

Contemporary Moral Problems - PHL 304

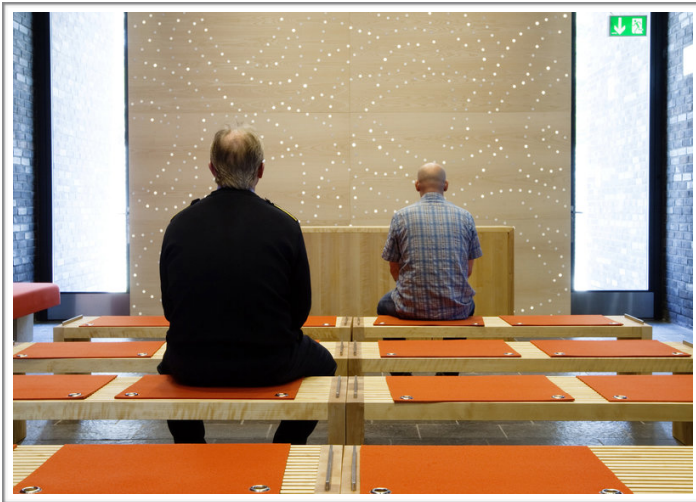
Summer 2020

MTWTHF 1:00 - 2:30PM, Zoom

Instructor: Nicole Smith (pronouns: she/her)

Office hours: Wednesdays 2:30 - 3:30PM & by appointment

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***A chapel for inmates
at Halden prison in
Norway.***

Chances are you've confronted an ethical choice recently: Should I pay someone to write my essay or do it myself? Should I refuse the plastic straw or not worry about it? What, if anything, should I do about homelessness? Should I donate blood or can it wait until next time? Should I report the harassment I witnessed or pretend it didn't happen? By contrast, there are many other ethical questions that you may have never explicitly considered, but that nonetheless apply to you, such as: Should I give up a healthy organ to a dying stranger? Is it wrong to use non-human animals as a food source? Is it permissible to buy clothes that contribute to child labor and unsafe working conditions? A further set of questions in ethics concerns institutions and policies: what moral (and legal) constraints or permissions should exist with respect to decisions related to both the beginning of life (e.g., the ethics of abortion) and the end of life (e.g., the ethics of euthanasia)? Is the system of punishment and incarceration justified? This course will introduce you to several contemporary moral problems and provide you with the skills necessary for critically evaluating proposed responses to those problems.

Required textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be made available on Canvas.

Course requirements and grading policies

25% – participation

40% – 4 quizzes

35% – take-home essay

Participation

You will be given the opportunity to earn one participation point each class period. You *must attend the Zoom session to earn the participation credit*. There is a scale provided in the assignment category to help you determine what your grade will be given the points you received.

Quizzes

There will be four quizzes. You should plan to attend the Zoom session on the day of the quiz. The quizzes will consist of multiple choice and essay questions. Their purpose is to ensure that you are understanding the material and to practice your philosophical writing in preparation for the essay.

Essay

There will be a take-home essay due at the end of the course. You will be able to choose from one of the topics we covered in the course, but there will be a specific prompt and set of guidelines you will need to follow in completing the assignment. More information will be provided on Canvas.

Policies

Final grade scale policy

	100% to 94% = A	93% to 90% = A-
89% to 88% = B+	87% to 84% = B	83% to 80% = B-
79% to 78% = C+	77% to 74% = C	73% to 70% = C-
69% to 68% = D+	67% to 64% = D	63% to 60% = D-
59% and below = F		

Late policy

I will permit makeups only for medical reasons, jury duty, family emergencies, or related documented emergencies, and for observance of a religious holiday (for more information see: <http://www.utexas.edu/provost/policies/religious_holidays/>). I will do my best not to schedule assignments that interfere with religious observance, but if

such a conflict arises please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for you to make up the relevant assignment. Documentation for all other excuses will be required.

Students with disabilities

Reasonable accommodation will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. Information about disability services is located here on the following webpage: <<http://www.utexas.edu/disability/>>. If you are a student with a disability, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities and inform me of any pertinent information early on in the semester, so that I may provide you with proper accommodations.

Academic integrity

Absolutely no plagiarism will be tolerated. This means that your ideas and writing must be your own. For more information on the university's official policy on academic honesty use the following link: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php>.

Course flag

This course carries the Ethics flag. It is designed to equip you with the skills necessary for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. You will be introduced to theories, concepts, and methods that will enable you to apply ethical reasoning to real-life situations. You will be required to think critically about various ethical viewpoints, and, most importantly, to reevaluate your own ethical opinions.

Content alert

We cover topics that touch on death and violence (including sexual violence), which can be emotionally demanding and even triggering. Often we will be applying "cold" analytic thought and reasoning to issues that may very well be relevant to you personally. I welcome you to address any questions or concerns you might have about this at the beginning of the semester.

Course Schedule

(The required reading should be completed before class on the day it is assigned).

Introductory week
Week 1: June 4th - 5th
Thursday: No readings.

Friday:
Required reading: Sebo & Schlottmann "Moral theory," pp. 27 - 35 (Canvas - Files).

Topic: Moral status and industrial agriculture

Week 2: June 8th - 12th

Monday:
Required reading: Schlottmann & Sebo "Moral theory," pp. 35 - 45 (Canvas - Files).

Tuesday: Discussion (re-read previous)

Wednesday:
Required reading: Schlottmann & Sebo "Moral status" (Canvas - Files).

Thursday: Discussion (re-read previous)

Friday: **Quiz day**
Required reading: Schlottmann & Sebo "Industrial agriculture" (Canvas - Files).

Topic: Food ethics and animal liberation

Week 3: June 15th - 19th

Monday: Guest lecture by a PETA representative (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals).

Tuesday: Discussion (no required reading).

Wednesday:
Required reading: Schlottmann & Sebo "The ethics of food consumption" (Canvas - Files).

Thursday: Discussion (re-read previous).

Friday: **Quiz day**
Required reading: Aph Ko "Why Animal Liberation Requires an Epistemological Revolution" (Canvas - Files).

Topic: Moral status and reproduction

Week 4: June 22nd - 26th

Monday:
Required reading: Amy Berg "Abortion and Miscarriage" (Canvas - Files).

Tuesday: Discussion (re-read previous)

<p>Wednesday:</p> <p>Required reading: Required reading: Seline Szkupinski Quiroga "Blood Is Thicker than Water: Policing Donor Insemination and the Reproduction of Whiteness" (Canvas - Files).</p>
<p>Thursday: Discussion (re-read previous)</p>
<p>Friday: Quiz day</p> <p>No required reading.</p>

<p>Topic: Liberalism and the incarceration system</p>
<p>Week 4: June 29th - July 3rd</p>
<p>Monday:</p> <p>Required reading: Aziza Ahmed "Think Again: Prostitution" (Canvas - Pages).</p>
<p>Tuesday: Discussion (re-read previous).</p>
<p>Wednesday:</p> <p>Required reading: Michelle Alexander "The Color of Justice" (Canvas - Files).</p>
<p>Thursday: Discussion (re-read previous).</p>
<p>Friday: Quiz day</p> <p>Required reading: Danielle Jefferis "Immigration Detention and Abolition" (Canvas - Pages).</p>

<p>Prison and police abolition and "allyship"</p>
<p>Week 5: July 6th - 10th</p>
<p>Monday:</p> <p>Required reading: The Abolitionist Toolkit, Part 2 & 3 (Canvas - Pages).</p> <p>Recommended viewing: <https://www.haymarketbooks.org/blogs/128-ruth-wilson-gilmore-on-covid-19-decarceration-and-abolition></p>
<p>Tuesday:</p> <p>Required reading: M. "A Critique of Ally Politics" (Canvas - Pages).</p>
<p>Wednesday:</p> <p>Required reading: Delio Vasquez "The Poor Person's Defense of Riots: Practical Looting, Rational Riots, and the Shortcomings of Black Liberalism" (Canvas - Pages).</p>
<p>Thursday: Last day — wrapping up with a Zoom activity.</p>
<p>Friday: No classes - final essay due.</p>

**The instructor reserves the right to change the course schedule with appropriate notification to students.*