

PHL 270: Philosophical Ethics | Spring 2021

Instructor: Dr. Marc Johansen / ✉ marcjohansen@creighton.edu

Section I: Tuesday & Thursday 12:30 – 1:45 / Online

Section K: Tuesday & Thursday 2:00 – 3:15 / Online

Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday 11:00 – 12:15 & by appointment / Online

This is a course in ethical theory, primarily *normative* ethical theory. A normative ethic aims to articulate the basic principles of right action. It's an attempt to answer the question, "What makes morally right actions right and morally wrong actions wrong?" We'll explore three kinds of answers to that question — utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics — and their implications for real-world ethical dilemmas.

Course objectives

- Identify and define terms, concepts, and principles that are crucial to fundamental theories of morality.
- Evaluate fundamental moral theories and the reasons that can be given for their support.
- Critically evaluate the student's own ethical presuppositions.
- Distinguish the morally relevant features of complex practical situations and use fundamental moral theories to form well-reasoned judgments about how to act in those situations.

Texts

- Russ Shafer-Landau (ed), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (Blackwell 2012)
- Additional articles will be available via BlueLine.

Grading

Course grades are determined by the weighted average of the following items. A score of 93–100 is an A, 90–92 is a A-, 87–89 is a B+, 83–86 is a B, 80–82 is a B-, 77–79 is a C+, 73–76 is a C, 70–72 is a C-, 60–69 is a D, and a score below 60 is an F.

- **Review quizzes (10%)** There will be a short quiz at the end of most weeks that covers some of the central ideas that have been covered that week. Quizzes will be conducted on BlueLine. They will become available by noon on Friday and must be completed by noon on Monday. *Quizzes cannot be made up.* If you miss a quiz due to an excused absence, the quiz will be waived for you.
- **Reading responses (10%)** You will need to write a brief response (200 – 250 words) to four reading assignments of your choice. ***Two must be completed by March 18. Two must be completed after March 18.*** Responses should thoughtfully and critically engage with the reading. They can present an objection, raise and develop a question, draw out an interesting implication, or otherwise thoughtfully comment on the reading. They are not to be summaries

of the reading. Unless otherwise noted, **responses are due by 8:00am on the day we begin discussing the reading they address** and should be submitted on BlueLine. Missed responses cannot be made up and will not be accepted late.

- **Exams (20% each)** There will be three exams covering the readings and lectures. Exams will be held on the following dates: **March 4, April 8, and May 6 @ 1:00 – 2:40 (Sec I) / May 7 @ 10:00 – 11:40 (Sec K).**
- **Paper (20%)** The paper will ask you to present and evaluate an ethical debate. In it, you'll present two (or more) opposing positions, their supporting arguments, and provide your own critical evaluation of that debate in which you argue in support of one side. Paper topics and other assignment details will be posted to BlueLine. Papers are to be 1500 – 2000 words. Due electronically on **April 30 @ 11:59pm.**

The work you submit must be your own. I encourage you to study and discuss course material in groups. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing it and one of the best ways to do philosophy is to talk about it with other people. However, when it comes time to take what you've learned and produce work for evaluation, you must be the sole author of that work.

Schedule

Readings found in Shafer-Landau are indicated with 'SL' and their chapter number. All other articles will be available on BlueLine (BL). This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on BlueLine.

Jan 28 Course introduction

The status of morality

Feb 2	Plato: The immoralist's challenge	(SL 15)
Feb 4	Gensler: Cultural relativism	(SL 6)
Feb 9	Mackie: The subjectivity of values (selections)	(SL 3)
	Enoch: Why I am an objectivist about ethics...	(BL)

Consequentialism

Feb 11	Mill: Utilitarianism	(SL 48)
Feb 16	Singer: The Singer solution to world poverty	(BL)
Feb 18	Smart: Extreme and restricted utilitarianism	(SL 49)
Feb 23	Le Guin: The ones who walk away from Omelas	(BL)
Feb 25	Harris: The survival lottery	(SL 54)

Mar 2	Wrap up and review	
Mar 4	—— Exam 1 ——	
Mar 9	Nozick: The experience machine	(SL 30)
Mar 11	TBA	

Deontology

Mar 16	Kant: Selections from <i>Groundwork...</i>	(SL 55)
Mar 18	Kant: Selections from <i>Groundwork...</i>	(SL 55)
Mar 23	O'Neill: Kantian approaches to some famine problems	(SL 57)
Mar 25	TBA	
Mar 30	Thomson: Killing, letting die, and the trolley problem	(SL 61)
Apr 1	Nagel: Moral luck	(BL)
Apr 6	Wrap up and review	
Apr 8	—— Exam 2 ——	

Virtue ethics

Apr 13	Aristotle: The nature of virtue	(SL 66)
Apr 15	Aristotle: The nature of virtue (cont.)	
Apr 20	Hursthouse: Normative virtue ethics	(SL 68)
Apr 22	Annas: Being virtuous and doing the right thing	(SL 71)
Apr 27	TBA	
Apr 29	TBA	
May 4	Wrap up and review	
May 6	—— Section I: Final exam ——	
May 7	—— Section K: Final exam ——	

Some advice on reading...

Reading philosophy can be difficult. Because the questions it takes up are often very general, the answers it arrives at tend to be fairly abstract. This takes some getting used to. I've tried to select readings in which the difficulty arises naturally from the ideas and arguments themselves and not just poor presentation, but there's no avoiding the fact that the reading will be challenging. Keep that in mind when you approach the readings. Especially at first, I recommend that you budget more time per page to complete these readings than you might otherwise be accustomed to.

To help make the reading easier (and, conveniently, to get more out of it), I recommend that you do something a little counterintuitive: *read everything twice*. The first time through, read quickly and just carefully enough to pick up the main ideas and get a rough sense of the arguments. When you get to a difficult part or something you don't understand, just make note of it and keep going. Then on the second time through, go back and read more carefully. The easy parts will be easier now that you've seen them before and you'll have more context with which to tackle the difficult parts.

You don't need to have mastered each reading before class. Your goal should be to come to class conversant enough in the reading to participate in discussion and ask good questions.

Other policies

- **Course modality** This course is considered by the university to be a Remote Instruction (SD300) course. Instructors and students meet synchronously using digital technology (e.g., Zoom) at the scheduled times according to the schedule of classes. No room is assigned. This option is reserved for (a) large courses for which a hybrid social-distance modality cannot be implemented, (b) courses with individuals who have additional health risks or (c) courses in which the learning objectives can be met with a technology-mediated pedagogy.
- **Attendance** I expect you to attend class. Though attendance itself does not directly count towards your grade, your success in the course will depend on your coming to class prepared and participating. If you will not be able to attend class for medical or religious reasons or due to a conflict with a university sponsored activity, please let me know as soon as possible — preferably in advance of your absence. I'll gladly excuse legitimate and verifiable absences *provided you notify me no later than 24 hours after the class meeting from which you were absent*.
- **Disability accommodations** Any student who requires accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make his or her needs known to the instructor and to the Office of Disability Accommodations. I am glad to work with you to provide any reasonable accommodations. See the [Office of Disability Accommodations](#) for more information.
- **Academic integrity** I take academic integrity *very seriously*. Plagiarism and cheating on any assignment, quiz, or exam is a very serious offense and will not be tolerated in any way. All suspicious assignments will be investigated. Any assignment that is found to contain plagiarized material or have resulted from cheating will at a minimum receive no credit and may, at my discretion, result in automatic failure from the course. Students who plagiarize or cheat in any way will be reported to the Dean. Creighton University policy also permits the Dean to impose a more serious penalty where warranted, "up to and including expulsion from the University." Students have the right to appeal charges of academic dishonesty.

If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, make sure you speak to me before turning in any written work. You may also consult Learning in the Academy: An Introduction to the Culture of Scholarship at www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/docs/LearningInAcademy.pdf

Copies of the most current college procedures on academic honesty can be found at: www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/curriculum/CCAS_Academic_Honesty_Policy_.pdf

- **Class recordings** Learning takes place in the face to face and virtual classrooms through a variety of means, including lectures, discussions, activities, etc. For learning to take place, these environments need to be a safe space. As part of that safe space, we should speak respectfully to and with each other. That is not to suggest that any of us will never misspeak. To learn from these conversations, we need to ensure that what happens in our face to face and virtual classrooms stays in the classroom.

For this reason all course materials, including handouts, problem sets (and solutions), and lecture and discussion materials (powerpoint slides, videos, lecture and discussion recordings, etc.) that are posted on the course BlueLine site are considered to be copyrighted and are intended to be used only by students enrolled in that class, for the purposes of fulfilling the course objectives. Only the instructor may record common class sessions. Only the instructor may distribute any and all recorded materials, including individual student discussion posts. Sharing any of these materials with others outside of the course will be considered "misuse of academic resources," as defined in the Creighton University Student Handbook as an act of academic misconduct, and students can be penalized, up to and including failure of the course.

In the case of recorded live lecture and discussion material, students should be aware that recording may continue during class breaks. Therefore, private conversations should be held elsewhere in order to avoid inadvertent recording.

There are additional consequences for cyberbullying or otherwise using a recording in violation of our code of conduct or Title IX policies.

Recordings of classroom content may not be available in real time, as sometimes it takes up to 24 hours for classroom recordings to become available.

- **Video etiquette** While you zoom, your background is visible unless you choose a virtual background. Please remove distractions and remind roommates/family of your schedule. Additionally, please keep your audio muted when you are not speaking.
- **Class cancellation** In the unlikely event that class must be cancelled because an emergency prevents me from attending class, an announcement will be sent to your university email account via BlueLine and/or a printed announcement will be posted in the classroom. In the event the university closes because of inclement weather, an official announcement will be made on the university's weather hotline at 402-280-5800. Unless the university officially closes, always assume that class will meet as scheduled.

- **Required technology** There are university tech standards for students and you can view these at <https://www.creighton.edu/node/170088>.
- **Office hours** Office hours are time that I've reserved for you outside of class. If you have questions or concerns about the course or course material, need help with a writing assignment, etc., I encourage you to stop by. To help that run smoothly, I ask that you let me know in advance that you'd like to meet — an email or word after class is more than enough. This will help me accommodate more students, especially around deadlines and exams.
- **Statement from the Provost** Creighton University may modify, suspend, or postpone any and all activities and services immediately and without notice because of force majeure causes beyond Creighton's control and occurring without its fault or negligence including, but not limited to, acts of god, fire, war, governmental action, terrorism, epidemic, pandemic, weather, national emergencies, or other threats to the safety of students or staff. Creighton may, at its option, alter the academic schedule or provide alternate instruction modalities to meet course objectives and competencies and program outcomes, including, but not limited to, distance or remote learning, until such time as Creighton determines normal operations may resume safely.
- **Student well-being** All members of Creighton University recognize that you, as students, may experience stressors that can impact both your academic experience and personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, relationships, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For other concerns, Creighton University offers many resources including Student Counseling Services, The EDGE, The Office of Disability Services, Student Health Education and Compliance, The Office of Student Retention, The Financial Aid Office, The Creighton Cupboard, The Student Leadership and Involvement Center, The VIP Center, The Creighton Intercultural Center, and so many more. All can be found on Creighton University's website or you can just ask.

It is the intent of the faculty and staff to support you. In the event I suspect you need additional support, I will express my concerns and the reasons for them and share resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be going on, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.