PHIL 1100: The Difference Between Right and Wrong: An Introduction to Ethics



Instructor: Jacob Nofal

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-3 PM (Middlebush 117) or by appointment

Meeting Times: Section 03–Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12:15, Section 04 Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30- 1:45

Course Objective: This course aims to provide students with a basic understanding of the foundation and application of ethics. We will investigate questions such as: Are there objective right and wrongs? What makes something right or wrong? Can right or wrong actions be captured by any particular theory (or, otherwise, which theory does it the best)? How can we apply this information to real world issues? By the end of this course students should understand and be able to discuss the basic principles and issues within meta, normative, and applied ethics.

Required Text:

Textbook: A Concise Introduction to Ethics (CIE) by Russ Shafer-Landau.
If you cannot afford to purchase the text please contact me or talk with me after class.

There are other required readings that will be provided online (you do not need to purchase these).

Email Policy: During normal hours Mon-Fri you can expect a response back within a few hours. Otherwise, if you email me after 5pm I will respond the following morning. Do not expect email responses over the weekend, though feel free to email then as I am sometimes able to reply.

Grading Structure:
A = 93-100
A- = 90-92
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76
C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69
D = 63-66
D- = 60-62
F = 0-59

Rounding Policy: Grades ending in .5 and above will be automatically rounded up. Grades ending in .4 or below do not round up under any circumstances. Rounding up grades is one of the built in charity measures of the course, but there must be a cutoff point somewhere.

Course Assignments/Grading Breakdown:

Unit Essays: 60%, 20% per essay
Each unit (there are three of them) will conclude with two in class mini essays completed on the same day. These will serve as "exams" to verify student understanding of the topics covered. The essays are hand written in blue books and should each be about 1-2 pages long. You are permitted to bring in a 3x5 index card as an aid! Rubrics for these exams can be found on Canvas. Exams are returned with grades and feedback two weeks from the date they were taken. There is no final exam, and these exams are not cumulative.

Reading Checks: 20%
At the beginning of each class you will write down 2-3 bullet points answering a question about the reading that was assigned for that day. The questions are open ended and typically require summarizing one important discussion point in the chapter assigned. These are not graded strictly for accuracy, though it must be clear that you have actually done the reading.

Participation: 20%
At the end of each class students will document their participation for the day. In order to earn credit for participation, students must contribute meaningfully to class discussions by speaking at least once per session (you must offer more than a simple yes, no, or I agree). Examples of this include: Coming to the class with questions related to each week's topics, providing answers to other people's questions or concerns, explaining the philosophical theories and arguments covered during the week, or articulating your stance on the issues (whether you agree or not, and why). Your two lowest participation grades will be dropped (another built in charity measure).

Makeup work policy:

- Unit essay makeups must be scheduled with me and taken in person (you cannot make these up in office hours without prior confirmation from me). Makeup essays will be different prompts than the one given in class.
- Reading checks can be made up without an appointment.
- Deadlines: All makeup work must be completed within two weeks of the original due date.
- Participation can not be made up, as the value of live class discussion for both you and your peers cannot be replicated.

Extra Credit: Each unit I will offer an extra credit assignment that can add up to 10% to your unit essay score. These must be completed and submitted before the unit essays. These assignments are TBD, but will be provided by the start of the third week for each unit. The assignments will involve watching a movie/tv episode with themes related to the course content and completing a short written assignment that will ask you to connect the course content to the movie in some way. The writing portion of the assignment must be done in person with me, during office hours (or at another time we have scheduled together).

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of the University. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to the students is dishonorable whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious offense. Consequences for academic dishonesty range from failing the course to expulsion from the University. Please see the office of academic integrity website for more information.

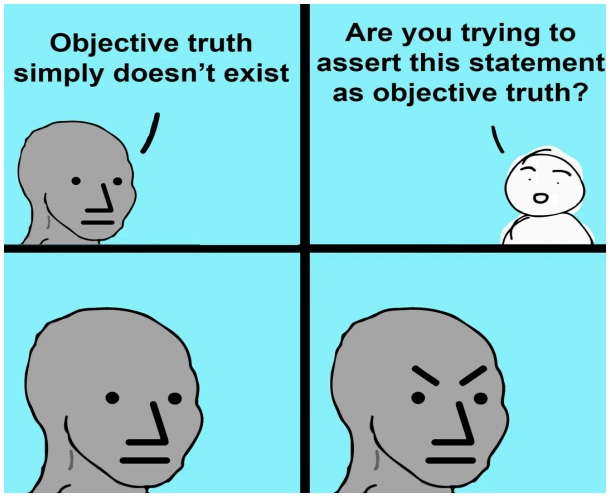
Technology Policy: Electronic devices are strongly discouraged. Cell phone use is not permitted. Students caught using their cell phones will be asked to leave the classroom and will not receive participation credit for the day. Notes should be written on pencil and paper if possible, nothing will be covered so fast that you cannot hand write your notes. In addition to this preventing potential distraction, research suggests that hand writing notes leads to better retention.

Regarding AI: Given the nature of this course, and being that all graded work is done in person, AI should not and cannot be used on assignments. AI should also not be used as a substitute for reading, this will only hurt your comprehension and in turn your grade. What AI can be used for, though be cautious, is as a study aid to ensure you understand the content. You might for instance ask AI to play the role of a moral philosopher and evaluate your understanding of a given argument or to provide pushback/play devil's advocate. With that said, it's worth reiterating that all initial learning attempts should be made without AI, and any work turned in cannot be produced with AI.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1: Metaethics





Week 1: Introductions & basic logic

Tuesday 8/26- No Reading. Course overview and introductions.

Thursday 8/28- Chapter 2 in CIE (Provided on canvas). Basic logic and philosophy foundations
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Week 2: Ethics background knowledge & questioning its existence

Tuesday 9/2- Chapter 1 in CIE (Provided on Canvas). Ethics preliminaries and common misconceptions.

Thursday 9/4- No readings, instead please watch these two youtube videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOoffXFpAIU &
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-8BdaK8TUg
Overview of metaethics, what is objective morality, and does it exist?

Week 3: Moral Skepticism/Anti Realist Arguments

Tuesday 9/9- Chapter 3 in CIE (not provided online, you must have the book by now).

Thursday 9/11- The Subjectivity of Values by J.L Mackie (Provided on Canvas).

Week 4: Moral Realist Arguments

Tuesday 9/16- The Challenge of Cultural Relativism by James Rachels and Stuart Rachels (provided on canvas).

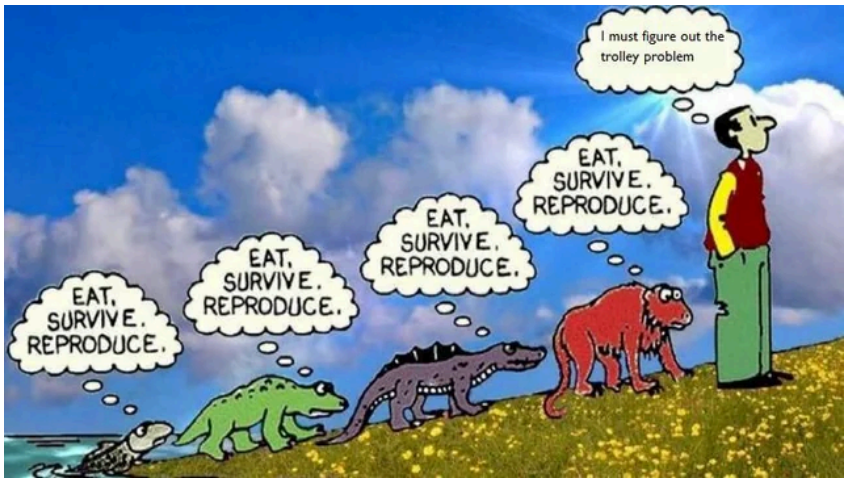
Thursday 9/18- Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too) by David Enoch (provided on canvas).

Week 5: Value Theory/First Essay

Tuesday 9/23- Chapter 4 in CIE. What makes something “good”?

Thursday 9/25- Unit essay today. No readings.

Unit 2: Normative Ethics



Week 6: Human Nature & Outcomes

Tuesday 9/30- Chapter 5 in CIE, Natural Law Theory.

Thursday 10/2- Chapter 6 in CIE, Consequentialism.

Week 7: Deontology

Tuesday 10/7- Chapter 7 In CIE, Kantian ethics.

Thursday 10/9- No readings, watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bIys6JoEDw, https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_vazquez_and_sarah_stroud_when_should_you_break_a_promise, and https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_stroud_ethical_dilemma_would_you_lie (20 minutes combined time, they're all short!)

Week 8: Agreements & Duties

Tuesday 10/14- Chapter 8 in CIE, social contract theory.

Thursday 10/16- Chapter 9 in CIE, Prima Facie Duties

Week 9: Character and Care

Tuesday 10/21- Chapter 10 in CIE, Virtue Ethics

Thursday 10/23- Chapter 11 in CIE, Feminist Ethics

Week 10: Exam and Start Applied Ethics (Medical Ethics First)

Tuesday 10/28- Unit essay today, no readings.

Unit 3: Applied Ethics (all readings on canvas)

Thursday 10/30- Active and Passive Euthansia by James Rachels and The Note by Chris Hill.

Week 11: Medical Ethics & Resource Allocation
Tuesday 11/4- When Self Determination Runs Amok by Daniel Callahan

Thursday 11/6-The Allocation of Emergency Lifesaving Treatment by Nicholas Rescher

Week 12: Finish Resource Allocation
Tuesday 11/11- No Class, Holliday.

Thursday 11/13- Effective Altruism by William MacAskill

Week 13: Complacency and Action

Tuesday 11/18- The Obligation to Resist Oppression by Carol Hay. Optional reading: letter from Birmingham jail by MLK.

Thursday 11/20- Moral Saints by Susan Wolf

Week 14: Population Ethics

Tuesday 12/2- Sections 1 & 2 in the IEP on Anti-Natalism: https://iep.utm.edu/anti-natalism/

Thursday 12/4- Sections 3 & 4 from the IEP on Anti-Natalism: https://iep.utm.edu/anti-natalism/. Optional reading: Procreating in an Overpopulated World by Craig Stanbury

Week 15: Platform Ethics (censorship/misinformation) & Exam

Tuesday 12/9- Quarantining Online Hate Speech by Stefanie Ullmann and Marcus Tomalin

Thursday 12/11- Unit essay today. No readings.