

The syllabi listed here are from the last term during which the course was taught and are posted only as a guide to some of the typical topics the course may cover. Please note that the readings and materials may change from term to term. An updated syllabus for the course for the coming semester will be posted closer to the start of the semester.

Philosophy 105 04

Instructor: Bob Beddor

Email: rbeddor@gmail.com

Office Hours: Fridays, 1-3pm. Office hours to be held in office 203, Seminary 3. (Seminary 3 is one of the Philosophy Department buildings, located on Seminary Place, between George Street and College Avenue.)

Description: This course will be devoted to exploring current moral and social issues. Topics will include the ethics of eating animals, the ethics of military intervention, the ethics of genetic engineering, the ethical issues raised by extreme poverty, and the ethical issues surrounding health care. This course will emphasize carefully evaluating and constructing philosophical arguments bearing on these issues.

This course satisfies Core Curriculum Goal:

'o'. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

Syllabus

Introduction

Philosophical Arguments: The Basics

We'll go over the difference between inductive and deductive arguments, as well as some desirable properties of deductive arguments, such as validity and soundness.

Topic 1

The Ethics of Eating Animals: When (if ever) is eating animals morally permissible?

Required Readings:

- James Rachels, "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism"
- Peter Singer, "All Animals are Created Equal"
- Carl Cohen, "Do Animals Have Rights?"
- Jeff McMahan, "Eating Animals the Nice Way"

Optional Reading:

- Lori Gruen, "The Moral Status of Animals" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Topic 2

Utilitarianism vs. Deontological Ethics

Required Readings:

- Selections from John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism
- Selections from Russ Shafer-Landau, The Fundamentals of Ethics
- Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"

Topic 3

The Ethics of Warfare

Required Readings:

- Section 2 of Brian Orend, "War" (Stanford Encyclopedia Article)
- Jeff McMahan, "Just War"
- Jeff McMahan, "Preventive War and the Killing of the Innocent"

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Optional Readings:

- Jeff McMahan, "Targeted Killing: Murder, Combat, or Law Enforcement?"
- Elizabeth Anscombe, "War and Murder"
- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "War – What is it Good For?"
- Cecil Fabre, "Guns, Food, and Liability to Attack in War"

Topic 4

The Ethics of Genetic Engineering

Required Readings:

- Michael Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection"
- Nick Bostrom, "Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up"
- Ross Andersen Interview of Allen Buchanan, "Why Cognitive Enhancement is in Your Future (and Your Past)"
- Nick Bostrom and Toby Ord, "The Reversal Test: Eliminating Status Quo Bias in Applied Ethics"

Optional Readings:

- Nick Bostrom and Rebecca Roache, "Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement"

Topic 5

The Justification for Punishment (Capital and Otherwise)

Required Readings:

- Mark White, "Criminal Justice: Punishment and Retribution"
- Gary Becker, "The Morality of Capital Punishment"
- The ACLU, "The Case Against the Death Penalty"

Optional Readings:

- Anthony Ellis, "A Deterrence Theory of Punishment"
- Cynthia Banks, "The Purpose of Criminal Punishment", chp. 5 of *Criminal Justice Ethics*, 2nd ed.
- David Wood, "Punishment: Consequentialism"
- David Wood, "Punishment: Nonconsequentialism"
- Stephen Nathanson, "Does it Matter if the Death Penalty is Arbitrarily Administered?"

Topic 6

What duties (if any) do we have to the extremely poor?

Required Readings:

- Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
- Garrett Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor"

Optional Readings:

- Keith Horton, "Aid and Bias"
- Dalie Jamieson, "Duties to the Distant: Aid, Assistance, and Intervention"
- Caspar Hare, "Rationality and the Distant Needy"

Topic 7

The Ethics of Health Care

Required Readings:

- Allen Buchanan, "The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care"
- Leonard Peikoff, "Health Care is Not a Right"

Optional Readings:

- Efrat Ram-Tiktin, "The Right to Health Care as a Right to Basic Human Functional Capacities"
- Norman Daniels, "Justice and the Access to Health Care" (Stanford Encyclopedia Article)

- Richard Salsman,
- Paul Krugman, “

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Topic 8

Existential Risk: How concerned should we be about global catastrophe scenarios?

Required Readings:

- Nick Bostrom, “Dinosaurs, Dodos, Humans?”
- Nick Bostrom, “Existential Risks: Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards”

Optional Readings:

- David Chalmers, “The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis”
- Nick Bostrom, “Existential Risk Reduction as the most Important Task for Humanity”
- Eliezer Yudkowsky, “Cognitive Biases Potentially Affecting Judgment of Global Risks”

Assessment:

This course requires two papers, a final exam, and a presentation. These will be factored into the overall grade as follows:

First Paper: 30%

Second Paper: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Presentation (or Short Paper): 10%

Attendance Policy:

While I do not officially factor in attendance as part of the grade, you are expected to attend every class. I also strongly encourage you to actively participate in class discussions. (Nothing is more boring than a class discussion where only one person participates.) In cases where a student’s final grade is on the borderline, I will boost the student’s grade if she or he has been an active participant in class discussions. (For instance, if your initial final grade is an 89 and you have been a frequent participant in class discussions, I will boost your final grade up to a 90 for an official grade of “A”.) Please note: if you miss the exam without a good reason, you will receive a 0 on it.

Plagiarism

All work you submit for this course must be your own. Do not submit someone else’s work; do not copy-and-paste from websites or articles. Every quote you use needs to be marked as a quote and references need to be provided. If you paraphrase text that is not your own, mark this appropriately and specify the reference in a footnote. I will require that all papers be submitted through turnitin.com.

If you have a question about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask. You can find the official Rutgers academic integrity policy online here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/policy-on-academic-integrity>.

Classroom Etiquette

Please refrain from using cell phones in class; it can be extremely distracting. Similarly, I ask that you refrain from facebooking, internet-browsing, etc. during class; if you bring a computer to class, you should only use it for taking notes.

Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to meet with students outside of class to discuss course material. Feel free to stop by my office hours without making an appointment. If you cannot attend during office hours, feel free to email me at rbeddor@gmail.com to set up an appointment to meet.

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Tips for Reading Philosophy Papers

When reading a philosophy paper, it's a good idea to keep the following questions in mind:

- What thesis (position) is the author arguing for?
- What exactly is the author's argument?
- Is the author's argument any good? Specifically, you can ask: Is the argument valid? Are the premises plausible?
- Are there any objections to the author's position that she or he may have overlooked?

It's also a good idea to take notes while reading a philosophy paper. In particular, it's a good idea to

- i) Write down the author's main thesis
- ii) Reconstruct the author's argument
- iii) Jot down any objections that come to mind