

PHL 231 C: Ethics
Spring 2016
TR 12:45–2:00, MO 413

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Office: Morrison 300B (shared)
Office hours: TR 3:30–5:00 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. Sometimes 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 our ethical judgements, both about the ones subject to disagreement and those not. Which judgements 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, 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. No exceptions. 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.

Reading questions and objections: For each day for which there is an assigned reading, I will ask that you to submit either a question you have about the reading or an objection you have to something in the reading (your choice). These questions/objections should be submitted by email and are due by the midnight before we discuss the reading in class. The point of this assignment is to help you engage with the texts and prepare to discuss them in class. You should be prepared to raise the same questions or objections during our class discussions (though you are, of course, also free to raise other questions and/or objections). All good-faith submissions will receive full credit. You may skip this assignment three times without penalty.

In-class exercises: I may assign any of a number of different kinds of in-class exercises that I deem pedagogically useful as I see how this particular class develops. Some of these are likely to be graded on a pass/fail basis. If I assign a sufficient number of these, I may also at my discretion drop one or more of the lowest grades for each student.

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 required to write papers of at least two of these types and encouraged, but not required, to write one of each type. 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 February 23, and (4) your second paper is done on a reading scheduled no later than March 29. 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 true or false, multiple choice, and short answer questions, as well as one or two essay questions. *NB:* The exams will be based on the readings for the course, not on in-class lectures and discussion. Lectures and discussion will, of course, help you understand the readings better and in that way will contribute to preparing for the exams. The final exam will not be cumulative. Some students may elect to write a longer paper in lieu of the final exam (see next paragraph).

Term paper: Students whose overall midterm grade is B- or higher may elect to write a term paper instead of taking the final exam. The paper will likely be somewhat more work but will also be a more rewarding project for certain students. 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

Class attendance and participation – 10%
 In-class exercises – 10% (all weighted equally)
 Questions/objections – 10% (all weighted equally)
 Short papers – 30% (10% each)
 Midterm exam – 20%
 Final exam/term paper – 20%

Grading Scale

	B+ 87–89.9	C+ 77–79.9			
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			

Reading Philosophical Texts

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:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

<http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/courses/notes.htm>

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. In this course, all clear instances of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of 0% for the assignment in question. Additional penalties such as an F for the course or suspension from the university may apply.

Make sure that you know what constitutes plagiarism and other kinds of academic dishonesty. 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. Note, however, that many cases of plagiarism obviously cannot happen innocently. It is students' responsibility to familiarize themselves with Asbury's policies on academic integrity, including the consequences for academic dishonesty and the appeals process:

<http://www.asbury.edu/offices/registrar/bulletin/academic-policies/general-policies>

Extensions and Late Penalties

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.

Special Accommodations	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.
Miscellaneous Policies	<p><i>Please refrain from using electronic devices in class</i>, unless you have a special need for doing so and have cleared it with me. 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</p> <p><i>Unexpected class cancellations will be announced by email</i>. If possible, I will also have the cancellation posted on the classroom door.</p> <p><i>Do not try to find my telephone number and call me—by far the best way to contact me is by email</i>. I will try to respond to emails within 24 hours.</p>

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.