

PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE—PHIL 1213.701, SPRING 2015
10:30-11:20, CLB 306

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Required Texts: Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (8th Ed.); Sterba, *Morality in Practice* (8th Ed.); *Web Readings (WR)* available on D2L

Course Objectives: We all have a moral experience of the world: We see actions as right and wrong, people as good and bad, etc. But when sincere people disagree in their moral judgments, we typically find it hard to resolve these disputes. Some give up and say it's "all just a matter of opinion"—turning morality into an "anything goes" free-for-all. Others conclude that moral truth can only be found by waiting on divine revelation—but then don't know what to do when God is silent, or when there is controversy about what God has revealed. For those with the patience to learn its methods, moral philosophy offers an alternative: the hope of reaching *rationaly defensible* positions on difficult moral issues through *critical reflection and dialogue*. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to this approach.

Major Assignments/Requirements:

- *Attendance:* 30 points. Since the methods of philosophy are best learned through class participation, regular attendance is essential. You may have 3 absences without penalty, after which you will lose 5 points for each *unexcused* absence. *Excused* absences (illness, family tragedy, etc.) do not count against you unless you exceed 6 total absences. Excused absences beyond this number can be made up by completing an extra assignment.
- *Participation:* 10 points. Active participation is expected, and can take many forms: classroom discussion of course materials, private discussion with the instructor outside class (especially if you are too shy to speak up in class), answering questions posed in class, posing questions to the instructor or fellow students, etc.
- *Reading Reflections:* 6 short papers (out of 8), 10 points each. For each reading appearing in **bold print** in the course outline, prepare a reading reflection of ~2 double-spaced typed pages by the indicated due date. *Unless otherwise indicated, reflections should (1) offer an overview of the reading in which you (a) explain the author's main thesis/theses, and (b) outline the author's most important argument(s) for the thesis; (2) identify points made in the reading that you find interesting, insightful, or challenging, and explain why; (3) identify and explain points of disagreement; or identify and explain the best objections you think a critic would raise (even if you are not such a critic).* Students who submit reflections will receive one of the following grades: 10, 9, 8, "See Instructor", or 0. A grade of 0 is reserved for those who failed to make a serious attempt to write a careful reflection. Those who receive a "See Instructor" grade will receive 8 points if they see the instructor (within a week), 4 points if they do not. Late reflections are not accepted.
- *Tests:* Midterm exam (March 13, in class) and final exam (May 8 at 10 AM), worth 100 points each. *Make-up tests will be given only for documented excused absences (illness, family emergency, etc.).*
- *Discussion Paper:* 5-6 pp., worth 100 pts. Introduction due April 15 (10 point penalty assessed if introduction is not submitted). Final paper due April 27. Except in documented cases of illness, family emergency, etc., late material will be docked 5 points for each day late. The paper will develop *your own* thinking about an essay covered in class. It is *not* intended to be a research paper, but an opportunity to advance the discussion started by the author of the essay. You may discuss an essay you disagree with and explain why you disagree, *defend* an essay you agree with against an important objection, or explain how an essay's arguments can be modified to overcome an important objection. Successful papers will include each of the following (not necessarily in this order): 1) A brief exposition of the main argument of the essay chosen; 2) A more focused explication of the part of the essay you will be critically examining; 3) A clear statement of your *thesis* (what you intend to prove); 4) An *argument* in support of your thesis (your *reasons* for embracing it); 5) A defense of your thesis against at least one carefully explained *objection*. Grades are based on organization, clarity, accuracy, originality, and the strength of your arguments.

Grading Scale: A=360 and above; B=320-359; C=280-319; D=240-279; F=239 and below. All assignments are assessed in terms of clarity, organization, fair/accurate explication of others' views, critical depth (including capacity to anticipate, fairly express, and respond to objections), difficulty of the issues addressed, and originality.

Tentative Course Outline

Jan 12	TOPIC: What is moral philosophy? An overview and introduction
Jan 14-16	TOPIC: The Methods of Moral Philosophy READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 1; Reitan, “The Methods of Moral Philosophy” (WR #1); Read historical display on William H Murray, in lobby outside 035 Murray Hall, then answer the following (in 1-2 pp): “Should Murray Hall be renamed? Why or why not?” (by 1/16)
Jan 19	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR HOLIDAY—NO CLASS
Jan 21	TOPIC: What’s in a Name? Applying Philosophical Methods to the Murray Hall Case
Jan 23-28	TOPIC: Isn’t It All Just a Matter of Opinion? The Challenge of Ethical Subjectivism READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 3
Jan 30-Feb 2	TOPIC: Isn’t Morality Just a Product of Culture? The Challenge of Cultural Relativism READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 2
Feb 4-11	TOPIC: Abortion, Part I: Getting Past the “Personhood Issue” READINGS: Sterba, # 15 (by 2/6) ; Sterba # 14
Feb 13-16	TOPIC: Abortion, Part II: The Broader Social Context READINGS: Sterba, #17 (by 2/16)
Feb 18	TOPIC: Religious Ethics, Part 1: The Intersections of Philosophy and Faith READINGS: WR #2--“The Wisdom of God and the Foolishness of Humanity”
Feb 20-23	TOPIC: Religious Ethics, Part 2: The Divine Command Theory of Ethics READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 4 (2/24)
Feb 26-28	TOPIC: Religious Ethics, Part 3: Natural Law Theory READINGS: WR #3--“The Natural Law Theory of Morality”
Mar 2-4	TOPIC: Case Study: Religious Arguments for and against Same-Sex Relationships READINGS: “US Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Marriage” pp. 7-24 (at http://new.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/upload/pastoral-letter-marriage-love-and-life-in-the-divine-plan.pdf) (by 3/2); WR #4—“Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin?”
Mar 6-9	TOPIC: Secular Case against Same-Sex Marriage Rights? READINGS: Sterba, #'s 54 & 55; WR #5—“The Case for Same-Sex Civil Marriage”
Mar 11	Overflow and Midterm Review
Mar 13	MIDTERM EXAM
Mar 16-20	SPRING BREAK
Mar 23-27	TOPIC: Does the End Justify the Means? Utilitarian Ethics READINGS: Rachels, Ch’s 7-8
Mar 30-Apr 3	TOPIC: Applying Utilitarianism: Deterrence and the Death Penalty READINGS: Sterba #'s 71 & 72—Address both essays in a single reading reflection in which you answer the following: Has Reiman successfully refuted van den Haag’s arguments for the death penalty? (by 4/1)
Apr 6-8	TOPIC: A Modern Utilitarian at Work, Part I: Peter Singer on World Hunger READINGS: Sterba # 8
Apr 10-13	TOPIC: A Modern Utilitarian at Work, Part II: Singer, Animal Liberation, and the Meat Industry READINGS: Sterba #58 (by 4/10)
Apr. 15-20	TOPIC: The Most Influential Modern Moral Theory: Kant’s Deontological Ethics READINGS: Rachels, Ch’s 9-10 INTRO TO DISCUSSION PAPER DUE ON 4/15
Apr 22-24	TOPIC: Can Torture Ever Be Justified? READINGS: Sterba # 75 (4/22) & Sterba # 76
Apr. 27	TOPIC: The Ethics of Care READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 11 DISCUSSION PAPER DUE ON 4/27
Apr. 29	TOPIC: Overflow and Wrap-Up
May 1	Review (with TA--Instructor at Conference)
May 8	FINAL EXAM @ 10 AM

NOTE: This is only a tentative outline. The course schedule, including the scheduled date for the midterm exam, may change during the semester. It is the student’s responsibility to keep up with any such changes.

Additional Information:

Academic Integrity Policy: Oklahoma State University is committed to the maintenance of the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct of its members. This level of ethical behavior and integrity will be maintained in this course. Participating in a behavior that violates academic integrity (e.g., unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, multiple submissions, cheating on examinations, fabricating information, helping another person cheat, unauthorized advance access to examinations, altering or destroying the work of others, and fraudulently altering academic records) will result in your being sanctioned. Violations may subject you to disciplinary action including the following: receiving a failing grade on an assignment, examination or course, receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript (F!), and being suspended from the University. You have the right to appeal the charge. Contact the Office of Academic Affairs, 101 Whitehurst 405-744-5627, academicintegrity.okstate.edu.

Note on Plagiarism: You plagiarize whenever you (a) specifically rely on an outside source (article, website, encyclopedia entry, etc.) for such things as ideas, arguments, word-choices, and research conclusions used in submitted work; and (b) obscure this fact either by failing to clearly indicate in the text (by the use of quotation marks, phrases such as “According to...,” etc.) what material comes from another source, or by failing to cite your sources. Any time you write *as if* an idea/argument/etc. originated with you, you convey the message that this is your work for which the instructor should give you credit. If this message is false, you are guilty of plagiarism whether or not you intended to deceive the instructor. Note that there is a difference between sources you specifically make use of in preparing your work and general influences from your intellectual history that have helped shape your ideas. A good general rule to follow is this: If you consult a source while writing a paper and then make use of what you gleaned from it, credit the source.

Special Accommodations for Students: Students with a qualified disability requiring special accommodations should notify me at the start of the semester and request verification of eligibility for accommodations through the Office of Student Disability Services, 315 Student Union, 744-7116, www.okstate.edu/ucs/stdis/.

See also the OSU Syllabus Attachment, available at the following web address:

<http://academicaffairs.okstate.edu/images/Patty/FacultyandStaffResources/Syllabus/spring%202015%20syllabus.pdf>

DISCLAIMER: Any resemblance to any other course or syllabus living or dead is completely coincidental, except when such a resemblance is the result of your instructor shamelessly plagiarizing a disclaimer from the syllabus of a member of the Religion Department at Butler University.