Introduction to Moral and Political Philosophy
PHIL 104
Fall 2022

INSTRUCTOR

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DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to moral and political philosophy by exploring two vexing conflicts:

1. *The conflict between morality and individuality*: What should we do when the right thing to do, morally speaking, is different than the right thing to do *for us*? Is it okay for us to pursue personal projects when we could do so much more good if we devoted our lives to promoting the welfare of others?
2. *The conflict between moral responsibility and moral luck*: How can we hold people responsible for their wrongdoings (and legally punish them) if the circumstances we are born into—and that make us who we are—are simply a matter of luck? Is the aim of the US criminal justice system to hold people responsible for their wrongdoings *because they deserve it*? Does it achieve that aim?

In the process of exploring these conflicts, students will develop critical reading and writing skills as well as the ability to engage in productive, respectful discussion.

GOALS

By the end of this course, students will have developed the following knowledge and skills:

- An understanding of ethical theory and moral responsibility and its relationship to legal punishment.
- The ability to read critically and identify a text's philosophically relevant aspects.
- The ability to reconstruct arguments accurately and charitably.
- The ability to defend an argument persuasively through clear and precise writing.
- The ability to engage in philosophical discussion productively and respectfully.

ELECTRONICS   I strongly discourage students from using electronics in class. A lot of research indicates that the use of electronics in the classroom prevents you and people sitting around you from learning. If you have a special reason to need electronic equipment for note-taking, that's a different matter: feel free to use electronics if this applies to you—no need to check in with me beforehand. I understand that some students prefer to access their readings electronically rather than printing them out. If this applies to you, you may have an electronic device open to the reading, as long as your device's internet function is turned off and you take notes by hand.

ATTENDANCE   If you will miss class, I would like for you to email me beforehand. Otherwise, I will worry!

EMAILS   I almost always reply to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends. If for some reason I haven't replied within 48 hours, feel free to send me a gentle reminder.

ACCOMMODATION   I am committed to working with every student interested in taking this course to ensure it's possible to. If you have a disability, are struggling with mental or physical health, or if there is anything else that might prevent you from fully participating in this course, let me know and we will figure something out. If you would prefer to speak about accommodations anonymously, contact Lauren Kozak (`kozakl@wlu.edu`), Title IX Coordinator and Director of Disability Resources.

PLAGIARISM   You are responsible for making sure that none of your work is plagiarized. Be sure to cite work that you use, both direct quotations and paraphrased ideas. You are encouraged to discuss the course material, including assignments, with your classmates, but all written work you hand in must be your own.

EXPECTATIONS   What I expect of you:

- To read the assigned texts before class.
- To come to class on time and prepared to engage. If everyone is prepared, our discussions will be exciting and challenging!
- Not to be perfect. I am not looking for "brilliant" contributions, but a sustained effort to seriously grapple with the material and engage with your peers.
- To treat me and your fellow classmates with respect. Please be mindful of how your words might affect others (and take care of yourself, too!).
- To make an effort to get to know other students. Introduce yourself to students sitting near you. Refer to classmates by name and make eye contact with them.
- To get in touch with me if you have questions or concerns about the course.

What you should expect of me:

- To challenge you to grapple with difficult and important moral questions.
- To work with you to develop and improve your philosophical writing and discussion skills by providing clear and thorough feedback on assignments.
- To be transparent and honest with you about my expectations.
- To listen and respond to your academic needs and support you throughout the term.

REQUIREMENTS   The requirements for the course are as follows:

- READING REFLECTIONS (15%): by 8pm the day before *eight* of our meetings, post one paragraph on the Canvas discussion board reflecting on that day's reading assignment. You might raise a question about the reading, challenge an argument in the reading, expand on or defend a point made in the reading, share what the reading made you think about, etc. You may also respond to what your peers have posted on the discussion board. I will use reading reflections to guide discussion. Reading reflections will be graded on the basis of completion.
- ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION (10%): in ~500 words, reconstruct either Mackie's argument from relativity or argument from queerness from "The Subjectivity of Values."
- PAPER 1 OUTLINE (3%): submit a one-page outline of your paper. The outline will be graded on the basis of completion.
- PAPER 1 (20%): write a ~1000 word paper on a topic from a selection of prompts.
- PAPER 1 RECORDING (2%, due Oct. 26): along with your submission of paper 1, submit a recording of your paper read aloud. In my experience, this is the best way to proofread philosophy papers and I want you to try it at least once. The recording will be graded on the basis of completion.
- PAPER 2 (25%, due Nov. 16): write a ~ 1500 word paper on a topic from a selection of prompts.
- FINAL ASSIGNMENT (25%, due Dec. 13): complete a final project. You can choose to write a ~1500 word paper if you'd like, but you can also write a short story exploring themes from the course, produce a podcast, etc. You are welcome to work with a partner or in a small group.

PAPER REWRITES   If you wish, you may revise the argument reconstruction and papers 1 and 2 in light of feedback for a new grade. Your final grade for paper 1 will be the better of the two grades and your final grade for paper 2 will be the average of the the two grades. Revisions are due two weeks after graded papers are returned to you.

Late Work   If you email me at least 24 hours before an assignment is due (with the exception of paper rewrites, which cannot be submitted late), I will grant you a 48 hour extension, no questions asked. The 24 hour limit will be strictly enforced. If you submit an assignment late without getting in touch with me 24 hours beforehand, you will lose $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade per day after the deadline.

Texts   You can find the readings in the "Files" folder on our Canvas site. The one required text for the class is *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis. When there is more than one text assigned for a class meeting, I encourage you to read them in the order they are listed.

Schedule   Unit 0: Metaethics

Sept. 8: Introduction
    No reading

Sept. 13: Is morality subjective?
    1. Connie Rosati, "Some Suggestions for How to Approach Reading a Philosophical Article or Book"
    2. J. L. Mackie, excerpts from "The Subjectivity of Values" from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*
    3. Olivia Bailey, "But How Do I Participate?"

Sept. 15: Can moral realists accept different ways of life? (+reconstructing arguments)
    1. Michele Moody-Adams, "Morality and Culture Through Thick and Thin" in *Fieldwork in Familiar Places*
    2. UNC Writing Center, "Tips and Tools for Writing Philosophy Papers" ("Argument Reconstruction" and "Objections and Replies")

Sept. 19: Argument reconstruction due by 11:59pm

Unit 1: The Conflict Between Morality and Individuality

Sept. 20: Utilitarianism
    Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Sept. 22: Understanding hedonism
    1. John Stuart Mill, excerpts from *Utilitarianism*
    2. Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Sept. 27: Challenges to utilitarianism
    1. Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"
    2. Derek Parfit, "The Repugnant Conclusion" in *Reasons and Persons*

Sept. 29: Kantianism
    Immanuel Kant, excerpts from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Oct. 4: A challenge to Kantianism (+ philosophy paper writing workshop)
  1. Charles W. Mills, "Kant's Untermenschen"
  2. Stephen Yablo, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

Oct. 6: The integrity objection to utilitarianism and Kantianism
    Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality"

Oct. 11: What is integrity?
    Cheshire Calhoun, "Standing for Something"

Oct. 12: Paper 1 outline due by 11:59pm

Oct. 13: No class (fall reading days)

Oct. 18: Responding to the integrity objection
    Nikhil Venkatesh, "Against Commitment"

Unit 2: The Conflict Between Moral Responsibility and Moral Luck

Oct. 20: What makes an action autonomous?
    Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality"

Oct. 24: Paper 1 and recording due by 11:59pm

Oct. 25: Is moral responsibility possible if determinism is true?
    Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

Oct. 27: Are we responsible for what we do while we're intoxicated?
    Nomy Arpaly, "Moral Psychology's Drinking Problem"

Nov. 1: Moral luck
    Video: Victor Kumar, "Moral Luck"

Nov. 3: Are we responsible for our characters?
    Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme"

Nov. 8: What's the point of legal punishment?
    Sofia Jeppsson, "Retributivism and Uncertainty: Why Do We Punish Criminals?"

Nov. 10: Retributivism
    Susan Dimock, "Retributivism and Trust"

Nov. 15: Imprisonment, part 1
    Angela Y. Davis, chapters 1-2 of *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Nov. 16: Paper 2 due by 11:59pm

Nov. 17: Imprisonment, part 2
    Angela Y. Davis, chapters 3-4 of *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Nov 22 & 24: No class (Thanksgiving)

Nov. 29: Imprisonment, part 3
    Angela Y. Davis, chapters 5-6 of *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Dec. 1: Are we responsible for fighting injustice?
    Robin Zheng, "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model
    of Responsibility for Structural Injustice"

Dec. 6: Wrapping up
    Sarah Buss, "Needs (Someone Else's), Projects (My Own), and Reasons"

Dec. 13: Final project due by 11:59pm