PHL 135: Contemporary Moral Issues

Fall 2022

Thursdays, 5:30-8:20 pm

Chris Register

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Drop-in Hours: 4:30-5:30, Thursdays

Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophical theory and practical ethics, conducted by investigating and discussing moral issues that our society faces today.

Course Materials

An open mind, patience and persistence with difficult ideas, & respect for diverse perspectives.

Assignments and Grading

15% – Canvas Weekly Discussion Posts

10% – In-class Presentation

10% – Short Paper   (Due **9/16** at 5pm, 300 words)

10% – Medium Paper DRAFT   (Due **10/7** at 5pm)

15% – Medium Paper COMPLETE   (Due **10/21** at 5pm, 750 words)

15% – Term Paper DRAFT   (Due **11/18** at 5pm)

25% – Term Paper COMPLETE   (Final Exam deadline at 5pm, 2,000 words)

WARNING: Writing a philosophy paper is new and difficult. Here are some *highly recommended* tips for how to write good philosophy: http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html

Canvas Weekly Discussion Posts: You are expected to post a question or comment about an assigned reading for the week by midnight the day *before* we discuss that reading in class. (Wednesday nights.)

In-Class Presentation: You must present *either* on a topic of your choosing, for 5-10 minutes, during a course session throughout the semester *or* on your final paper during one of the final sessions.

DRAFTS: You must write drafts for the medium-length and term papers. The draft can be written in prose, or it can be an extensive outline. I will give you feedback to help you improve. The better the draft, the better the feedback, the better the completed paper. Plus, your future self will thank you.

Course Objectives

The course is designed to accomplish a series of specific goals. PHL 135 will explain central concepts, terms, questions, and theories in ethics. Students will learn to engage, analyze, and discuss a series of topics that illustrate the intersection between current dilemmas and moral reasoning. Students will learn to articulate multiple perspectives, and present sustained, cogent arguments on a variety of positions. Its assignments are designed to help students achieve the following learning goals:

- MS Goal 1 – Written Communication
- MS Goal 2 – Oral Communication
- MS Goal 5 – Critical Analysis and Reasoning
- HSS Goal – Interpretation of Language and Symbol
- HSS Goal – Ethical Reasoning

General Important Dates to Remember

Tuesday, 8/30 – Wednesday, 9/7: Add/Drop Period

9/7:   Last day to withdraw and get 100% money back

9/20:   Last day to withdraw and get 75% money back

10/4:   Last day to withdraw and get 50% back

10/7:   Last day to declare a change of major

11/1:   Last day to request the ungraded option

11/1:   Last day to withdraw with a W

11/22: Last day to withdraw with a WP/WF

Course Schedule

Note: I will provide digital copies of all readings. All assignments and topics are subject to change.

Session	Topic	To do BEFORE	Notes
Week 1, Sept. 1	Introduction	➔ Timmons, "A Moral Theory Primer," pg. 1-26 ➔ Watch excerpt of Singer's google talk (2:22 to 10:20+) ➔ Watch Kant's Axe ➔ (optional) Regan, "Ethical Thinking and Theory", pg. 122-130	After class: look over the syllabus and Pryor's guidelines for writing philosophy

Week 2, Sept. 8	Abortion	➔ Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion" ➔ Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" ➔ (optional) Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion", pg. 223-226 & 233-246	First in-class presentation
Week 3, Sept. 15	End-of-Life	➔ Hooker, "Utilitarianism and Euthanasia" ➔ Velleman, "Against the Right to Die" ➔ Firlik, "Margo's Logo" ➔ Dworkin, "Life's Dominion", selections ➔ Walsh, "Cognitive Transformation, Dementia, and the Moral Weight of Advance Directives"	Short paper due tomorrow **9/16 @5p**
Week 4, Sept. 22	Animal Rights	➔ Gruen, "Ethics and Animals", pg. 1-33 ➔ Singer, selections (pg. 16-26 & pg. 55-64) ➔ Setiya, "Humanism" ➔ (optional) Godfrey-Smith, "On Being an Octopus" ➔ Lomasky, "Is it wrong to eat animals?" ➔ Gill, "On Eating Animals"	
Week 5, Sept. 29	Climate Change	➔ (optional) IPCC, Summary for Policy-Makers ➔ (optional) Kolbert, "The Sixth Extinction?" ➔ Parfit, "Energy Policy and the Further Future: The Identity Problem" ➔ Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm"	

		➔ Hourdequin, "Climate, Collective Action, and Individual Ethical Obligations"	
Week 6, Oct. 6	Reparations	➔ Boxill & Corlett, "[Black Reparations](#)", sections 1-8 ➔ Ta-Nehisi Coates, "[The Case for Reparations](#)"	Medium paper DRAFT due tomorrow **10/7 @5p**
Week 7, Oct. 13	Race and Gender	➔ Haslanger, "What is Gender?" ➔ Haslanger, Jeffers, & Spencer, "What is Race?", selections ➔ Frye, "Oppression" ➔ Dembroff & Payton, [Why We Shouldn't Compare Transracial to Transgender Identity](#)	
Week 8, Oct. 20	Disability	➔ Barnes, "Disability, Minority, and Difference" ➔ McMahan, "Cognitive Disability, Misfortune, and Justice" ➔ Ross, [Aphantasia: How It Feels To Be Blind In Your Mind](#) ➔ Jenkins and Webster, "Disability, Impairment, and Marginalized Functioning" ➔ Feder Kittay, "Ideal Theory Bioethics and the Exclusion of People with Severe Cognitive Disabilities"	Medium paper COMPLETE due tomorrow **10/21 @5p**
Week 9, Oct. 27	Discriminatory Bias	➔ Hi-Phi Nation: [S3, Episode 1: The Precrime Unit (Jan. 31st, 2019)](#)	

		➔ Johnson, "Algorithmic Bias: On the Implicit Biases of Social Technology" ➔ Brownstein, "Implicit Bias", sections 4.1 & 5.4	
Week 10, Nov. 3	Harms of the Future	➔ Chalmers, What Should Be Considered a Crime in the Metaverse? ➔ Chalmers, *Reality+*, excerpts ➔ Nozick, "The Experience Machine" ➔ Lemoine, "Is LaMDA Sentient – An Interview" ➔ Sebo, Op-Ed: What should we do if a chatbot has thoughts and feelings?	
Week 11, Nov. 10	Consent	➔ Kukla: "That's What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation" ➔ Dougherty: "Sex, Lies, and Consent"	
Week 12, Nov. 17	Appropriation and Appreciation	➔ Matthes, "Cultural Appropriation", section 4 ➔ Nguyen and Strohl, "Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups" ➔ Nguyen, "Twitter, the Intimacy Machine" ➔ (optional) Bailey, "Empathy and the Value of Humane Understanding"	Term paper DRAFT due tomorrow **11/18 @5p**
(Thanksgiving)	Topic of choice	Civil family discussions	(jk)
Week 13, Dec. 1	TBD / Presentations		

Week 14, Dec. 8	Final Presentations		Term paper COMPLETE due on **exam day by 5p**

Other Policies

Grading Scale:

A = 100-95   A- = 94-90   B+ = 89-87   B = 86-84   B- = 83-80   C+ = 79-77

C = 76-74   C- = 73-70   D+ = 69-67   D = 66-61   F= < 60 ↓

Attendance and Zoom:

Attendance is not directly assessed. However, it will indirectly contribute to your grade because of the importance of in-class participation for understanding course material and developing skills in philosophical analysis.

If you are sick, do not come to class. Please notify me via email. I will arrange for a Zoom option or another way to help you make up for lost class time. You are still expected to contribute to the weekly online discussions, but don't hesitate to ask for some additional time if you are not feeling well.

Aside from illness or other special excusing circumstances (email me), the class is **in person only**. I will revisit this policy if covid numbers start looking bad. (They might!)

Late Assignments:

Instructor has the discretion to accept or not accept late assignments. If the instructor accepts late assignments, Late work will be assessed 1/3 of a grade penalty (i.e. from a B+ to a B) for every business day that it is late.

Fourth Hour Learning Requirement:

The students are assigned additional learning tasks that make the semester's learning experience more deeply engaged and rigorous, and no additional classroom space is needed. The course meets 160 minutes a week but carries 1 full unit of credit toward the completion of the degree given the understanding that students enrolled in this course will take substantial responsibility outside the classroom for their own learning experience and complete assignments at a level of excellence that significantly exceeds what was required by the College itself prior to 2006.

Phones, Tablets, and Laptops

You MAY use technology in the classroom, but you MAY NOT be disruptive with or distracted by that technology. This includes phones, tablets, and laptops. The purpose of my relaxed policy is to enable you to access information, assignments, and resources to facilitate your learning process. **Please** do not surf the web or use social media while class is in progress.

TCNJ Attendance Policy:

While attendance itself is not used as a criterion for academic evaluations, grading is frequently based on participation in class discussion, performance, field experience, or other activities which may take place during class sessions. If these areas for evaluation make class attendance essential, the student may be penalized for failure to perform satisfactorily in the required activities. In all circumstances, it remains the student's responsibility to initiate discussion about absence and arrangements for making up any missed work with each instructor. Link to the policy: https://policies.tcnj.edu/?p=77

TCNJ Academic Integrity Statement:

Academic dishonesty is any attempt by the student to gain academic advantage through dishonest means, to submit, as his or her own, work which has not been done by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment. Such dishonesty would include, but is not limited to: submitting as his/her own a project, paper, report, test, or speech copied from, partially copied, or paraphrased from the work of another person or a paper writing program (whether the source is printed, under copyright, or in manuscript form). Credit must be given for words quoted or paraphrased. The rules apply to any academic dishonesty, whether the work is graded or ungraded, group or individual, written or oral. Link to the policy: https://academicintegrity.tcnj.edu/documents/

TCNJ Final Exam Policy:

For each course, there shall be a final evaluation. Such an evaluation may take the form of an in-class final exam, a take-home final exam, a final paper or a final project. Other formats may be acceptable as well. In each case, the evaluation should be comprehensive and integrative in nature, but not necessarily cumulative. The final evaluation does not need to exhaustively cover details from the entire course, but should instead require students to identify the major themes covered during the semester and to synthesize these concepts in a holistic and integrated manner. Link to the policy: https://policies.tcnj.edu/?p=266

Accessibility and Accommodations:

Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Accessibility Resource Center

(609-771-3199). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. Link to the ADA policy: https://policies.tcnj.edu/?p=145

Students who experience barriers in this course are encouraged to contact the instructor as early in the semester as possible. The Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) is available to facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure reasonable accommodations. For more information about ARC, please visit: https://arc.tcnj.edu/.

EEO Policy:

The College of New Jersey Policy Prohibiting Discrimination in the Workplace and Educational Environment governs the college's commitment to and expectations of having an environment that respects the diversity of all members of the campus community. Under this policy, forms of discrimination or harassment based upon specific protected categories are prohibited and will not be tolerated. Link to EEO Policy: https://policies.tcnj.edu/?p=454

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access, and Belonging:

The TCNJ community is composed of people with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, and the college is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, access and belonging. The college's Campus Diversity Statement can be viewed here: https://diversity.tcnj.edu/campus-diversity-statement/

IT Support:

If you do not have access to the necessary equipment for this course, such as a working laptop computer, TCNJ can provide it for you for the semester. Please contact care@tcnj.edu to help you secure the needed technology free of charge. This is a confidential process. If you need assistance in this process, however, please let me know. Please note the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) is available to help facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure reasonable accommodations if needed. For more information about ARC, please visit: https://arc.tcnj.edu/. If you have technology needs during the semester, please contact the IT Helpdesk at 609-771-2660 or helpdesk@tcnj.edu.

Gender Pronouns and Names/TCNJ Preferred Name Policy & NameCoach:

TCNJ maintains an official Preferred Name Policy, allowing a preferred name to be added to your TCNJ digital identity and official records. For instructions on adding your preferred name, please consult this guide. Once a preferred name is added to PAWS, other TCNJ sites, such as Canvas, will use your preferred name. TCNJ has also rolled out NameCoach technology, a tool that gives students the ability to record the pronunciation of their names, provide the phonetic spelling of their names, and store their preferred pronouns.