

## **Phil 108: Contemporary Ethical Issues**

Tu, W, Th 1–3:30pm in 175 Barrows

F 1–3:30pm in 215 Dwinelle

### **Important Notice:**

I have been summoned for jury duty on July 12. While the chances of having to serve on a jury are low, if I do have to serve, then the class will have to meet 6–8:30PM until I am released. Please take this into consideration before enrolling.

### **Instructor:**

Niko Kolodny

Office hours and contact info: <http://sophos.berkeley.edu/kolodny/>

### **Graduate Student Instructor:**

Erich Matthes

Contact info: <http://philosophy.berkeley.edu/people/detail/178>

### **Catalog Description:**

This course will be devoted to in-depth discussion of a variety of problems in moral philosophy raised by real-life questions of individual conduct and social policy. Its contents will vary from occasion to occasion. Possible topics include philosophical problems posed by affirmative action, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, terrorism, war, poverty, and climate change.

### **Course Description:**

As a thoughtful person, living in this country, at this time, you have at some point asked yourself some of the following questions. Are you allowed to buy yourself an iPod when you could use the money to save people from starving? Should you buy a hybrid, rather than an SUV, when your individual choice is just “a drop in the bucket” and won’t really affect global warming? Is there any difference between terrorism and “collateral damage”? May we kill enemy soldiers or even civilians to protect ourselves? Is abortion wrong? Is it wrong to kill yourself to spare yourself a future of pain and debilitation? Is it wrong for a doctor to help you to do this? What is the point of punishing criminals? *Is* there any point in it? What do we owe to future generations? Is it wrong to bring children into this world?

These questions can be difficult for many different reasons. Self-interest, prejudice, and fear can cloud our judgment. Religious authorities that we accept on faith, such as the Bible, can give unclear or conflicting directions. Finally, it can be hard to be sure of relevant facts: for example, whether the justice system applies the death penalty consistently, or whether burning fossil fuels leads to climate change.

This course, however, is about another set of difficulties, which persist when we set aside our personal feelings, we see how far we can get without relying on faith, and we assume that we know the relevant facts. We may not be able to decide, by our own reflection and reasoning, which answers are correct, and even when we are sure that certain answers are

correct, we may not be able to justify them. Our ethical ideas may seem not up to the task. Our aim in this course is to come to terms with these difficulties and to see to what extent they can be overcome.

### **Prerequisites:**

One course in moral philosophy, such as Phil 2 or Phil 104; or two courses in other areas of philosophy.

### **Readings:**

All of the readings are available online.

1. If there is no link, check “Resources” on the course site on bSpace:  
<https://bSpace.berkeley.edu/>
2. If you have trouble with the link...
  - Make sure you are on the UC Berkeley network, or connected to it via a VPN. See:  
[http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/Help/connecting\\_off\\_campus.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/Help/connecting_off_campus.html)
  - If the source in parentheses is “Oxford Scholarship Online”...
    - Visit:  
<http://sunsite2.berkeley.edu:8088/ERF/servlet/ERFmain?cmd=searchSub&resTypeId=6&subjectId=98>
    - Follow the link to Oxford Scholarship Online, and then search for the relevant author and title.
    - If you are not given full text access, try logging out (upper right hand corner) and then trying to access it again. (Surprisingly, that often works.)
  - If the source in parenthesis is a journal (e.g., “Philosophy and Public Affairs”)
    - Visit:  
[http://ucelinks.cdlib.org:8888/sfx\\_ucb/a-z/default](http://ucelinks.cdlib.org:8888/sfx_ucb/a-z/default)
    - Search for the relevant journal, follow the link to the journal, and search for the relevant author and title.
  - If that fails, let me know ASAP.

### **Requirements:**

1. For each lecture, download the handout from the course website and bring it to class.
2. Section participation: 15%.
3. One 3–4-page paper: 20%.
4. One 2-page proposal for your term paper, describing a question or problem and how you will address it. You may submit this for approval at any time up until July 30. However, the earlier you submit your outline, the earlier you will get comments, and so the more time you will have to write your term paper itself.
5. One 7–8-page term paper: 35%.
6. Final exam: 30%. The questions will come from a longer list that you will have before the exam.

Note: GSI will not comment on the term paper or final exam, but will be available to discuss them.

## **Introduction**

1. Introduction  
Tuesday, July 6

## **Aiding**

2. How much must we do to prevent suffering?

Wednesday, July 7

Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, Ch. 1, 2, 3 (§7-10 only), 4 (§1 only), 5 (§3–6 only), 6 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

(<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780195108590/toc.html>)

Thursday, July 8

Unger, continued.

Murphy, “The Demands of Beneficence” (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265468>)

Friday, July 9

Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence* Ch. 5 and 8 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

(<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780199258116/toc.html>)

## **First Paper Assigned**

Tuesday, July 13

Discussion section

## **Individual or group action?**

3. What difference does one person make?

Wednesday, July 14

Glover, “It Makes No Difference Whether Or Not I Do It” (Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplemental Volume)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4106873>)

Jackson, “Group Morality”

## Harming: Theory

4. Is allowing people be harmed different from harming them oneself? (Is letting die different from killing?)

Thursday, July 15

Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect" (Oxford Scholarship Online)

(<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780199252862/p022.html> - aprof-0199252866-chapter-2)

Thomson, "The Trolley Problem" (Yale Law Journal)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/796133>)

Friday, July 16

Discussion section

Tuesday, July 20

Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing" (Philosophical Review)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2185021>)

Thomson, "Turning the Trolley" (Philosophy & Public Affairs)

(<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/121501239/HTMLSTART>)

### First Paper Due

5. Is foreseeing harm different from intending harm?

Wednesday, July 21

Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect" (re-read)

Quinn, "Actions, Intentions and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect" (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265475>)

6. May we harm others to defend ourselves?

Thursday, July 22

Thomson, "Self-Defense and Rights" (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265419>)

Friday, July 23

Discussion section

## Harming: Applications

### 7. May we kill in war?

Tuesday, July 27

McMahan, "The Ethics of Killing in War" (Ethics)

(<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/422400>)

### 8. Is there a difference between terrorism and "collateral damage"?

Wednesday, July 28

Rodin, "Terrorism without Intention" (Ethics)

(<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/383442>)

Scheffler, "Is Terrorism Morally Distinctive?" (Journal of Political Philosophy)

(<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/jopp/14/1>)

### 9. Is abortion permissible?

Thursday, July 29

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265091>)

Friday, July 30

Discussion section

**Deadline for Term Paper Topic**

Tuesday, August 3

McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margin of Life* 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.5 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

(<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780195079982/toc.html>)

Wednesday, August 4

McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margin of Life* 4.1, 4.2, 4.7

### 10. May we kill ourselves?

Thursday, August 5

Velleman, "A Right to Self-Termination?"

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2989455>)

Friday, August 6

Discussion section

11. May we punish criminals?

Tuesday, August 10

Ewing, *The Morality of Punishment*, Ch. 2

Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Ch. I, XIII, XIV

(<http://www.utilitarianism.com/jeremy-bentham/index.html>)

Quinn, "The Right to Threaten and the Right to Punish" (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265336>)

**Term Paper Due**

**Creating life:**

12. What do we owe people whom we caused to exist?

Wednesday, August 11

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Ch. 16: "The Non-Identity Problem" (Oxford Scholarship Online)

([http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780198249085/p087.html - acprof-019824908X-chapter-16](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780198249085/p087.html-acprof-019824908X-chapter-16))

Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm" (Legal Theory)

(<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid=LEG&volumeId=5&issueId=02>)

**Review:**

Thursday, August 12

**Final Exam:**

Friday, August 13

**Course Policies:**

*Extensions:*

Plan ahead. You may request extensions from your GSI *up until 72 hours* before papers are due. After then, extensions will be granted *only for medical and family emergencies*.

*Submitting Work:*

*Papers must be submitted, on paper, by you, to your GSI, in class, by 1:10pm, before the lecture starts.* Papers submitted later will lose *one step* (e.g., B+ to B) *immediately* and

then an *additional step every 24 hours*. If you cannot come to lecture on the due date, you may request to make other arrangements with your GSI, so long as you do so well before the deadline. Whatever the circumstances, you are responsible for ensuring that your GSI gets your paper. Forgotten or unopenable attachments, bounced or lost emails, and so on, are your responsibility.

*"Re-grading":*

You are strongly encouraged to discuss grades and comments on papers with your GSI or me. However, *grades on particular papers and exams will not be changed under any circumstances*. While there is no perfect system, selective "re-grading" at students' request only makes things worse. "Second" grades are likely to be less accurate and less fair than "first" grades. This is because, among other things, the GSI does not have access to other papers for purposes of comparison, the student will inevitably supply additional input (clarifications, explanations, etc.) that the original paper did not, and there are certain biases of self-selection.

The only exception, to which none of these concerns apply, is a suspected arithmetical or recording error in your final course grade. Please do not hesitate to bring this to your GSI's or my attention.

*Academic Dishonesty:*

“Any test, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor.”

—Report of the Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Subcommittee, June 18, 2004.

You are expected to be familiar with the definitions of academic dishonesty in the Code of Student Conduct, which can be found here:

<http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/sja.asp?id=1143&rcol=1201>.

*Plagiarism and cheating will be penalized, at a minimum, by an "F" on the paper or exam in question. It may also, depending on its seriousness, result in an "F" in the course as a whole and a report to Student Judicial Affairs.*

*Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:*

If you have an official accommodation letter from the Disabled Students' Program that is relevant to this course, please notify both me and your GSI at a reasonable time. We will do whatever we can to help.