

# Contemporary Moral Issues

Fall 2015

UCLA Extension  
Philosophy XL 4  
Instructor: Jonathan Gingerich

## Meeting Times, Type, and Location

This course will be taught online. A video lecture will be posted on the course website each Monday. Students will participate on the discussion board on the course website every week.

## Contact Information

**Email:** [jgingerich@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:jgingerich@humnet.ucla.edu) (You can also contact me using Canvas Conversations, which is the preferred means of contacting me about this course.)

**Office Location:** TBA

**Office Hours:** I will hold two hours of video office hours on the course website each week. I'll conduct a poll when class begins to figure out a time that is convenient for as many students as possible.

**Contacting Me:** On weekdays I'll typically respond to Canvas Conversation messages, emails, and questions posted on the discussion boards within 24 hours unless I'm traveling or there are other extenuating circumstances, in which case I'll answer within 48 hours at most. On weekends, I may take longer to respond. I'm also available for videoconferencing through Canvas by appointment, and I'm available by appointment to meet face to face with students who are in Los Angeles.

## Course Description

This course will investigate a range of moral questions that arise in contemporary society, focusing in particular on questions about equality and oppression. In addition to discussing classic philosophical texts about the nature of morality, we will consider questions about how states should provide access to healthcare, whether one has an obligation to obey the state, conditions under which revolutions are justified, and how the government regulates intimate relationships. In this class we will critically investigate the arguments and principles invoked in these debates. Our goal will not be to settle the questions we examine, but to expand our understanding of them and to elevate the level of debate about them.

## Learning Objectives

During the course, students will:

- Summarize and evaluate complex philosophical arguments
- Ask insightful questions about difficult philosophical texts
- Write clear and careful philosophy essays
- Revise their own philosophical writing

- Assemble philosophical arguments and anticipate objections to them
- Debate controversial philosophical topics with people who have different views

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, an effective learner should be able to:

- Describe utilitarian and non-consequentialist approaches to morality
- Argue for and against views in contemporary moral debates about healthcare, the state, and relationships
- Explain the positions and arguments developed in the readings

## Materials

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) (ISBN 1107401062)

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, edited by Georg Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010) (ISBN 087220605X)

Course Reader (available from the UCLA Store in either print or digital format)

Please do the reading at least once before the lecture at which it will be discussed. Most of the readings are complex, and you will find it helpful to read the material at least twice. If you're having trouble with the reading, please talk with me about strategies for approaching this material.

## Evaluation

Course requirements include doing the assigned reading and watching the recorded lecture each week, submitting homework assignments and participating on the course discussion board every week, a short paper (2-3 pages), a rough draft of a final paper (5-6 pages), and a final draft of the final paper (5-6 pages). Each of these assignments are discussed in greater detail below.

You will receive a letter grade in each of the following categories, from which your course grade will be calculated using the weightings below:

- 30%: Weekly homework assignments due every Thursday by 11:59 PM
- 10%: Replies to at least two other homework assignments due every Sunday by 11:59 PM
- 10%: Short paper (2-3 pages) due Friday of week 4 by 5:00 PM
- 10%: Rough draft of final paper (5-6 pages) due Friday of week 9 by 5:00 PM
- 40%: Final draft of final paper (5-6 pages) due Monday of week 11 by 5:00 PM

Extra credit may be given for thoughtful (not necessarily frequent) contributions in office hours or for participation on the discussion board that goes above and beyond that required by the homework assignments.

Your grades will be available on the course website as assignments are completed.

## **Homework and Discussion Board Participation**

A homework assignment will be due on the discussion board **each Thursday night by 11:59 PM.**

You should substantively and thoughtfully reply to at least two other student's discussion board postings by **each Sunday night by 11:59 PM.**

Each week, I will grade your homework assignment and discussion board participation on a scale of distinguished/proficient/basic/unsatisfactory. (I'll use the "Discussion Rubric" posted on the course website under "Resources" to assess your postings and participation.)

If you receive a "proficient" grade for your homework assignment and participation each week, you will receive a B+ for the homework and participation portions of your grade. "Distinguished" grades will bring your grade up from a B+; "basic" and "unsatisfactory" grades and missed assignments will bring it down.

Extensions for weekly homework assignments will only be granted in exceptional circumstances because these assignments provide the basis for class discussion on the discussion board each week. You may miss up to *two* homework assignment without penalty, and if you complete all of the homework assignments, I will drop your two lowest scores when calculating your grade.

A few pointers about completing homework assignments and participating in discussion:

- The classroom should be active all week, not just on weekends. Pacing your work earlier in the week will give you more time for larger projects when you need it.
- A good way to learn philosophy is by discussing your ideas and working through the materials that we read with other students on the discussion board.
- Your responses to other students' postings on the discussion board should include more than phrases like "I agree with that," or "Interesting comment." If you offer an opinion, you should provide reasons in support of your opinion.
- Distinguishing features of a good post might include exposition of the readings or lectures that helps other students understand them, a well supported argument for a philosophical view, or thoughtful and probing questions on topics that you find unclear.
- Because effective philosophical writing needs to clearly communicate difficult ideas well-done posts will also feature good writing.
- I expect respectful disagreement about the complicated philosophical issues that we will discuss. Critical posts should never target other *participants* in the course but should address the *content* of other posts, and should interpret other posts as charitably as possible.

## **Papers**

This course requires a short paper (2-3 pages) and a longer final paper (5-6 page).

The short paper is due **Friday of week 4 by 5 PM.**

A rough draft of the final paper is due on **Friday of week 9 by 5 PM.**

You will revise your final paper in light of the comments that I give you on your rough draft, and the final draft of the final paper is due on **Monday of week 11 by 5 PM.**

Paper topics will be posted on the course website at least a week before each paper is due, and papers will be assessed using the “Grading Rubric for Papers” posted on the course website. If you think that the deadlines for these assignments will pose any problem for you, you should contact me *at least 48 hours in advance* so we can discuss an alternative.

## Schedule

Date	Lecture Topic	Readings	Quizzes/Exams and Assignment Due Dates
Week 1	Introduction: Value	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (course reader)	Wednesday: Post brief bio on course website. Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 2	Morality and Autonomy	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , sections 1-2	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 3	Utilitarianism	J.S. Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , ch. 1-4	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 4	Health and Medicine: Access to Healthcare	<u>Robert C. Hughes, “Strict Egalitarianism about Medical Treatment”</u> Allen E. Buchanan, “The Right to A Decent Minimum of Healthcare” (course reader)	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. <b>Friday: Short paper due by 5:00 pm</b> Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 5	Health and Medicine: Global Justice, Patents, and Drugs	<u>William W. Fisher &amp; Talha Syed, “Global Justice in Healthcare: Developing Drugs for the Developing World”</u>	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due

Week 6	The State: Obligations to Obey	Plato, <i>Crito</i> (course reader) Robert Paul Wolff, <i>In Defense of Anarchism</i> , ch. 1 (course reader) Tommie Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto" (course reader)	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 7	The State: Participation and Democracy	Rousseau, <i>The Social Contract</i> , bk. 1-2 (course reader) <u>V.I. Lenin, <i>The State and Revolution</i>, ch. 5</u> <u>Rosa Luxemburg, <i>The Russian Revolution</i>, ch. 6</u>	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 8	The State: Oppression and Equality	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> , ch. 1-5, 17-19 (course reader) <u>David Singh Grewal, "The Laws of Capitalism," part II</u>	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 9	Relationships: Sex Equality and Sexuality	<u>Janet Halley, "Trading the Megaphone for the Gavel in Title IX Enforcement"</u> <u>Diane Rosenfeld, "Uncomfortable Conversations: Confronting the Reality of Target Rape on Campus"</u>	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. <b>Friday: Rough draft of final paper due by 5:00 pm</b> Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 10	Relationships: Partiality	Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett, "Friendship and Moral Danger" (course reader) Susan Wolf, "Morality and Partiality" (course reader)	Comments on rough drafts returned by 5:00 pm on Wednesday Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 11	Conclusion: Value	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> , preface & first essay (course reader) Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism" (course reader)	<b>Monday: Final paper due by 5:00 pm</b> NO WEEK 11 HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT