

Phil 002: Contemporary Moral Issues

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Instructor:

Office Hours: 3 pm - 4 pm PDT F

Web: UCR Profile

Class Hours: 2:00 pm - 3:20 pm PDT MTWR

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an introductory level course in applied ethics, which is to say that it is a survey of several contemporaneously relevant topics from the viewpoint of moral philosophy. No background knowledge of moral philosophy, however, is presupposed. We will develop the necessary theoretical apparatus for approaching these topics as we encounter them. Each week of the course will concern a different contemporary moral issue: Free Speech & Expression, True Crime Media, Misinformation & Conspiracy Theories, Loneliness & Parasocial Relationships, and Civil Disobedience. Issues have been selected for a variety of reasons, not limited to their general social importance. While some of the issues we will discuss are significant at a societal level, others may be consequential only to those whom they directly involve. Apart from that, these issues were chosen because they are philosophically interesting, and because an examination of them may yield insight that transfers to other areas.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

There are no required reading materials for this course. Readings and lecture recordings will be posted on the Canvas course page. Likewise, you will submit quizzes, as well as the midterm and final paper there. As such, internet access is the only requirement for this course.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course will be taught partly live and partly asynchronously. Although the schedule indicates lecture on Monday through Thursday, we will meet live through Zoom only for the main lecture on Mondays. The lectures for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday will be posted, along with the respective readings, under the

Modules section of the Canvas Course page. Because they are recorded does not mean that these lectures are optional. The asynchronous component is designed to make life easier on you as students and to improve the quality of participation in our live meetings. Essential material will be covered in these lectures and it will not be possible to do well on the quizzes without them. I invite students who have questions about any of this material to come to my office hours as listed above, or to bring them up on Mondays as time permits. **Section meetings with your TAs are not recorded. You must attend them live over Zoom.**

ASSESSMENTS

There are 2 major writing assignments for this course. We will also have weekly quizzes on reading material, and you will receive a grade for your section participation with your TA and your attendance in the main lecture. Further details are provided below.

Quizzes

Each unit of the course will have a quiz, meaning there will be one quiz per week of the session. These will be posted on Canvas under the corresponding module. Quizzes will be made available on Thursdays and due that Friday at 11:59 PM PDT. They will be timed and multiple choice. Late submissions are subject to a grade penalty of one letter grade per day late. These are generally designed just to test descriptive competence with the material, i.e. they will not ask you to settle an issue for yourself but, for instance, to describe the stance of one of our authors. Your final grade for this category will be the average of the five with the lowest dropped.

Midterm Paper

You will write an approximately 750 word midterm paper on a prompt to be given in the first week or two of the course. The prompt will ask you to consider in detail one of the topics covered in Weeks 1-3. You will receive feedback from your TA on your submission, and revision of it will be a requirement for the final paper. As such, it is crucial that you submit the midterm on time. If you cannot submit it on time for any reason, contact your TA as soon as possible. **The use of generative A.I. for anything other than grammar or spelling is strictly prohibited.**

Final Paper

The final paper will be a revision of your midterm paper in response to feedback from your TA. The revised paper should be approximately 1500 words. You will

also be required to incorporate a discussion of one of the topics from Weeks 4-5 of the course, and to relate it to the topic chosen for your midterm paper. Further directions on how to do this will be given at the time of the assignment. **Again, the use of generative A.I. for making substantive revisions or additions is strictly prohibited.**

Section Participation

The details of this are left to your TA, who will inform you of them on the first day of sections meetings.

Lecture Attendance

Attendance will be taken for the main lecture on Mondays. Zoom logs both attendance and time in meeting. Attendance for less than half of a lecture will not be counted.

Content Warning & Alternate Assignments

Some of the content for this course concerns subject matter that may be difficult for some students, in particular the unit on True Crime. If you do not feel that you can engage with an assigned reading or film, please contact me and I will do my best to arrange an appropriate alternate assignment.

GRADING POLICY

The assignments will be weighed as follows:

✎ Section Participation 10%

✎ Lecture Attendance 5%

✎ Quizzes 25%

✎ Midterm Paper 30%

✎ Final Paper 30%

COURSE SCHEDULE

This schedule may be subject to some change. If readings or assignments are modified, you will be given adequate notice through Canvas.

Week 1: Freedom of Speech

Session 1

- ☞ No Reading– the first lecture will go over the course requirements and introduce some background in philosophical ethics that we will make use of.

Session 2

- ☞ John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2

Session 3

- ☞
- ☞ John Stuart Mill: *On Liberty*, Ch. 2 & Ch. 3

Session 4

- ☞ Jeremy Waldron: *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Ch. 4
- ☞ Optional– Jeremy Waldron: *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Ch. 5

Due: Quiz 1

Week 2: True Crime Media

Session 5

Watch Either:

- ☞ Thought Crimes
- ☞ I Love You, Now Die
- ☞ Annie Nichol: *My Sister Was Murdered 30 Years Ago. True Crime Repackages Our Pain as Entertainment*

Session 6

- ☞ Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morality*
- ☞ Richard Smith & Wilco van Dijk- Schadenfreude and Gluckschmerz

Session 7

- ☞ Olivia Bailey: *Empathy with Vicious Perspectives*

Session 8

- ☞ David Velleman: *A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics*

Due: Quiz 2

Week 3: Misinformation & Conspiracy Theories

Session 9

- ☞ C Thi Nguyen- Epistemic Bubbles Echo Chambers

Session 10

☞ St. Augustine- De Mendacio (On Lying)

Session 11

☞ Keith Raymond-Harris- Beyond Belief

Session 12

☞ Chris Ranalli - Weaponizing Conspiracy Theories

Due: Quiz 3

Due: Midterm Paper

Week 4: Loneliness & Parasocial Relationships

Session 13

☞ Alexander Nehamas- The Good of Friendship

Session 14

☞ Tom Roberts & Joel Krueger- Loneliness & the Emotional Experience of Absence

Session 15

☞ Kaitlyn Creasy- Loneliness & Ressentiment

☞ Oliver Tradi- Parasocial Relationships

Session 16

☞ Alfred Archer & Catherine Robb- Ethics of Parasocial Relationships

Due: Quiz 4

Week 5: Civil Disobedience

Session 17

☞ Henry David Thoreau- Civil Disobedience

Session 18

☞ Martin Luther King, Jr- Letter from Birmingham Jail

Session 19

☞ Thom Brooks- A Defense of Jury Nullification

Session 20

☞ Teng Herng Lai- Sit-ins, Blockades, and Lock-ons

Due: Quiz 5

Due: Final Paper