

Phil 315: Social Ethics

Spring 2022

SWEN 111 T/Th 12:25-2:05pm

Instructor: Nathaniel Greely Email: ngreely@callutheran.edu Office Hours: T/Th 11:20am-12:20pm

Course Description:

This course is a survey of topics in applied ethics. Topics we will cover include bioethics, social ethics, environmental ethics, neuroethics, ethics of artificial intelligence, and business ethics. No previous knowledge of philosophy, logic, or ethics is required or assumed, though contributions from students with previous training in various disciplines is welcome.

Textbook:

All required texts will be provided in PDF format on Blackboard.

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding of important topics in applied ethics by engaging in discussions, completing written exams, and writing and revising an original essay that argues for or against a specific thesis related to applied ethics.

Assessments:

The assessments in this course are largely designed to keep you engaged with the lectures, readings, and other students in the course. Your grades for discussion, quizzes, research proposal, and essay draft comprise 55% of your grade. It should be easy to do well on these components if you stay engaged. The midterm, final essay, and final exam will be graded on quality - to get top marks on these components you will be required to demonstrate understanding of the material (for the midterm and final exam) and some original philosophical insight (for the final essay). Your final grade in the course will be composed of the following:

Attendance – 15%

Lecture attendance is required. In lecture I will not only present and explain the readings, but we will engage in active learning projects. Being in class is essential to these activities. Exceptions will only be made with a documented excuse, such as a doctor's note. You may miss up to three lectures without an excuse and still receive full marks for attendance.

Quizzes – 15%

At the end of each two-week unit, we will devote one class period to review, followed by a short quiz on that unit. The goal of the quizzes is to assess whether students are keeping up with reading and lectures. They are designed to be quite easy for students who do so.

Midterm – 15%

The midterm take place in class Mar. 8. It will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 1-3. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be

provided Mar. 4 and students will have the weekend to craft a response to the two they choose. The midterm will be taken in class with no access to notes.

Research Proposal – 10%

Students will produce a one-page document that explains the thesis they plan to argue for in their essay and outlines the argumentative strategy they will employ. These may change over the course of composing the draft and revising it into a final paper. This assignment is designed to get you thinking about your essay early-on and receive feedback on how it may be improved. Students are free to choose any topic that interests them. Specific prompts will also be provided as models for the appropriate scope of the essay, and students may choose to write on those prompts if they wish. Prompts will be provided Mar. 8 after the midterm. Research proposals are due Mar. 20.

Essay draft – 15%

One of the most important parts of writing an essay is revision. Students will be required to turn in a rough draft of their essay, due Apr. 3. The essay should present and develop an original thesis on one of the topics of the course. Prompts will be provided, but students are welcome to develop their own essay topics. The essay should be narrowly focused on a very specific claim, likely a single premise in an argument presented in a lecture or reading. Provide an original argument for your view about that claim and consider objections to your argument. The essay should be 5 pages (1250 words), give or take a page. It should be easy to get full points for your draft so long as it reflects an honest effort to make a cogent argument.

Final Essay – 15%

Students will revise their essay, taking into account the comments they receive. You are almost certainly expected to make significant changes to your essay in order to get top marks. The final draft will be graded on quality, not merely on effort. The final essay will be due May 1.

Final Exam – 15%

The final exam will be similar in format to the midterm exam. It will consist of three short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided six essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 4-7. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be provided Dec. 6. We will then devote two class sessions to review. The final exam takes place on May 10 at 1:30pm.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Metaethics

The bulk of this course will be on applied ethics – whether things like abortion, affirmative action, geoengineering, or neural implants are right or wrong. But first we need to understand some theories on the very nature of right and wrong. Later authors will use these theories to argue for particular cases.

Jan. 20 – Course Intro

Jan. 25 – Utilitarianism - Reading: Rachels Ch. 7 & 8; Mill - “What Utilitarianism is”

Jan. 27 – Deontology - Reading: Rachels Ch. 9 & 10; Kant - *Groundwork*

Feb. 1 – Virtue Ethics & Care Ethics - Reading: Rachels Ch. 11 & 12

Feb. 3 – Unit 1 review; Quiz

Unit 2: Bioethics

In this unit we will consider the morality of abortion, the morality of creating life, and of organ sales.

Feb. 8 – Abortion - Readings: Lee & George – “The Wrong of Abortion”; Little – “The Moral Permissibility of Abortion”

Feb. 10 – Birth - Readings: Parfit – “The Non-Identity Problem”; Benatar – “Why Coming into Existence is Always a Harm”

Feb. 15 – Organ Sales – Readings: Brecher – “The Kidney Trade”; Taylor – “Autonomy, Constraining Options, and Organ Sales”

Feb. 17 – Unit 2 review; Quiz

Unit 3: Social Ethics

In this unit we will examine ethical issues related to race and gender. These include the nature of racism, the morality of affirmative action, and the status of trans people.

Feb. 22 – Affirmative Action – Readings: Mosley – “A Defense of Affirmative Action”; Wolf-Devine – “Preferential Policies Have Become Toxic”

Feb. 24 – Racism – Readings: Blum – “Racism: What it is and What it isn’t”; Shelby – “Racism, Moralism, and Social Criticism”

Mar. 1 – Gender – Readings: Bettcher – “Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers”; Raymond – “The Politics of Transgender”

Mar. 3 – Unit 3 Review; Quiz

Mar. 4. – Midterm questions posted

Unit 4: Environmental Ethics

In this unit we will consider who is morally responsible for climate change and what are the ethical ways that it can be addressed.

Mar. 8 – Midterm; Sample essay topics posted

Mar. 10 – Responsibility – Readings: Sinnott-Armstrong – “It’s Not My Fault”; Banks – “Individual Responsibility for Climate Change”

Mar. 15 – Geoengineering – Readings: Gardiner – “Is ‘Arming the Future’ with Geoengineering Really the Lesser Evil?”; Rayner et al. – “The Oxford Principles”

Mar. 17 – Unit 4 Review; Quiz

Mar. 20 – Research Proposals Due

Unit 5: Neuroethics

In this unit we will examine ethical issues that arise from technologies like neural implants and neurotropic drugs.

Mar. 22 – Cosmetic Neurology – Readings: Chatterjee – “The Promise and Predicament of Cosmetic Neurology”; Bostrom – “Cognitive Enhancement”

Mar. 24 – Predictive Implants – Readings: Gilbert – “A Threat to Autonomy?”; Walker and Mackenzie – “Neurotechnologies, Relational Autonomy, and Authenticity”

Mar. 29 – Brain Reading – Readings: Haynes – “Brain Reading”; Moore – “Privacy, Neuroscience, and Neuro-Surveillance”

Mar. 31 – Unit 5 Review; Quiz

Apr. 3 – Essay Drafts Due

Unit 6: Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

This unit explores ethical issues that arise from developments in artificial intelligence.

Apr. 5 – Autonomous Systems – Readings: Schwitzgebel – “Will Your Driverless Car Kill You so Others May Live?”; Muller – “Autonomous Cognitive Systems in Real World Environments”; Amoroso – “The Ethical and Legal Case Against Autonomy in Weapons Systems”

Apr. 7 – Algorithms – Readings: Danaher – “The Threat of Algocracy”; Asaro – “AI Ethics in Predictive Policing”

Apr. 12 – Spring Break

Apr. 14 – Spring Break

Apr. 19 – Machines as Agents – Readings: Misselhorn – “Artificial Systems with Moral Capacities?”; Moor – “The Nature, Importance, and Difficulty of Machine Ethics”

Apr. 21 – Unit 6 Review; Quiz

Unit 7: Business Ethics

This unit explores ethical issues related to the free market in a democracy. What, if any, are the moral obligations of a company? What are its duties to its employees? What political activities should companies be allowed to engage in?

Apr. 26 – Shareholder Primacy – Readings: Friedman – “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits”; Stout – “The Shareholder Value Myth”

Apr. 28 – Sweatshops – Readings: Zwolinski – “Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation”; Kates – “The Ethics of Sweatshops and the Limits of Choice”

May 1 – Final Essay Draft Due

May 3 – Corporate Political Activity – Readings – Stark – “Business in Politics”; Christiano – “The Uneasy Relationship Between Democracy and Capital”

May 5 – Unit 7 Review; Quiz; Final Questions posted

May 10 – Final Exam

GRADING

Numeric	Grade	Numeric	Grade
Over 93%	A	73% to 76%	C
90% to 92%	A-	70% to 72%	C-
87% to 89%	B+	67% to 69%	D+
83% to 86%	B	63% to 66%	D
80% to 82%	B-	60% to 62%	D-
77% to 79%	C+	<60%	F

CARNEGIE/STUDENT WORKLOAD -

Activity	Instructor-Led		Independent		Remarks
	Weekly	Course	Weekly	Course	
Class Meetings	4	60			
Course Readings			4	60	
Midterm Prep				5	
Research Proposal				10	
Essay Draft				10	
Final Essay				20	
Quiz Prep				10	
Final Exam Prep				5	
Total Hours		60		120	

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS FOR BLACKBOARD

Even though this is an on-ground, on-campus, face-to-face, in-person class, some components of your class could be placed on Blackboard (e.g., syllabus).

Hardware & Software

	Windows	Mac OS X
Operating System	Windows 10	OS X 10.12 or later version
Java	Most recent version	Most recent version

Browser

Your browser must always be up to date. We recommend Firefox and Chrome for all Blackboard functions. If you are experiencing problems on another browser, please switch to Firefox or Chrome. To check your browser and system compatibility with Blackboard, please use the Blackboard Browser Checker below to view your functionality. *Please note that checkmarks on all functions does not guarantee a seamless experience.*

Click here: [Blackboard Browser Checker](#)

Internet

Bandwidth: recommended requirement is 5 Mbps per device or higher; anything less will cause potential issues.

Note: Bandwidth is affected by distance from the wireless router or access point, use of Netflix video streaming and number of users on the wireless network.

Streaming services: Sites or applications that use the internet like YouTube, Netflix, P2P, Spotify, or Pandora must be closed before starting a Zoom session.

Connection: You must be connected to the internet via an ethernet cable or Wi-Fi. Hotspots do not have the bandwidth to handle Zoom sessions.

Wi-Fi: Be as close to the router access point as possible to get the best connection. Be aware that locations with free Wi-Fi, i.e. Starbucks or Barnes & Noble, cannot provide enough bandwidth for Zoom sessions and should not be used.

Use the following link to check your speed. Click here: <http://speedof.me>

Diversity and Inclusion:

Individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders (and identities & expressions thereof), national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability - and other visible and non-visible differences are welcome in this course. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. We will be discussing controversial topics in this class and students may confront views that they find wrong or even reprehensible. Where possible I would like to confront those views with reasoned arguments. If you find that a particular reading or assignment is so emotionally charged that it interferes with your ability to complete it, send me an email and we'll see if there is a solution that we can all be happy with.

Academic Accommodation:

If you require any form of accommodation on the grounds of disability, please visit this link: <https://www.callutheran.edu/students/disability-services/register.html> well in advance so that you can submit the necessary documents.

Contact information is dss@callutheran.edu, Phone: (805) 493-3464, Disability Support Services, 60 W. Olsen Rd. #5300, Thousand Oaks, CA, 91360

Religious Accommodation:

If you require any accommodation on religious grounds, please alert me in writing as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:

All instances of academic offences including plagiarism, cheating on exams, and multiple submission of work, will be handled in accordance with official policy, which can be found here:

<https://catalog.callutheran.edu/undergraduate/academicpolicies/>. Please read the policy and ensure that you understand it.