Intersectionality; Race, Gender, and Class	<a href="#">Statement of the Combahee River Collective</a> (~3800 words)  bell hooks – Men: Comrades in Struggle (16 Pages)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Paper Outline Due
17 – Week 9: Oppression	Race, Sex, and Class Discussion	No New Reading	

18 – Week 9: Realizing Justice	Protest and Political Rioting	<p>Lucy Parsons (1886 interview) – <a href="#">“I am an Anarchist”</a> (4 Pages)</p> <p>Avia Pasternak – Political Rioting: A Moral Assessment (35 Pages)</p> <p>Optional video on Lucy Parson’s life and organizing: <a href="#">More Dangerous Than a Thousand Rioters</a></p>	
19 – Week 10:	Make Up	Make Up Session	End of Term Teaching Evaluations Circulated
20 – Week 10:	Wrap Up	Course Recap and Final Paper Workshops	Final Paper Due