

**Course Syllabus**  
**Social Ethics**  
**PHIL 321, Fall, 2015**

**Instructor:** Dr. Matt Zwolinski

**Office Hours:** 9:30-10:30 AM; 12:15-1:45 PM (T/TH)

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**Required Books:**

Mark Timmons, *Disputed Moral Issues: A Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Oxford University Press, 2013) [DMI]

All other required readings are available via electronic reserve.

**Core Requirements:** This course fulfills the Core Curriculum requirement for Ethics.

**Content:**

Most of us believe that it is wrong to cause unnecessary suffering to others. But most of us believe that there is nothing at all wrong with eating meat from animals raised in factory farms. Most of us believe that it would be an act of monstrous cruelty to watch a child drown in front of us when we could easily have saved her. But most of us do not think that we are monsters for ignoring the suffering and death caused every day by massive global poverty.

Are our moral beliefs riddled with inconsistency and irrationality? If so, we are in big trouble. Because our moral beliefs not only govern how we behave as individuals. They govern how we behave as a society, and how we ask our government to behave on our behalf. Once upon a time, in the not-so-distant past, our moral beliefs led us to murder, degrade, and enslave certain kinds of people because of their race. We now think those beliefs were horribly flawed. But what about the moral beliefs we have today? We think it's OK for our government to use men with guns to keep people from coming to our country to find a better life for themselves and their families, to run our society on fossil fuels that contribute to global warming, and to prohibit people dying from terminal diseases to have "death with dignity" through voluntary euthanasia. How confident are we that those beliefs aren't also flawed?

Our goal in this course is to think more critically about our moral beliefs. Which of our beliefs are well grounded and which should we discard? In order to answer these questions it is helpful to have some familiarity with philosophical moral theory, and so our course will start with a very brief survey. But most of the course will be spent thinking about relatively concrete practical problems and the specific philosophical issues they give rise to. My goal is not to indoctrinate you with some particular view that I regard as correct. Rather, it is to help you to think through these difficult issues yourself by exposing you to some of the best arguments from different perspectives, and subjecting those arguments to philosophical scrutiny.

Our pace will be brisk; and so even by philosophical standards, where conclusive resolutions of problems are difficult to come by, our inquiry will leave much unsettled. But the goal of the course is not to solve the philosophical problems involved in our ordinary moral beliefs, so much as to bring to our awareness what those problems are and why they matter.

A word about the content of this course. Some of the topics we will cover are controversial, and some of them may involve issues to which you have strong emotional reactions. My goal, however, is to help you think about these issues like a philosopher would – in a way that is governed by logical reasoning and critical analysis rather than emotion or prejudice. A big part of the task is learning to recognize that there are a great many important issues about which perfectly reasonable people can disagree. Thus, while I expect our classroom meetings to be full of argument and debate, I expect that debate to be conducted in a spirit of respect, courtesy, and goodwill. The goal of philosophical arguments – both those that we will read and those that we will engage in on our own – is to get us closer to the truth, not to "defeat" our opponent.

**Course Requirements:**

Philosophical readings are dense and difficult. It will probably take longer than you expect to read them once, and it will probably be necessary to re-read most pieces at least once in order to come to an adequate understanding of the material. You should expect to spend at least **six hours per week** outside of class time reading and re-reading the material.

The requirements set out in this syllabus are subject to revision at the instructor's discretion.

- **Quizzes** – I will give 5-10 unannounced, multiple-choice quizzes over the course of the semester. The purpose of these quizzes is to test your completion and comprehension of the day's reading assignment, and to encourage attendance at class. Three things to note about them:
  - First, **quizzes are given at the very beginning of class**. You will not be allowed extra time to take them if you are late, and you will not be allowed to make them up if you miss them. So it is to your advantage to show up and be seated on time every day.
  - Second, you will receive a **zero for any quiz that you miss**, for any reason. However, at the end of the semester, I will **drop your two lowest quiz scores**. So missing a quiz will not destroy your grade. But you will have a better chance of excelling in the course if you show up regularly.
  - Finally, these quizzes are very difficult, so it is vital that you read the material carefully and in advance of class. Read the material actively, with pen (or computer) at hand to take notes. And feel free – encouraged, even – to come to office hours any time to discuss any difficulties you might be having with the readings or the quizzes.
- **Exams:** You will have three in-class exams – two during the regular semester and one final exam. Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions (drawn from your earlier quizzes), short-answer questions, and possibly a longer essay. The final exam will be cumulative, but will emphasize material covered in the last third of the course. **All exams must be taken at the date and time at which they are scheduled on this syllabus.** *No exceptions will be made except for cases of documented medical emergencies. Please look at the dates now and check for conflicts.*
- **Participation** – Philosophy is best learned through active conversation with others. It is therefore important that you be a regular participant in classroom discussions. Ideally, you will be sufficiently engaged with the material to contribute to these discussions spontaneously and voluntarily. As an additional stimulus, however, I will engage in regular Socratic questioning of students – typically one lucky student per class period. This process will involve me asking you questions about both what the readings said and what you think about them. These questions will become increasingly difficult as the process continues, but the point is not for you to get the answers “right,” so don't be afraid to stumble. The point is for you to demonstrate preparation and thoughtfulness, and to help your fellow students think through some very difficult issues. To the extent that you do this, you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade.

## Your Grade

Each activity in this class is worth a certain number of points. Your grade will be determined based on a straight (un-curved) analysis of percentage of points earned vs. total points.

Quizzes 5-10 @ 5 points each	25-50
Exam 1 & 2 @ 30 points each	60
Final Exam	50
Participation	10
Total Points:	145-170

A+	97 - 100%
A	93 - 96.9
A-	90 - 92.9
B+	87 - 89.9
B	83 - 86.9
B-	80 - 82.9
C+	77 - 79.9
C	73 - 76.9
C-	70 - 72.9
D+	67 - 67.9
D	63 - 66.9
D-	60 - 62.9
F	59.9 or below

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course...

- Students should be able to describe the main tenets of the major ethical theories (e.g. Utilitarianism, Kantianism) in essay form.
- Students should be able to identify specific moral problems and apply these theories to them.

## Respect

This is a course in ethics, and one of the fundamental ethical values we will study is *respect*. I will treat you with respect in this course, and expect you to do the same for me and your fellow students. What this means in practice is (at a minimum):

*For me:*

- I will arrive on time and prepared for each class meeting scheduled on the syllabus.
- I will take student questions seriously and attempt to address them as helpfully as I can within the constraints of class time.
- I will keep my scheduled office hours, or provide advance notice if this is not possible.
- I will return written assignments within a reasonable time and provide you with ample constructive criticism and an adequate explanation of your grade.
- I will treat you as an adult. Part of what this means is taking your philosophical opinions seriously. But taking your views seriously does not mean treating you with kid gloves. It means that I will assume that you have put some thought into your position and that I will hold you accountable for it, and challenge you when appropriate. I expect the same from you.
- I will respect your time and not give you “busy work.”

*For you:*

- You will respect the opinions of your classmates, and respond to them with seriousness, courtesy, and charity.
- You will show up to class on time.
- You will read the material assigned for class prior to the meeting at which we are scheduled to discuss it.
- You will take responsibility for turning in your written assignments on time.
- You will respect my time and the time of your fellow students by helping to make our time together as productive and conducive to learning as possible.

## Integrity

Doing your own work is part of what it means to have respect for me, for your fellow students, and for yourself.

As above, my treating you with respect involves treating you like an adult. As an adult, you are responsible for knowing the University’s regulations concerning Academic Integrity. **“I didn’t know it was plagiarism” is not an excuse.** Any violation of the Code of Academic Integrity is grounds for failure from the class in addition to any further penalties deemed appropriate by the Academic Integrity Committee.

USD subscribes to a service called Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com is a web-based application that compares the content of submitted papers to the Turnitin.com database and checks for textual similarities. All required papers for this course may be subject to submission to Turnitin.com for textual similarity review and to verify originality. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting textual similarities and verifying originality. Each student is responsible for submitting his or her papers in such a way that no identifying information about the student is included. A student may not have anyone else submit papers on the student’s behalf to Turnitin.com. A student may request in writing that his or her papers not be submitted to Turnitin.com. However, if a student chooses this option, the student may be required to provide documentation in a form required by the faculty member to substantiate that the papers are the student’s original work.

**Schedule of Readings for PHIL 321: Social Ethics**  
**Fall, 2015**  
**Matt Zwolinski**

**KEY DATES AT A GLANCE**

Oct 6	-	Midterm Exam #1
Oct 8	-	No class (this course only)
Nov 10	-	Midterm Exam #2
Nov 26	-	No class (Thanksgiving Break)
Dec 17	-	Final Exam, Section 2, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Dec 22	-	Final Exam, Section 1, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

**Schedule of Readings**

All readings are due on the first day of the week for which they are assigned, unless otherwise specified in class. Readings marked “[DMI]” are from the Timmons anthology. All other readings are on electronic reserve.

Week 1 (Sept 3)                      Introduction and Syllabus Review

Week 2 (Sept 8-10)  
Readings:                      Introduction to Philosophical Ethics, Part 1  
Mark Timmons, “A Moral Theory Primer” [DMI]  
Jeremy Bentham, “The Principle of Utility” [DMI]  
St. Thomas Aquinas, “Treatise on Law” [DMI]

Week 3 (Sept 15-17)  
Readings:                      Introduction to Philosophical Ethics, Part 2  
Mark Timmons, “A Moral Theory Primer,” continued [DMI]  
Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law” [DMI]  
John Locke, “Natural Rights” [DMI]  
Aristotle, “Virtue and Character” [DMI]  
W.D. Ross, “What Makes Right Actions Right”? [DMI]

Week 4 (Sept 22-24)  
Readings:                      What Do We Owe the World’s Poor?  
Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics” [DMI]  
Peter Singer, “The Life You Can Save” [DMI]  
Onora O’Neill, “A Kantian Approach to World Hunger” [DMI]

Week 5 (Sept 29-Oct 1)  
Readings:                      Are Restrictive Immigration Laws Morally Justified?  
Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Immigrate?”  
Stephen Macedo, “The Moral Dilemma of U.S. Immigration Policy: Open Borders Versus Social Justice?” [DMI]

Week 6 (Oct 6)                      Midterm Exam #1  
**Midterm Exam 1: Oct 6**  
**No class Oct 8 (this course only)**

Week 7 (Oct 13-15)  
Readings:                      Is Voluntary Euthanasia Wrong?  
James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” [DMI]  
Philippa Foot, “Killing and Letting Die” [DMI]

- Week 8 (Oct 20-22)  
Readings: Is It Moral to Eat Meat?  
James Rachels, “The Moral Argument for Vegetarianism”  
R.G. Frey, “Moral Vegetarianism and the Argument from Pain and Suffering”
- Week 9 (Oct 27-29)  
Readings: How Should We Treat the Natural Environment?  
William Baxter, “People or Penguins: The Case for Optimal Pollution” [DMI]  
Thomas Hill, “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving the Natural Environment” [DMI]
- Week 10 (Nov 3-5)  
Readings: Should We Act Now to Stop Global Climate Change?  
Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations” [DMI]  
Bjørn Lomborg, “Let’s Keep Our Cool About Global Warming”
- Week 11 (Nov 10-12)  
Readings: Is There a Duty to Obey the Law?  
**Midterm Exam #2: Nov 10**  
M.B.E. Smith, “Is There a *Prima Facie* Duty to Obey the Law?”
- Week 12 (Nov 17-19)  
Readings: When and Why is Discrimination Wrong?  
Larry Alexander, “What Makes Wrongful Discrimination Wrong? Biases, Preferences, Stereotypes, and Proxies”  
Frederick Schauer, “The Profilers,” and “The Usual Suspects,” from *Profiles, Probabilities, and Stereotypes* (Harvard University Press, 2003)
- Week 13 (Nov 24)  
Readings: Is Price Gouging Immoral?  
**No Class Nov 26 (Thanksgiving Break)**  
Matt Zwolinski: “The Ethics of Price Gouging”  
Jeremy Snyder, “What’s the Matter with Price Gouging?”
- Week 14 (Dec 1-3)  
Readings: Should it Be Legal to Sell Your Kidney?  
Janet Radcliffe-Richards, “Nephroarious Goings-On: Kidney Sales and Moral Arguments”  
Gabriel Danovitch and Francis Delmonico, “The Prohibition of Kidney Sales and Organ Markets Should Remain”
- Week 15 (Dec 8-10)  
Readings: How Should We Help the Working Poor?  
T.M. Wilkinson, “The Ethics and Economics of the Minimum Wage”  
Charles Murray, *In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State*

**Final Exam:**

Section 1 – Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Section 2 – Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM