

# **PHIL 1104:**

## **Philosophy and Social Ethics**

Fall 2017

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*Office Hours:*

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-11:00 or by appointment, HTB 224 (Hartford)

### **Course Description:**

“What kind of person should I be?” “What makes a life valuable?” “What are my obligations to others and to society?” These questions and others like them are the focus of ethics and of social and political philosophy.

This course aims to help students think carefully and clearly about these sorts of questions, and develop, support and defend coherent, plausible answers to them. These abilities will be developed via careful, generous but critical readings of essays, followed by informed and thoughtful discussion and debate.

We aim to get clear on the sources of some of our most deeply held ethical convictions and assumptions, and to establish better foundations for our own moral beliefs and practices. By the end of this semester, students should come to appreciate the complexity of careful moral reasoning. It is hoped that students will also be better equipped for ethical decision making and civil discourse about ethical issues.

### **Course Materials and Readings:**

All course readings are available online or via HuskyCT, as indicated on the schedule.

Reading philosophy can be quite challenging, despite the relatively short length of the assigned readings. It is helpful to allot enough time to read them several times: at least once quickly for the general shape, and once closely to see how the argument is supported. Remember that many of these authors entertain objections to their own claims. Keep track of whether the author is presenting his or her own argument, or an objection, as you read the material. There will be approximately 5 unannounced “reading check” quizzes during the semester at the beginning of class.

In addition, you will be responsible for mastering material presented in lectures and discussions, much of which will be available exclusively by attending classes. Students who do not regularly attend class are highly unlikely to do well in this course.

**Grading Scheme:**

- 25% - Midterm exam #1
- 25% - Midterm exam #2
- 15% - Presentation/Paper
- 20% - In-class activities, class participation, and unannounced quizzes
- 15% - Assignments

**Presentation:**

Starting after the first midterm exam, throughout the rest of the semester each student will give a 5-10 minute presentation on the ethical issue of their choosing using the conceptual tools we have developed throughout the course. These presentations are expected to be a well-researched and well defended exposition and critical analysis. It can be a broad ethical dilemma or policy issue (e.g. the death penalty, gun control, etc.) or an analysis of a specific case in history or current events that carries ethical implications. Grades will be determined by a combination of a write-up turned in with the presentation, the presentation itself, and responses to student and instructor questions. More details to follow, including sign-ups and details about how to select your topic and prepare your presentation.

**Exams:**

We will have 2 exams, each a combination of short-answer, multiple choice, true/false, and fill in the blank questions.

**Course Policies:**

- **LATE POLICY:** Late work is accepted up to 1 week late for ½ credit
- **Attendance policy:** Attendance is not mandatory, but there are in-class activities you may miss if you miss class. If you do have to miss class, you will be able to make up the activities only if you can provide a doctor's note within 2 weeks.
- **Technology policy:** No laptops or phones on desks during class
- **Be respectful to your peers.** Disagreement is okay and expected as we discuss potentially controversial ethical issues, and part of the goal of this course is to learn how to handle that disagreement in a productive and thoughtful manner.
- **Ask questions!!!** Lecture is designed to be interactive and you will get a lot more out of it if you are taking part in a discussion.

## Course Schedule:<sup>1</sup>

| Week | Day      | Lecture   | Reading  |
|------|----------|---|--|
| 1    | T 8-29   | Course Introduction and primer on Argumentation                   | None   |
|      | Th 8-31  | Famine, Affluence, Morality                                       | Singer (Optional)  |
| 2    | T 9-5    | Cultural Relativism   | Midgley (Required)<br>Rachels (Optional)                         |
|      | Th 9-7   | Divine Command Theory   | Euthyphro (Required)   |
| 3    | T 9-12   | Happiness and Virtue Theory                                       | Aristotle (Required): Selections from <i>Nichomachean Ethics</i> |
|      | Th 9-14  | Virtue Theory continued   | Aristotle Continued  |
| 4    | T 9-19   | Utilitarianism<br><b>Assignment #1 due</b>                        | Bentham (Required)<br>Smart (Optional)                           |
|      | Th 9-21  | Kant  | Kant<br><i>Optional-</i> O'Neill                                 |
| 5    | T 9-26   | Kant -- continued   | ---  |
|      | Th 9-28  | Care Ethics   | Cassidy (Required)<br>Noddings (Optional)                        |
| 6    | T 10-3   | Care Ethics -- continued  | ---  |
|      | Th 10-5  | Social Contract Theories  | Rawls  |
| 7    | T 10-10  | "Beyond the Social Contract"<br><b>Assignment #2 due</b>          | Nussbaum   |
|      | Th 10-12 | Abortion  | Thomson  |
| 8    | T 10-17  | <b>Exam #1</b>  |  |
|      | Th 10-19 | --No class--  | Foot "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double effect" |
| 9    | T 10-24  | Introduction to Abortion debate and the doctrine of double effect | Foot; Thomson "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem"    |
|      | Th 10-26 | Abortion  | Thomson "A Defense of Abortion"                                  |
| 10   | T 10-31  | Abortion  | Marquis "Why Abortion is Immoral"                                |
|      | Th 11-2  | Abortion  | Warren "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"               |
| 11   | T 11-7   | Moral Personhood  | ----   |

<sup>1</sup> This schedule is subject to modifications and additions as the course progresses.

|                           |          |   |   |
|---------------------------|----------|---|---|
|                           | Th 11-9  | Animal Rights                                 | Korsgaard, "Personhood, Animals, and the Law"                                       |
| <b>12</b>                 | T 11-14  | Animal Ethics                                 | Norcross "Puppies, Pigs, and People"  |
|                           | Th 11-16 | Animal Ethics                                 | ----  |
| <b>Thanksgiving Break</b> |          |   |   |
| <b>13</b>                 | T 11-28  | Racial Injustices<br><b>Assignment #3 due</b> | Martin Luther King, Jr "Letter from Birmingham City Jail"                           |
|                           | Th 11-30 | Social Justice;                               | Ta Nehasi Coates "The Case for Reparations"   |
| <b>14</b>                 | T 12-5   | Social Justice; Race                          | Mills "White Ignorance"   |
|                           | Th 12-7  | Social Justice; Race                          | Fish "Reverse Racism", McIntosh "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" |
| <b>14</b>                 | T 12-12  | Final Exam                                    |   |