

PHL 231 B: Ethics
Fall 2015
MWF 9–9:50, HU 147

Sydney Penner
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Office: Morrison 300B (shared)
Office hours: MW 11–11:50 pm or by appt.

Course website: <http://www.sydneypenner.ca/phl231/>

Course
Description

We all routinely make ethical judgements and encounter other people making such judgements. Often we more or less agree in our judgements, though agreement often escapes our notice, being so entirely non-disruptive. Sometimes we disagree, as, for example, in the very noticeable case of abortion. Ethics as a discipline is in the business of asking questions about those judgements. Which ethical beliefs are true? What justifies them? Are they relative to cultural standards or not? Does moral obligation depend on God's commands or does secular morality make sense? Is there a systematic ethical theory that explains our disparate ethical judgements and helps us think through controversial cases?

In this course we will explore answers to a variety of such questions and we will examine a number of specific ethical theories that have gained prominence, including ethical relativism, consequentialism, Kantianism, contractarianism, and Aristotelianism.

Required
Texts

- Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, eds. *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*. 5th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Additional readings will be posted to the course website for you to print.

Course
Objectives

- to think carefully about some central ethical questions and to understand the major responses to those questions
- to practice reading philosophical texts closely and both charitably and critically
- to explore the bearing of Christian faith on philosophical investigation and vice versa
- to learn how to analyze and evaluate arguments with care and precision
- to develop skills in formulating and expressing your own views

Course
Requirements

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and participation are mandatory. The mere presence of your body is not sufficient for an A for participation. I expect you to come to class having done the readings with care, alert, and prepared to engage in discussion. I will ask you to grade yourselves on your participation, though I will keep an eye on things and will both lower your grade if you are giving yourself a free pass and raise your grade if you are being unduly harsh on yourself.

You may miss two classes without providing any reason for your absence (though I would appreciate an email in advance letting me know you will be absent). I strongly recommend using these two absences with caution, since any additional absences will require an excused absence from the registrar. Every unexcused additional absence will result in your overall participation grade being lowered by a third of a letter grade. Note, too, that I am not responsible for giving you a private tutorial to cover the material you missed during an absence. It is your responsibility to arrange with a classmate to bring you up to speed and share notes. Any handouts distributed in class, however, will be made available on the course website.

In-class exercises and quizzes: There will be frequent short exercises to be completed in class. At least some of these will be quizzes based on reading(s) for that class period. When calculating course grades at the end of the term, I will exclude each student's lowest three in-class exercise grades.

Two-minute essays: At the end of many class periods, I will ask you to write a note answering a couple of questions of the following sort. What did you take to be the most important issue discussed in class that day? What did you find most confusing of the things discussed in class that day? Assuming a reasonable level of effort, you will receive full credit. Essays missed as a result of an excused absence will not result in a penalty.

Three short papers: These 400–600 word papers can come in one of three flavours: (1) identifying a Biblical passage that illuminates or is illuminated by a philosophical discussion, (2) identifying and analysing a key argument in one of the readings, and (3) identifying a claim in a reading that seems crazy and explaining why the author might nonetheless have made the claim. You are encouraged to write one paper of each type, but not required to do so. You can select any reading for each of your short papers as long as (1) the reading is at least two pages in length, (2) you do not use the same reading for more than one paper, (3) your first paper is done on a reading that is scheduled no later than September 28, and (4) your second paper is done on a reading scheduled no later than November 16. A given paper will be due by the beginning of the class period for which the relevant reading is assigned.

Exams: There will be midterm and final exams, composed of multiple choice and short answer questions, as well as one or two essay questions. The final exam will not be cumulative. You may elect to write a longer paper in lieu of the final exam (see next paragraph).

Term paper: Students who wish may write a term paper instead of taking the final exam. The paper will likely be more work but for certain students will be more rewarding. This assignment will involve several stages. First, you will meet with me to propose and talk about the topic on which you wish to write your paper. Second, you will write the paper (around 1200–1500 words) as you usually would. I will then read your paper and offer comments on it. You, finally, will rework your paper on the basis of my comments. Your grade will be based on both drafts and on your responsiveness to my comments.

Grading	<p>Class attendance and participation – 10%</p> <p>In-class exercises and quizzes – 15% (all weighted equally)</p> <p>Two-minute essays – 5% (all weighted equally)</p> <p>Short papers – 30% (10% each)</p> <p>Midterm exam – 20%</p> <p>Final exam/term paper – 20%</p>																		
Grading Scale	<table border="0"> <tr> <td></td> <td>B+ 87–89.9</td> <td>C+ 77–77.9</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>A 94–100</td> <td>B 83–86.9</td> <td>C 73–76.9</td> <td>D 60–69.9</td> <td>F 0–59.9</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>A- 90–92.9</td> <td>B- 80–82.9</td> <td>C- 70–72.9</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		B+ 87–89.9	C+ 77–77.9				A 94–100	B 83–86.9	C 73–76.9	D 60–69.9	F 0–59.9		A- 90–92.9	B- 80–82.9	C- 70–72.9			
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Reading Philosophical Texts	<p>Many of the readings in this class will be challenging and they may well seem alien in form. In addition to guidance I will offer in class, you may find some helpful advice on how to read philosophical texts (and many other texts) on the following two webpages:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/courses/notes.htm</p>																		
Academic Integrity	<p>Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Make sure that you know what constitutes plagiarism. If in doubt, cite your source. Or ask me for guidance. There are genuine grey areas and I am happy to help you learn where the boundaries are. That is, incidentally, perfectly compatible with many instances of plagiarism being obvious cases where it is utterly obvious to an instructor that they could not have happened innocently. Familiarize yourself with Asbury's policies on academic integrity:</p> <p>http://www.asbury.edu/offices/registrar/bulletin/academic-policies/general-policies</p>																		
Extensions and Late Penalties	<p>Note that the short papers already allow for flexible scheduling and no extensions will be granted on them. This means that it would be prudent not to wait to write a paper on the last possible reading. If you choose to write a term paper and need an extension, talk to me (the sooner, the better). Failing an extension, work will have a third of a letter grade deducted if received later in the day, a full letter grade if received the following day, and an additional third of a letter grade for each additional day it is late.</p>																		
Special Accommodations	<p>If you need any special accommodations for reasons related to disabilities, religious observance, athletics, and the like, do not hesitate to let me know. I will be happy to work with you in arranging appropriate accommodations. Again, letting me know sooner is better than later.</p>																		

Miscellaneous
Policies

Please refrain from using electronic devices in class. I want the classroom to be a place where we engage in genuine, thoughtful discussion—electronic devices by and large do not contribute to that goal. This policy includes laptops.¹

Unexpected class cancellations will be announced by email. If possible, I will also have the cancellation posted on the classroom door.

Do not try to find my telephone number and call me—by far the best way to contact me is by email. I will try to respond to emails within 24 hours.

The Writing Center

You can get assistance with your writing from the Center for Academic Excellence's Writing Center. Consult their website for more information:

<http://www.asbury.edu/academics/cae/writing-center>

¹ If you are interested in seeing a justification for keeping laptops out of classrooms, see the following piece: Kevin Yamamoto, "Banning Laptops in the Classroom: Is It Worth the Hassle?", *Journal of Legal Education* 57 (2008): 1-46.