

PHRE 340: Introduction to Ethics

Dr. Joshua Kissel

He/They

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Winter 2021-22

Classroom: Chapel Basement 15

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday

Period 4: M 1140-1220, T/Th 1045-12

Period 5: M 1230-110, T/Th 1210-125

Course Description:

This is an introductory level philosophy course in ethics and moral philosophy. 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 and discuss moral and cultural relativism. We will then explore the possibility that we have serious obligation to those suffering from ills like poverty. 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. We will then use these tools to think about some questions in political philosophy related to distributive justice. The class concludes by spending several sessions exploring environmental ethics. We'll see how some consequentialists, Kantians, and virtue theorists think through questions of 'who' matters morally and what we might owe—if anything at all—non-standard moral subjects like non-human animals.

Course Objectives:

- (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 the claims and arguments identified in 2 and 3.

In addition, students will acquire a background in important areas of philosophy including critical reasoning, validity and soundness, normative ethical theory (including virtue ethics, consequentialism, and Kantian deontology), distributive justice, the scope of ethics and moral status, and applied questions, especially those related to environmental ethics.

Conference Time:

During my conference times (Mon: 1005-1045 and Wed: 950-1015) I will be sitting quietly behind a desk in Chapel Basement in my office (C14D), 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 the regular conference time but still would like to meet please send me an email asap with a range of time that you could meet, and we will try to work something out! Additionally, I can be available to meet via Zoom if necessary.

Materials:

All readings except the Cohen book will be posted to Canvas in the files tab. You will also have links to the readings for each week in the module for that week. *Please bring all readings for the given module to class each day.*

Class Expectations – Fostering Productive and Effective Discussions

Respect:

This course is designed to help each of you meet each of our course objectives. A large part of achieving these goals is actively engaging with our course materials. Active participation in class, on canvas, and on our assignments is proven to boost retention, speed up the learning process, and facilitate creative thinking, among other things.

Most of all, the truths of the texts we are reading are not delivered from on high. We need to engage critically with our texts; in other words, *we need to practice doing philosophy as a collective discipline*. I strongly encourage you *to talk to one another and not just to me*. Here are some suggestions and guidelines to facilitate such collaborative philosophy:

- Practice being patient with others.
- Listen carefully and respectfully.
- Leave others room to speak; don't monopolize or dominate.
- When agreeing, explaining why you agree.
- Criticize ideas and arguments, not the people who offer them.

How do we criticize others and discuss controversial ethical views without attacking our peers?

Endeavor to follow these guidelines:

- *Textual Evidence*: The best points bring us back to the text. Use quotes and page numbers to ground your questions or comments.
- *Prior Points*: Our discussions should lead somewhere. Try to build on what's been said, before offering a different point.
- *Eye Contact*: Look around the discussion circle and speak to everyone (not just me).
- *Assume the Best*: Treat those who disagree with you as if they, like you, have the best of intentions and assume that they too want to find the best answer to these questions. This goes for our authors too!

Attendance:

Always email me if you're going to be late or absent. As a rule, I rely on the policies in the Blue Book, but if you give me advance notice, I'll be better able to work with you.

I will record attendance daily. Being late to class three times will negatively affect your participation score in the way an unexcused absence would.

Academic Honesty:

Honesty is the basic value on which this community rests and is an essential component of academic integrity. Academic integrity is demanded by the very nature of a school community. Honesty in the academic area means claiming as one's own only that work which is one's own. All scholarship builds upon the ideas and information of others; the honest person makes clear in written work exactly what the source of any borrowed information or idea is, whether it be library materials, the internet, classmates, or family members. Since words are the bearers of both information and the unique style of the writer, the words of others, if borrowed, must be properly acknowledged. In addition, work done for one course may not be used to secure credit in another. It is not acceptable to submit one piece of work to more than one course without prior consultation with and written permission from all instructors involved.

Simply: use the Writing Center (and indicate when you do), ask questions, and when in doubt, cite!

Screen Policy:

Screens are often shown to result in [worse learning outcomes](#) and [lower grades](#) for students, they even effect students who are *not* using screens themselves. I share all lecture notes on Canvas; and will often share a handout in class to help make it easier for you all to follow along *and* participate in discussion. This is in order to help make note-taking less laborious. At the same time, I recognize that some students will prefer to take notes on laptops or will have their readings on electronic devices rather than printing them off. For these reasons I **permit** screens for notetaking in most parts of class.

Exceptions to the permitted use of screens:

- During discussion periods I will often require students to close their laptops/set aside electronic devices. **Bring paper and a writing device to jot down thoughts for these times.**
- I also suggest all students use paper for notetaking.
- Additionally, I **require** everyone leave phones on airplane mode, occasionally you may feel the need to take a picture of the board but otherwise keep them out of sight.

Special accommodations are exempted. [E.g., medical exemptions.]

Students with Disabilities, Health Related Needs, and/or Other Wellness Related Concerns:

It is my goal to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you anticipate any issues related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course, please email me so we can explore potential options. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a

disability, you can also initiate this conversation with Laura Warner, Director of Student Accessibility Services: lwarner@andover.edu. Please visit [their Canvas page](#) for contact and other information. If you have already been approved for accommodations, please email me so we can develop an implementation plan together. Barring unforeseen circumstances, any necessary arrangements should be made within in the first two weeks of class or as soon as possible thereafter.

Assessment, Grading, and Course Outline

General Grading Schema for all Assessments

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| 1. | Discussions Participation and Attendance | 15% |
| a. | 1% weekly, 5% overall | |
| 2. | Mini-Outline (Singer) | 10% |
| 3. | Normative Theory Reflections (Choose 2) | 10% (5% Each) |
| 4. | Rawls Game Reflection | 5% |
| 5. | Paper Outline | 20% |
| 6. | Peer Review | 5% |
| 7. | Final Paper (1000 words) | 35% |

Percentage to 6 Point Scale Conversions

6	6-	5+	5	5-	4+	4	4-	3+	3 or less
97-100	<97-94	<94-91	<91-88	<88-85	<85-82	<82-79	<79-76	<76-73	<73...

Assignment Due Dates [Details for Particular Assignments Will be Posted on Canvas]:

Assignment	(Some) Details. More extensive details will but available on Canvas for each assignment.	Due Dates All assignments due by the regular start of class unless otherwise noted.
1. Singer Mini-Outline	Three Parts: 1. Thesis Sentence 2. Formalized author argument in premise-conclusion from (based on in-class group work). Focus is this part! 3. Engagement with formalized argument (formal <i>or</i> informal/prose).	December 14
Short Discussion Posts/Reflection on Normative Theory Reflection (2 of 3)	200-300-word reflections. One each for each normative theory explored. 350 words MAX. You will focus on explaining what you think is the strongest asset of or strongest weakness of each normative theory.	a) Consequentialism January 10 b) Virtue Ethics January 20 c) Kantian Ethics February 1

Rawls Discussion Post	200-400-word reflection discussing your thoughts on the Rawls game. 450 words MAX. This will be posted in a discussion board. Your focus will be on explaining your own thinking on the game. If the discussion changed your position relative to what your group decided, you should discuss this.	February 3rd (Post due by this date, no class!) Graded: Submitted (3) Good/Satisfactory (4) Great (5) Excellent (6)	
Distributive Justice Paper Outline OR 4. Environmental Ethics Paper Outline	Paper Outline on Rawls Game or Cohen Three Parts: 1. Introduction and Thesis Sentence, 2. Formalized author argument in premise-conclusion form. 3. Engagement with formalized argument. Must be in formalized in premise-conclusion form. Focus is this part!	Paper Outline on environmental/animal ethics Three Parts: 1. Introduction and Thesis Sentence, 2. Formalized author argument in premise-conclusion form. Engagement with formalized argument. Must be in formalized in premise-conclusion form. Focus is this part!	February 10 February 17th Note: one day extensions available but must be requested.
5. Peer Review	I will be reviewing your feedback and the comments you share with your peers during our paper review session on November 9 th and 11 th .	February 21, 22, and 24 (in-class)	
6. Final Paper	Paper of 1000 words on either of the 2 paper outlines (assignments 3 or 4 above). Final papers must be submitted to Canvas by the start time of the exam period listed on the end-of-term schedule. Early submissions are of course encouraged!	Period 4: 1pm March 4 Period 5: 9am March 4	

General Course Outline

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments and/or Activities
1. Dec 2 (75 Min)	Introduction to Class and to Validity and Soundness	No reading, come prepared to talk about what philosophy is to you!	
2. Dec 6 (40 Min)	What is Ethics and What do Ethicists Care About?	What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For? – Kwame Anthony Appiah (3 pgs.)	

3. Dec 7 (75 min)	Applied Ethics; Global Poverty Argument Mapping	Watch Beth Barnes " Effective Altruism " (6 minutes) Peter Singer – Famine, Affluence, and Morality (16 pgs.)	
4. Dec 9 (75 Min)	Applied Ethics; Global Poverty Objections to Singer	No new reading, continue Singer. Objections	Argument Mapping (in-class)
5. Dec 13 (40 Min)	Mini-Outline Peer-Reviewing	In class groupwork on mini-outlines Read: Mary Midgley – Trying Out One’s New Sword (7 pgs.) (for Tuesday)	
6. Dec 14 (75 Min)	Relativism and Judging Others; the Easy Case	No new reading. Discuss Midgley	Singer Mini-Outline Due
WINTER BREAK			
7. Jan 4 (75 Min) Consequentialism	Utilitarianism (Act and Rule)	Watch: Video: Utilitarianism (10 minutes) John Stuart Mill’s <i>Utilitarianism</i> ; Excerpts of Chapter 2. Read pgs. 4-8, 11-13, 16-17 (9 pgs.)	Recommended Reading: Bentham, Excerpts; Chapter 1 I-XII, Chapter 4 I-VII (5 pgs.)
8. Jan 6 (75 Min) Consequentialism	Utilitarianism Continued A Buddhist Argument for Impartiality	Finish Mill. Shantideva – Verses 90-103 (3 pgs.)	
9. Jan 10 (40 Min)	Virtue and the Good in Aristotle What the Good is/it not. Function Argument.	Watch: Aristotle and Virtue Theory (9:21 minutes) Aristotle – <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> excerpts from Book 1 Read chapters 1-5 (pgs. 2-6), and chapters 7-8 (pgs. 8-13) (11 pgs. total)	Consequentialism Reflection (a) Due
10. Jan 11 (75 Min)	Virtue in Aristotle – Function Argument.	Continue Aristotle	
11. Jan 13 (75 Min)	Virtue in Confucianism	Mencius (and Confucianism) excerpts. (11 pgs.) Read Excerpts (1A1-1A4, 1A6, 1B9, 2A4, 2A6, 6A1, 6A2, 6A6, 6A8, 6A14,6A15, 7B14) [Marked on PDF]	

Jan 17 (No Class, MLK Day]			
12. Jan 18 (75 Min)	Virtue and Anger – Applying Virtue Ethics	Audre Lorde – The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism (3709 Words)	Self-Assessment: What’s working and what isn’t for you?
13. Jan 20 (75 Min)	A Problem for Consequentialism?	Ursula LeGuin – The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas (4 pgs.)	Virtue Ethics Reflection (b) Due
14. Jan 24 (40 Min)	Kant and Deontology Maxims and Contradictions	The Good Life for Kant [Compare this discussion of virtue and happiness to Aristotle!] Reading: Dr. Bhardwaj Kant Reading Set 1 (5 pgs.)	
15. Jan 25 (75 Min)	Kant and Deontology; Categorical Imperatives	Video: Kant & Categorical Imperatives (10:28 minutes) Dr. Bhardwaj Kant Reading Set 2 (4 pgs.)	
16. Jan 27 (75 Min)	Deontology on Global Poverty (A Reply to Singer)	Onora O’Neill – A Kantian Approach to Famine Relief 294-300 (7 pgs.)	
Jan 31 - No Class!			
17. Feb 1 (75 Min)	Distributive Justice	Rawls Game, No Reading for Today	Kantian Ethics Reflection (c) due
Feb 3 [No Class!]			Rawls Discussion Post by Today
18. Feb 7 (40 Min)	Distributive Justice	G.A. Cohen – <i>Why Not Socialism</i> Read Sections I, II, III, and V. Section IV (pgs. 53-79) is optional.	Have at least sections I and II done today.
19. Feb 8 (75 Min)	Distributive Justice	No New Reading Finish discussion of Cohen	
20. Feb 10 (75 Min)	Environmental Ethics -Consequentialism	Peter Singer – All Animals Are Equal (10 pgs.) Recommended: William Baxter – People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution (5 pgs.)	Distributive Justice Paper Outline Due
21. Feb 14 (40 Min)	Environmental Ethics – Deontology/Kant	Tom Regan – The Case for Animal Rights (10 pgs.)	
Feb 15 No Class!	Department Day		
22. Feb 17 (75 Min)	Environmental Ethics – Virtue	Rosalind Hursthouse – Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals, pgs; 2-7, 12-14, 22-24 (12 pgs.)	Environmental Ethics Paper Outline Due

			[One day extension available]
23. Feb 21 (40 min)	Final Paper Discussion and Guidelines	In Class Peer Reviewing of Outlines for Final Paper. You should have your outline draft, updated in response to my comments ready to share.	
24. Feb 22 (75 min)	Group Peer Review of Outlines/Papers	In Class Peer Reviewing of Outlines for Final Paper	
25. Feb 24 (75 min)	Final Paper Workshopping	We'll continue reviewing—ideally final paper drafts.	Peer Reviewing Work Due
26. Nov 28 Conferences	Final Paper Conferences	Optional final paper conferences. Please email me to schedule a slot!	See Due Date Above