

# PHIL 2100 – Contemporary Problems in Ethics

Fall 2020

Meeting time and place: Tuesday and Thursday 10-11:40 AM Kohrman Hall 02258

**Instructor:** Ian Everitt

**Office:** Moore 3007

**Email:** [ian.a.everitt@wmich.edu](mailto:ian.a.everitt@wmich.edu)

**Office Hours:** Email me to set up a time to meet over Webex or Zoom

## **Course Description:**

This course is an introduction to contemporary debates and research in ethics. Through the semester, we will have an opportunity to discuss a number of specific moral issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, socioeconomic inequalities, capital punishment, and more. Contemporary life is filled with moral challenges. In this course, we will have opportunity to reflect upon some of them through the lenses of relevant ethical theories that will allow students to address moral issues in a systematic and rigorous manner.

## **Learning Objectives:**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify, critically analyze, and evaluate key contemporary ethical problems
2. Apply key philosophical terms, concepts and theories correctly;
3. Evaluate the validity, soundness and plausibility of key philosophical arguments and theoretical perspectives using relevant evidence from a range of sources;
4. Recognize, explain and evaluate how philosophy is relevant to contemporary ethical problems.

**Assessment:** Final grades will be based on the following factors:

Theory Exam: 20%

Presentation: 20%

Final Paper: 20%

Reading Reflections and Replies: 15%

Reading Quizzes/: 15%

Participation: 10%

**Theory Exam (worth 20%):** There will be one exam administered during our normally scheduled class period. You **\*must\*** take the exam at this time unless you have made a **prior arrangement**. No one can take an exam after it has been administered to the class as a whole without an acceptable excuse. The exam will be a mix of matching, multiple choice, and short answer questions.

**Presentation (worth 20%):** Following the theory portion of the class, everyone will be responsible for making a brief (5-10 minute) presentation on a contemporary ethical issue. This presentation

will consist of three parts. 1) A brief summary of what the issue is; 2) Taking a position on the issue and justifying it using our ethical theories; 3) A brief Q&A with myself and your classmates. You will have opportunity to choose your own topic, although it cannot be one we are covering in class already.

**Final Paper (Worth 20%):** The final paper for this class will be a critical analysis paper of moderate length. **(900-1200 words)** You will be expected to critically analyze a topic of your choosing (subject to my approval) using one of the ethical theories that we have discussed in class. This paper will be similar to your presentation and in fact, may be a deeper analysis of the same topic. You will be asked to: 1) Provide a brief summary of the issue of your choice; 2) Take a position and justify it using one of our ethical theories; 3) Consider how a different theory might object to your position; 4) Respond to those objections.

**Reading Reflections and Replies (Worth 15%):** Beginning after the first exam, you will be asked to complete weekly reading reflections **(150-250 words)**. These reflections will be in response to the reading for that week, and they are **due on Mondays by 11:59 pm**. The task will simply be to discuss what you found interesting, what you found confusing, or what you take to be the author's main argument. The goal of these assignments is to get you thinking critically about the material we will be discussing in class. In this way, these reflections operate as a primer for our in-class discussions.

You will also be asked to reply to one of your classmates' reflections **(around 100 words)**, and this is **due on Wednesdays by 11:59 pm**. In your reply, you should respond to something your classmate said: Do you have something to add on to what your classmate said? Do you agree with what they wrote? Do you disagree? Note that it's fine to disagree with your classmates; however, if I deem your reply cruel or inappropriate, I will ask you to rewrite your reply. If this problem persists, I will find a much less appealing set of assignments for you.

**\*\*You are *not* being graded on your understanding of the material. Rather, you are being graded on your engagement with the material and your formal writing skills.**

**Reading Quizzes (Worth 15%):** For the first five weeks of the class there will be a quiz on the reading due the night before class. For example, if we meet on Wednesday then the reading due for that day will have a quiz on it due Tuesday by 11:30 PM on eLearning. These are not designed to trick you. Rather, they are meant to serve as a reading check. If you do the reading these *\*should\** be straightforward.

**Participation (Worth 10%):** Given that this is a largely discussion-based class, participation and attendance are of significant importance. As such, attendance is **\*REQUIRED\***. You will be granted **\*two\*** absences without requiring an excuse (exam and presentation days excluded). Further absences without contacting me with a valid excuse will result in 1 point off your participation grade. In percentage terms, this means each absence reduces your participation by a full 10%. **10+ absences will result in failure regardless of overall grade.**

**Effective Participation:** Be prepared for class. Do all the reading so that you can participate effectively. The material in the class is difficult. Making comments

without having read the necessary material will likely derail the class discussion, so please do all the reading carefully and stay on task. While in group work, make sure you are actually doing what is asked.

#### Grade Scale

Letter Grade		Percentages
A		100-93
BA		92.999-87
B		86.999-83
CB		82.999-77
C		76.999-73
DC		72.999-67
D		66.999-63
E		62.999-0

**Completion of the paper and presentation is required for passing the course.** Assignments must be turned in on time. The exact dates and times on which papers are due will be provided in class and listed on the eLearning site. Extensions on assignments will only be granted for good reasons (with appropriate documentation) and **by prior arrangement** (that is, more than a day before the assignment is due) with me. Late papers without an extension will incur a grade penalty of 5 points per day. (E.g., A 95 one day late is a 90, two days 85, etc. Weekend days do count.)

**General Advice:** The reading for much of this class is rather difficult. As such, it's important that you read before class and come prepared with your questions and concerns. It would be helpful to read articles twice (once before class and again after where it will hopefully be more clear for you). In any case the goal of the readings is not for full comprehension prior to class, rather it is to facilitate discussion by providing the framework from which to work off of.

**Tentative Schedule:** All Readings and due dates are subject to change as the instructor deems appropriate. Given the nature of the class we may need to spend more or less time on topics. As such, I am more than willing to be flexible with assignments. It is your responsibility to stay up to date with changes. I will announce changes in class and any changes will be posted on eLearning.

Wk	Dates	Topic
1	3/Sep	Overview Whyte, "The Right To Your Opinion"

2	8/Sep 10/Sep	Boss, "Identifying & Analyzing Arguments" <b>DUE: Reading Quiz #1 by 11:30 PM 9/Sep</b> Singer, "About Ethics" LaFollette, "Theorizing About Ethics"
3	15/Sep 17/Sep	<b>DUE: Reading Quiz #2 by 11:30 PM 14/Sep</b> Mill, "What Utilitarianism Is" <b>DUE: Reading Quiz #3 by 11:30 PM 16/Sep</b> Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism, Its Difficulties"
4	22/Sep 24/Sep	<b>DUE: Reading Quiz #4 by 11:30 PM 21/Sep</b> Shafer-Landau, "The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice" Shafer-Landau, "The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect" <b>DUE: Reading Quiz #5 by 11:30 PM 23/Sep</b> Rachels, "Virtue Ethics"
5	29/Sep 1/Oct	<b>DUE: Reading Quiz #6 by 11:30 PM 28/Sep</b> Beauchamp, "The Four Principles Approach to Health Care Ethics" <b>DUE: Reading Quiz #7 by 11:30 PM 30/Sep</b> Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"
6	6/Oct 8/Oct	Review for Theory Exam <b>THEORY EXAM</b>
7	13/Oct 15/Oct	Euthanasia <b>DUE: Reading Response #1 by 11:30 PM 19/Oct</b>
8	20/Oct 22/Oct	
9	27/Oct 29/Oct	
10	2/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reflection Discussion on Hursthouse's "Virtue Theory and Abortion"
10	3/Nov	<b>In-Class Discussion:</b> Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion" and Hursthouse's "Virtue Theory and Abortion"
10	4/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reply to one of your classmates' reflections
10	5/Nov	<b>In-Class Discussion:</b> Hursthouse's "Virtue Theory and Abortion" <b>Continuing with Student Presentations</b>
11	9/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reflection Discussion on Marquis's "Why Abortion is Immoral"
11	10/Nov	<b>In-Class Discussion:</b> Marquis's "Why Abortion is Immoral"
11	11/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reply to one of your classmates' reflections
11	12/Nov	<b>In-Class Discussion:</b> Marquis's "Why Abortion is Immoral" and concluding remarks on abortion readings

12	16/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reflection Discussion on Ekeli's "Environmental Risk, Uncertainty and Intergenerational Ethics"
12	17/Nov	<b>In-Class Discussion:</b> Ekeli's "Environmental Risk, Uncertainty and Intergenerational Ethics"
12	18/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reply to one of your classmates' reflections
12	19/Nov	<b>In-Class Discussion:</b> Ekeli's "Environmental Risk, Uncertainty and Intergenerational Ethics"
13	24/Nov 26/Nov	<b>NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>
14	30/Nov	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reflection Discussion on Sterba's "The Welfare Rights of Distant Peoples and Future Generations: Moral Side-Constraints on Social Policy"
14	1/Dec	<b>Online Discussion:</b> Sterba's "The Welfare Rights of Distant Peoples and Future Generations"
14	2/Dec	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reply to one of your classmates' reflections
14	3/Dec	<b>Online Discussion:</b> Sterba's "The Welfare Rights of Distant Peoples and Future Generations"  <b>DUE: Submit your final paper topic to me by 11:59 PM 7/Dec</b>
15	7/Dec	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reflection Discussion on James's "Climate Change" from <i>Environmental Philosophy: An Introduction</i>
15	8/Dec	<b>Online Discussion:</b> James's "Climate Change"
15	9/Dec	<b>Due by 11:59 pm:</b> Reply to one of your classmates' reflections
15	10/Dec	<b>Online Discussion:</b> James's "Climate Change" and closing remarks on Future Generations readings <b>DUE: If you wish to submit a draft for your final paper, please do so by December 11.</b>
16	15/Dec 17/Dec	<b>FINAL EXAM WEEK</b> <b>DUE: Final paper by 11:59 PM 17/Dec</b>

**Class Rules:** Please refrain from texting, receiving phone calls, checking websites (e.g., Facebook), email, etc. during class. Doing so is distracting and disrespectful to the instructor and other students. **If use of electronics becomes a problem, I will require all electronic devices to be turned off during class.**

**Contacting the Instructor:** For the foreseeable future, face-to-face office hours are not likely to be available. As such, please contact me via e-mail to setup an e-conferencing time for virtual office hours.

**Academic Honesty:** You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the university's policies and procedures that pertain to Academic Honesty. If there is reason to believe you have been

involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment.

**Accommodations:** Any student with a documented disability who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact me and the appropriate Disability Services office at the beginning of the semester. The two disability service offices on campus are: Disabled Student Resources and Services (269) 387-2116 and the Office of Services for Students with Learning Disabilities (269) 387-4411

**Civility Statement:** Western Michigan University is committed to creating and sustaining an environment that honors the inherent dignity and worth of all members of the WMU community. Respectful behavior expressed verbally, textually, visually, and physically should be the norm in all university communications and venues including classrooms, meetings, offices, workplaces, forums, events, social media, and residential communities.

As an institution of higher education, we welcome a diverse range of perspectives and opinions and uphold the importance of civil debate. We fully support the free exchange of ideas and beliefs, as well as the expression of provocative or unpopular ideas. It is through this process that we generate knowledge and deepen our understanding of humanity.

Freedom of thought and expression may create conflict, strong emotions, and divergent ideological positions. While these effects are expected and welcomed, all members of the community have a responsibility to behave in a manner that does not harm others nor creates a hostile environment. Behavior that attacks, humiliates, belittles, or conveys hatred towards others diminishes our thriving and safe university environment.

Each member of our academic community is encouraged to be thoughtful and sensitive in their choice of words and behaviors. We should be aware of how our behavior affects others. Furthermore, we carry a responsibility to challenge those who communicate intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. Words and actions matter. Everyone is asked to do their part in creating a healthy and positive university community and a culture that truly values each member's uniqueness, experiences, and perspectives.

**COVID-19 Statement:** Due to the current COVID-19 Pandemic, and consistent with the State of Michigan\* requirements and the WMU Safe Return plan (<https://wmich.edu/safereturn>), safety requirements are in place to minimize exposure to the Western Michigan University community. These guidelines apply to all in-person or hybrid classes held either inside or outside a WMU building.

**Facial coverings (masks), over both the nose and mouth, are required for all students while in class, no matter the size of the space.** This includes outdoor class settings where social distancing is not possible (i.e., at least six feet of space between individuals). Following this recommendation can minimize the transmission of the virus, which is spread between people interacting in close proximity through speaking, coughing, or sneezing.

During specified classes in which facial coverings (masks) would prevent required class elements, students may remove facial coverings (masks) with instructor permission, in accordance with the exceptions in the Facial Covering (mask) Policy\*\* ("such as playing an instrument, acting, singing, etc.").

**Facial coverings (masks) must remain in place throughout the class. Any student who removes the mandatory facial covering (mask) during class will be required to leave the classroom immediately.**

Facial coverings (masks) are not a substitute for social distancing. Students shall observe current social distancing guidelines in all instructional spaces, both indoors and outdoors. Students should avoid congregating around instructional space entrances before and after class sessions. Students should exit the instructional space immediately after the end of class to help ensure social distancing and to allow for those attending the next scheduled class session to enter.

Students who are unable to wear a facial covering (mask) for medical reasons must contact Disability Services for Students (<https://wmich.edu/disabilityservices>) before they attend class.

These guidelines are in place to ensure the safety of all students, faculty, and staff during the pandemic. Noncompliance is a violation of the class requirements and the Student Code of Honor (<https://wmich.edu/conduct/expectations-students>).

\*For current State of Michigan Executive orders, see: [https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499\\_90705---,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499_90705---,00.html)

\*\*For the WMU Facial Covering (Mask) Policy, see: <https://wmich.edu/policies/facial-covering-mask>

**Food and Drink:** Please note that food and drink are not permitted in the classroom at this time due to COVID restrictions.