

# L30 PHIL 131F: PRESENT MORAL PROBLEMS<sup>1</sup>

Washington University in Saint Louis, Spring 2019

Instructor: Dr. Taylor Cyr (tcyr@wustl.edu)

## Basic Information:

Class Meeting Times: MW 8:40-10am

Class Meeting Location: Psychology 251

Instructor's Office: Wilson Hall 101

Instructor's Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30pm  
(and by appointment)

## Required Text:

- Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2017. *The Ethical Life: Fundamental Readings in Ethics and Moral Problems* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Oxford University Press. (Note: 3<sup>rd</sup> edition is acceptable.)

## Course Overview

### Description:

This course has two parts. In the first part, students will be introduced to several of the ethical theories that have been most popular in the history of philosophy, including utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics. Building on this theoretical background, the second part of the course turns to applied ethical issues. Many of these are familiar problems that are widely debated by philosophers and non-philosophers alike, such as the morality of abortion and the death penalty, whereas others are less widely discussed but (arguably) still very important contemporary moral issues, such as the morality of robotic labor and the value of work.

### Learning Outcomes:

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze and evaluate complex philosophical arguments
- Apply ethical theories to practical moral problems

### Instructional Objectives:

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Critically read philosophical texts by identifying and assessing the author's reasoning
- Analyze and critique ethical arguments related to various pressing moral issues
- Present arguments in their own words and provide their own objections to them

## Course Requirements (% of Final Grade)

- Exam 1 (20%)
- Exam 2 (20%)
- Final Exam (20%)
- Paper (20%)
- Reading Quizzes (20%)

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<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is subject to change (at the instructor's discretion) with advanced notice.

**Midterm Exams and Final Exam:**

- The midterm exams and final exam will be similar in length and in format and are designed to test understanding of all of the course material. The final exam is not cumulative.
- The format of these exams will be a combination of true/false, multiple-choice, shorter-answer (4-6 sentences) essay questions, and longer-answer (2-3 paragraphs) essay questions.

**Paper:**

- A paper of 4-5 pages in length is due during week 13. There will be several topics from which students may choose, and more specific instructions for the paper will be given during week 10.
- Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B- to C+) for each day past their due date.

**Reading Quizzes:**

- There will be 12 unannounced reading quizzes throughout the term. These will be short, multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank quizzes that will test basic comprehension of the assigned readings for the day of the quiz.
- At the end of the course, I will drop students' two lowest scores (i.e., only a student's 10 best reading quizzes will count toward her final grade). Make-up quizzes will not be offered.

**Course Policies****Academic Integrity:**

Students are expected to act with academic integrity. For details, visit <https://wustl.edu/about/compliance-policies/academic-policies/undergraduate-student-academic-integrity-policy/>. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be reported to the relevant academic integrity officer and will result in an F on the assignment.

**Respect:**

Students are expected to treat each other and the instructor with respect. This includes, among other things, paying attention to what a person is saying, being charitable to others' points of views, and criticizing ideas rather than persons.

**Email:**

Course announcements will be delivered via email, so students are expected to check their email at least once per day on weekdays. The instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours (and often much more quickly than that).

**Disabilities:**

Washington University is committed to providing accommodations and/or services to students with documented disabilities. Students who are seeking support for a disability or a suspected disability should contact Disability Resources at 935-4153. Disability Resources is responsible for approving all disability-related accommodations for WU students, and students are responsible for providing faculty members with formal documentation of their approved accommodations at least two weeks prior to using those

accommodations. I will accept Disability Resources VISA forms by email and personal delivery. If you have already been approved for accommodations, I request that you provide me with a copy of your VISA within the first two weeks of the semester.

### **Accommodations Based upon Sexual Assault:**

The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations to students who are victims of sexual assault. Students are eligible for accommodation regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. Depending on the specific nature of the allegation, such measures may include but are not limited to: implementation of a no-contact order, course/classroom assignment changes, and other academic support services and accommodations. If you need to request such accommodations, please direct your request to [Kim Webb](#), Director of the [Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center](#), or [Jen Durham Austin](#), Support Services Counselor. Both Kim Webb and Jen Durham Austin are confidential resources; however, requests for accommodations will be shared with the appropriate University administration and faculty. The University will maintain as confidential any accommodations or protective measures provided to an individual student so long as it does not impair the ability to provide such measures.

If a student comes to me to discuss or disclose an instance of sexual assault, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, or if I otherwise observe or become aware of such an allegation, I will keep the information as private as I can, but as a faculty member of Washington University, I am required to immediately report it to my Department Chair or Dean or directly to Ms. Jessica Kennedy, the University's Title IX Director. If you would like to speak with directly Ms. Kennedy directly, she can be reached at [\(314\) 935-3118](tel:(314)935-3118), [jwkennedy@wustl.edu](mailto:jwkennedy@wustl.edu), or by visiting the [Title IX office](#) in Umrath Hall. Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards or by contacting WUPD at [\(314\) 935-5555](tel:(314)935-5555) or your local law enforcement agency. See: [Title IX](#)

You can also speak confidentially and learn more about available resources at the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center by calling [\(314\) 935-3445](tel:(314)935-3445) for an appointment or visiting the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Seigle Hall. See: [RSVP Center](#)

### **Bias Reporting:**

The University has a process through which students, faculty, staff and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination against a student can report their experiences to the University's Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team.  
See: [brss.wustl.edu](http://brss.wustl.edu).

### **Mental Health:**

Mental Health Services' professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression.

### **Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI):**

The Center of Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) supports and advocates for undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students from underrepresented and/or marginalized

populations, creates collaborative partnerships with campus and community partners, and promotes dialogue and social change. One of the CDI's strategic priorities is to cultivate and foster a supportive campus climate for students of all backgrounds, cultures and identities.

See: [diversityinclusion.wustl.edu/](http://diversityinclusion.wustl.edu/)

## Course Schedule and Readings<sup>2</sup>

### PART ONE

- Week 1
  - 1/14: Introduction
    - *Optional*: Plato, “Ring of Gyges” (from the *Republic*; provided electronically)
  - 1/16: Metaethics
    - Harry Gensler, “Cultural Relativism”
    - David Enoch, “Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)”
- Week 2
  - 1/21: *Martin Luther King Day* (no class)
  - 1/23: Morality, Religion, and Natural Law
    - Plato, *Euthyphro*
    - *Optional*: Aquinas, “Natural Law”
- Week 3
  - 1/28: Utilitarianism
    - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (selections)
  - 1/30: Kantianism
    - Immanuel Kant, “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative”
- Week 4
  - 2/4: Other Ethical Theories: Virtue Ethics and Contractarianism
    - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections)
    - Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (selections)
  - 2/6: A Feminist Critique
    - Hilde Lindemann, “What Is Feminist Ethics?”
- Week 5
  - 2/11: *Exam 1*

### PART TWO

- 2/13: Death
  - Epicurus, “Letter to Menoecus” (provided electronically)
  - Thomas Nagel, “Death” (provided electronically)
- Week 6
  - 2/18: Abortion
    - Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral”
  - 2/20: Abortion (continued)
    - Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
- Week 7

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all reading assignments are included in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Shafer-Landau, *The Ethical Life* (the assigned textbook). (Readings not included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition will be made available online.)

- 2/25: Abortion (continued)
  - Dan Moller, “Abortion and Moral Risk” (provided electronically)
- 2/27: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide
  - Legal Cases (provided electronically)
    - *Optional: Bouvia v. Superior Court*
    - *Optional: Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Department of Health*
    - *Vacco v. Quill*
    - *Washington v. Glucksberg*
    - *Oregon Death with Dignity Act*
- Week 8
  - 3/4: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide (continued)
    - James Rachels, “The Morality of Euthanasia”
  - 3/6: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide (continued)
    - J. David Velleman, “Against the Right to Die” (provided electronically)
- Week 9
  - 3/11: *Spring Break*
  - 3/13: *Spring Break*
- Week 10
  - 3/18: The Death Penalty
    - Igor Primoratz, “Justifying Legal Punishment”
    - *Discuss Paper Topics*
  - 3/20: The Death Penalty (continued)
    - Stephen Nathanson, “An Eye for an Eye?”
- Week 11
  - 3/25: *Exam 2*
  - 3/27: Poverty and Hunger
    - Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”
- Week 12
  - 4/1: Poverty and Hunger (continued)
    - Theron Pummer, “Risky Giving” (provided electronically)
    - *Philosophy Bites*, “Larry Temkin on Obligations to the Needy” (podcast available [here](#))
  - 4/3: The Legacy of Racism
    - Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (provided electronically)
    - Chris Lebron, “Time for a New Black Radicalism”
- Week 13
  - 4/8: The Legacy of Racism (continued)
    - Louis P. Pojman, “The Case Against Affirmative Action”
    - Elizabeth Anderson, “The Future of Racial Integration”
  - 4/10: Climate Change
    - Broome, “The Ethics of Climate Change” (provided electronically)
    - Eric Posner and Cass R. Sunstein, “Climate Change Justice”
    - *Paper Due*
- Week 14
  - 4/15: Climate Change (continued)
    - Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations” (provided electronically)
  - 4/17: Climate Change (continued)

- Broome, “Justice and Fairness” and “Private Morality” (selections from chapters 4 and 5 of *Climate Matters*, provided electronically)
  - *Planet Money*, “Money Trees” (podcast available [here](#))
- Week 15
  - 4/22: Robotic Labor and the Value of Work
    - Bertrand Russell, “In Praise of Idleness” (provided electronically)
    - Judith Shulevitz, “Bring Back the Sabbath” (provided electronically)
  - 4/24: Robotic Labor and the Value of Work (continued)
    - *On Point*, “Robots and Our Automated Future” (podcast available [here](#))
- Reading Week
  - 5/2 (Thursday), 8-10am: *Final Exam*