PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE—PHIL 1213 (22672), SPRING 2019
MWF 10:30-11:20 HSci 331

Instructor: Dr. Eric Reitan  
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Office Hrs: MWF 11:30-12:20 (and by appt.)

Required Texts: Rachels, The Elements of Moral Philosophy (8th Ed.); Course Packet (CP); Some Web Readings

Course Objectives: We all have a moral experience of the world, but when sincere people disagree on moral issues we find it hard to resolve these disputes. Some give up and say it’s “all just a matter of opinion.” Others conclude that moral truth can only be found by waiting on divine revelation but don’t know what to do when God is silent or unclear. Moral philosophy offers an alternative: the hope of reaching rationally defensible positions on difficult moral issues through critical reflection and dialogue. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to this approach.

Major Assignments/Requirements:

- **Attendance**: 30 points. Since the methods of philosophy are best learned through class participation, regular attendance is essential. You may have 3 absences without penalty, after which you will lose 5 points for each unexcused absence. Excused absences (illness, family tragedy, etc.) do not count against you until you exceed 6 total absences. Excused absences beyond this number can be made up by completing an extra assignment, but only if you see the instructor no later than one week after an absence that exceeds the limit.

- **Participation**: 10 points. Participation includes answering questions posed to the class, asking questions, and participating in class discussions and activities—including peer review (see below). It may also include course engagement outside the classroom, such as discussing course material with the instructor during office hours.

- **Readings Journal**: 10 (of 13) entries, 3 points each (totaling 30 points). For each reading appearing in **bold** in the course outline, prepare a 1-page typed, double-spaced journal entry by the indicated due date. Each entry should (1) offer a one paragraph overview of what the essay author seeks to do (the aim being to digest what you have read and express your understanding in a single clearly-written paragraph, not a comprehensive summary); (2) identify at least one clarifying question about a passage, idea, or argument whose meaning is not clear to you; and (3) formulate at least one open-ended discussion question about the reading that you might like to discuss with the class. Entries should be submitted on D2L in the “Journal Entries” dropbox before the start of class on the day the entry is due. A copy should also be brought to class, since on any class day you may be asked to share aloud your responses. For each entry, if it is clear that you have done the reading you will receive full credit.

- **“Warm-Up” Reflection Essay**: 1 short (1-2 pp.) paper, worth 30 pts., due Jan. 23. Answer the following question after reading the historical display on William H Murray in the lobby outside 035 Murray hall: Should Murray Hall be renamed? Why or why not? Please submit BOTH a hard copy in class and an electronic copy on D2L. If you score below 24 points (a “B”) you may raise your grade by meeting with Dr. Reitan to discuss the essay, after which your grade will be raised to 24 pts. If you have not arranged such a meeting within a week of getting back the graded essay, you will receive the original grade.

- **Reading Reflection Essays**: 2 short (2-3 pp.) papers, worth 50 points each. For each essay, develop your own thinking about an essay covered in class. You may discuss an essay you disagree with and explain why you disagree, defend an essay you agree with against an important objection, explain how an essay can be modified to overcome an important objection, or explain the implications of the author’s thinking in some area the author has not directly addressed. Successful papers will include a brief exposition of the chosen essay, a clear statement of your thesis, and an argument in support of your thesis. The strongest papers will anticipate and respond to criticisms. Each essay will undergo a peer-review process prior to final submission, following these timetables:
  - RRE1: First draft to peer-reviewers by Feb. 20; in-class peer-review session on Feb. 22; final draft submitted to instructor by March 1 (please submit hard copy to instructor that includes first draft, copies of peer review forms, and final draft; submit final draft only on D2L):
  - RRE2: First draft to peer-reviewers by April 17; In-class peer-review session on April 19; final draft submitted to instructor by April 26 (same submission requirements as for RRE1).

- **Peer Review**: For both of the reading reflection essays, a class period will be devoted to a peer-review process to help develop the essay. Students will be assigned to teams of 3. Peer-reviewers will provide constructive reader feedback by completing a peer-review form for each teammate prior to discussion in the peer-review session.

- **Exams**: A midterm exam (March 15, in class) and final exam (May 6 at 10 AM), worth 100 points each.

- **Extra Credit**: For certain campus events announced in class, students can earn up to 5 extra credit points by attending the event and submitting a 1-2 page reflection within a week of the event.

**Grading Scale**: A=360 and above; B=320-359; C=280-319; D=240-279; F=239 and below.
Jan 14  TOPIC: What is moral philosophy? An overview and introduction
READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 1; In CP: The Methods of Moral Philosophy

Jan 16  TOPIC: The Methods of Moral Philosophy, Part 1: Basic of Argumentation
READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 1; In CP: The Methods of Moral Philosophy

Jan 18  TOPIC: The Methods of Moral Philosophy, Part 2: Arguing Fairly
READINGS: Reitan, “Disagreeing in a Spirit of Love” (by 1/18)

Jan 21  Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday

Jan 23  TOPIC: What’s in a Name? Applying Philosophical Methods to the Murray Hall Case
READINGS: Historical display on William H Murray in lobby outside 035 Murray Hall
DUE DATE: “WARM-UP” REFLECTION ESSAY DUE on 1/23

Jan 25-30  TOPIC: Isn’t It All Just a Matter of Opinion? The Challenge of Ethical Subjectivism
READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 3 (by 1/28)

Feb 1-6  TOPIC: Isn’t Morality Just a Product of Culture? The Challenge of Cultural Relativism
READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 2 (by 2/4)

Feb 8-15  TOPIC: Abortion, Part I: Getting Past the “Personhood Issue”
READINGS: Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” (by 2/11); Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion (by 2/15)

Feb 18-20  TOPIC: Abortion, Part II: The Broader Social Context
READINGS: In CP: Markowitz, “Abortion and Feminism” (by 2/20)
DUE DATE: 1st DRAFT OF RR ESSAY 1 to PEER REVIEWERS by 2/20

Feb 22  IN-CLASS PEER REVIEW SESSIONS for READING REFLECTION ESSAY 1

Feb 25-Mar 4  TOPIC: Religious Ethics, Part 1: From Divine Command Ethics to Natural Law Theory
READINGS: Rachels, Ch. 4 (2/25); “The Natural Law Theory of Morality” (handout)
DUE DATE: READING REFLECTION ESSAY 1 DUE ON 3/1

Mar 6-11  TOPIC: Religious Ethics, Part 2: Applying Natural Law: Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage

Mar 13  TOPIC: Midterm Review

Mar 15  MIDTERM EXAM

Mar 18-22  Spring Break

READINGS: In CP: Reitan, “Christian Love”; Martin Luther King Excerpts: “An Experiment in Love” and “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom” (by 3/27)

Apr 1-5  TOPIC: Does the End Justify the Means? Utilitarian Ethics
READINGS: Rachels, Ch’s 7-8 (journal entry on Ch. 8 by 3/30)

Apr 8-10  TOPIC: A Modern Utilitarian at Work, Part I: Peter Singer on World Hunger
READINGS: “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” (by 4/10)

Apr 12  TOPIC: A Modern Utilitarian at Work, Part II: Singer, Animal Liberation, and the Meat Industry
READINGS: Singer, “All Animals are Equal” (by 4/12)

Apr. 15-19  TOPIC: The Most Influential Modern Moral Theory: Kant’s Deontological Ethics
READINGS: Rachels, Ch’s 9-10
DUE DATE: 1st DRAFT OF RR ESSAY 2 to PEER REVIEWERS by 4/19

Apr 22  IN-CLASS PEER REVIEW SESSIONS for READING REFLECTION ESSAY 2

Apr 24-26  TOPIC: Confronting Racism and Oppression: Conceptual Issues

Apr 29  TOPIC: Confronting Racism and Oppression: A Letter to White America
READINGS: George Yancy, “Dear White America” (https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/dear-white-america/) and “The Ugly Truth of Being a Black Professor in America” (https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Ugly-Truth-of-Being-a/243234). Instead of a standard journal entry, write a short reflection, answering each of the following: (1) What are the most important things Yancy is trying to say in his open letter to White America? (2) What do you think he hoped to achieve by writing the letter? (3) What was your strongest or most immediate reaction to reading the letter? Hostility? Defensiveness? Introspection and self-assessment? Empathy? Something else? (4) Why did you have the reaction you did, and how appropriate was that response given your understanding of what Yancy meant and intended in the letter and your best sense of race relations in America today?
DUE DATE: READING REFLECTION ESSAY 2 DUE ON 4/29

May 1  Overflow, Wrap-Up, and Review
May 3  No Class; Professor at a Conference
May 6  FINAL EXAM @ 10 AM

NOTE: This is only a tentative outline. The course schedule, including the scheduled date for the midterm exam, may change during the semester. It is the student’s responsibility to keep up with any such changes.

Additional Information:

Grading Policies: All written assignments except the exams should be submitted on D2L, in the appropriate submission dropbox. Essays should also be submitted in hard copy during class on the day they are due (hard copies of journal entries do not need to be turned in). Written assignments are assessed in terms of clarity, organization, fair/accurate explication of others’ views, critical depth (including capacity to anticipate, fairly express, and respond to objections), difficulty of the issues addressed, and originality of thought. Except in documented cases of illness, family emergency, etc., late reflection essays will be docked half a letter grade for each day late (e.g., 2.5 points/day). Late journal entries are not accepted except in cases of illness or family emergency. Make-up tests will be given only for documented excused absences (illness, family emergency, conflicting university activity, etc.).

Electronics Policy: Electronic devices—including laptops and cell phones—may not be used during course time unless specific permission is granted in advance for specific purposes. For notetaking, students should rely on handwritten notes (which have been shown to be more effective in promoting learning than notes typed into a computer).

Academic Integrity Policy: Oklahoma State University is committed to the maintenance of the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct of its members. This level of ethical behavior and integrity will be maintained in this course. Participating in a behavior that violates academic integrity (e.g., unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, multiple submissions, cheating on examinations, fabricating information, helping another person cheat, unauthorized advance access to examinations, altering or destroying the work of others, and fraudulently altering academic records) will result in your being sanctioned. Violations may subject you to disciplinary action including the following: receiving a failing grade on an assignment, examination or course, receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript (F!), and being suspended from the University. You have the right to appeal the charge. Contact the Office of Academic Affairs, 101 Whitehurst 405-744-5627, academicintegrity.okstate.edu.

Note on Plagiarism: You plagiarize whenever you (a) specifically rely on an outside source (article, website, encyclopedia entry, etc.) for such things as ideas, arguments, word-choices, and research conclusions used in submitted work; and (b) obscure this fact by failing to clearly indicate in the text (by the use of quotation marks, phrases such as “According to….,” etc.) what material comes from another source and by failing to properly cite your sources. Any time you write as if an idea/argument/etc. originated with you, you convey the message that this is your work for which the instructor should give you credit. If this message is false, you are guilty of plagiarism whether or not you intended to deceive the instructor. Note: there is a difference between sources you specifically make use of in preparing your work and general influences from your intellectual history that have helped shape your ideas. A good general rule to follow is this: If you consult a source while writing a paper and then make use of what you gleaned from it, credit the source.

Special Accommodations for Students: Students with a qualified disability requiring special accommodations should notify me at the start of the semester and request verification of eligibility for accommodations through the Office of Student Disability Services, 315 Student Union, 744-7116, http://sds.okstate.edu/

See also the OSU Syllabus Attachment, available at the following web address: https://academicaffairs.okstate.edu/sites/default/files/Spring%202019%20Syllabus%20Attachment.pdf

DISCLAIMER: Any resemblance to any other course or syllabus living or dead is completely coincidental, except when such a resemblance is the result of your instructor shamelessly plagiarizing a disclaimer from the syllabus of a member of the Religion Department at Butler University.