

PHIL 1104

Philosophy and Social Ethics in a Global Pandemic

Instructor: Jenelle Salisbury

E-mail: jenelle.salisbury@uconn.edu

Virtual Office Hours: [T 11:00-1:00](#) or by appointment

Readings: *Available on HuskyCT*

Course Overview

Ethical philosophy is an examination into “the right” and “the good.” How do we determine the right thing to do when we are in a situation of uncertainty? Is there an objective fact of the matter about which actions are “right” and which are “wrong”? How can we apply rational principles to judge the actions of ourselves and others in terms of moral appropriateness? *Should* we be engaged in this practice of moral judgment at all? How do we engage in meaningful discourse when we have a deep disagreement regarding values, policy, or moral thought? What does it mean to be a good person? How ought we to live?

These questions are always relevant to everyday life, but it seems especially so now. The unprecedented times of the current global pandemic have brought many moral issues to the fore. Things we used to do without a second thought, such as going to the grocery store, the hospital, our friend’s house, or getting on a plane, have become fraught with a whole host of ethical quandaries. What’s the morally appropriate measure of adequate social distancing? Is it acceptable to judge the character of other people who aren’t living up to standards we deem appropriate? How should scarce resources such as ventilators be allocated when there aren’t enough to go around? How quickly should vaccines move to human trials? How should risk assessment be balanced amongst our other values such as our mental health and community relationships?

Because these questions are so pressing and relevant, this course has been modified from its typical structure to incorporate them. At its core, this course is designed to give you an introduction to some basic theoretical and applied ethical issues, and to acquaint you with traditional philosophical methods for addressing these questions and/or problems. We will be reading and critically analyzing both ancient and contemporary philosophical works, discussing them as a group, and discussing, workshopping, and debating ethical topics, especially those related to COVID-19. Your instructor is there to help guide you through these texts, and to help you in clarifying and articulating your own viewpoints on the issues we will address.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will obtain a basic understanding of the tradition in philosophy for addressing ethical questions.
- Students will gain an appreciation for the complexity (and importance) of careful moral reasoning.
- Students will improve their written and verbal communication skills.
- Students will be better equipped for ethical decision making and civil discourse about controversial issues.
- Students will sharpen their critical thinking skills.
- Students will gain a nuanced perspective regarding a host of ethical issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grading Scheme

Your overall grade in this course will be assessed through multiple modes. The two primary aims of your learning are: (a.) to achieve a conceptual grasp of moral theory and philosophical reasoning and (b.) to improve your skills in critical thinking and moral communication.

Periodic **content quizzes** will check your understanding of *concepts, theories, and arguments*. The **assignments** will consist of weekly *short reflection papers* and/or *discussion board posts*, which will be used to demonstrate your understanding as well as to articulate your own perspective. Your **final paper** will apply what you have learned on both fronts by integrating moral theory with an applied moral issue. Your **presentation** will enable you to learn about a specific issue in-depth and use what you have learned to spark discussion amongst your peers. Finally, you are expected to regularly **participate** in class discussions both inside and outside of our synchronous meetings by engaging in meaningful conversations with your peers.

Item	Percentage	Date(s)
Content Quizzes	25	Due: 9/20, 10/11, 10/25, 11/15, and 12/6
Discussion board	20	Tuesdays from 9/7-11/30 ¹
Reflection Papers	15	Saturdays from

¹Excluding Thanksgiving Break

		9/11-12/4 ²
Final Paper	20	Finals week
Presentations	10	Assigned
Participation	10	Ongoing

Grades will be updated to the Husky CT portal periodically. At the end of the semester, your weighted total grade will be submitted to the registrar under the following scheme:

Weighted Total	Final Grade
<i>93 or above</i>	A
<i>90-92.9</i>	A-
<i>87-89.9</i>	B+
<i>83-86.9</i>	B
<i>80-82.9</i>	B-
<i>77-79.9</i>	C+
<i>73-76.9</i>	C
<i>70-72.9</i>	C-
<i>67-69.9</i>	D+
<i>63-66.9</i>	D
<i>60-62.9</i>	D-
<i>59.9 or below</i>	F

More information:

- We will use a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning. Instead of using our synchronous meeting times to lecture, lectures will be provided via video clips posted onto Husky CT. These **video lectures** are a primary source of information you will need to know

²You only need to turn in 5 reflection papers over the course of the semester. You can turn in more if you like, and your top 5 will count toward your grade.

to succeed in this class. Do not skip watching them, as they may explain crucial information about assignments.

- The lectures and class discussions will be based on a selection of **readings** which are listed on the schedule below and will be made available via Husky CT. You will not be tested on minor details of readings that were not covered in lecture or discussion, but the readings will add to your understanding. I recommend watching the video lecture associated with a reading before doing that reading so you have a better idea of what to focus on, and then coming to our synchronous meeting prepared with your questions and reflections.
- We will use the **discussion board** to prompt in-class discussions and to provide a space for in depth reflections on or related to course content. Each week, a discussion board post will be due on Tuesday night on the readings and lectures for the upcoming Wednesday discussion. These are meant to gather your initial thoughts on a topic or question and need not be overly formal.
- **Reflection papers** are 2 page reflections on a specific topic from the content we read about and discussed that week. These will be more formal than discussion posts in terms of grammar. You can turn in as many reflection papers as you want, due Saturday nights, and your top 5 scores will count toward your final grade in the class.
- Your **final paper** will be due in the last week of class and will be a longer critical examination of an ethical theory or applied issue. We will discuss more about this assignment as it gets closer. One option may be to choose your favorite reflection paper and expand it into an in-depth, philosophically informed argument for a claim.
- Each student will be assigned a topic and associated article to prepare a **presentation** on, which they will present during our synchronous meeting. Presentations should be approximately 5 minutes. Presenters should come up with 3-4 thoughtful discussion questions to spark conversation amongst the class. Their discussion questions should be posted by the Sunday before they are assigned to present.
- **In-class participation** is an important way for me to assess your engagement with the course material. This can come in the form of asking questions, making connections, or providing objections to content from the reading for that day or content from lecture. We will also have miscellaneous in-class activities that will be part of your participation score.
- **Office hours** are drop-in times when you don't need to make an appointment to come talk to me about anything at all. Visiting office hours is considered class participation (it is not required, but if you don't actively participate during lecture this is a good alternative). Virtual office hours will be held via Webex. My personal meeting link is:
<https://uconn-cmr.webex.com/meet/jgs15101>
- You will have periodic **quizzes** testing your mastery of the course content through a combination of fill-in-the blank, short essay, and multiple choice. These quizzes will be administered online and will be open-book and open-notes. As such, they will be designed to

test that you have an understanding and ability to apply concepts, rather than testing memorization of theories and definitions.

Other Policies and Expectations

- You are expected to be present and engaged during all virtual meetings via Blackboard Collaborate. You are expected to have watched the video lectures and perused the associated course reading for that day ahead of time and be ready to discuss it.
- I have a strict no-tolerance policy when it comes to **academic dishonesty and plagiarism**. If any of your written work is plagiarized, you will not only receive a 0 for that assignment, but the infraction will also be reported and may result in further penalties or a mark on your record. Do not consult online forums for your reflections or papers, as this may result in plagiarism whether accidental or intentional. More information about UConn’s academic misconduct policy can be found here:
<https://community.uconn.edu/academic-misconduct/#>
- **Late work policy** - I will accept assignments late for a 20% grade deduction per day. The final paper will not be accepted late without documentation of a serious emergency.
- **Special accommodations**: Special accommodations are available on a needs-basis. If you suspect you have a need for an accommodation, I suggest you work with the center for students with disabilities (CSD) in order to work out what, if any, these may be. More information can be found at <http://csd.uconn.edu>

Course Schedule³

Week	Guiding Questions	Associated Readings
Week 1	Who are we? What are we doing here? What is philosophy? What is ethics? How do we learn and talk about ethics? What are the basics of arguments?	Syllabus LeGuin, <i>The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas</i> Sober, <i>Deductive Arguments</i>
Week 2	What is morality? What’s the relationship between religion and morality? What’s the nature of moral facts? How do we gain moral knowledge? Moral motivation? Do we need religion to ground moral facts? Do we need religion to give us a reason to act morally?	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> Plato, <i>Republic</i> Book 2 Midgley, <i>Trying out One’s New Sword</i> Rachels, <i>The Challenge of Cultural Relativism</i>

³ This schedule is open to change as the semester progresses

Week 3	What ethical questions are raised by the current global pandemic? How do we determine our individual-level obligations? How should scarce resources be allocated? What injustices has this pandemic brought to light? How do we move forward?	Bramble, <i>Pandemic Ethics</i>
Week 4	What is Utilitarianism as a moral theory? What are the arguments for and against this theory? How do we apply this theory to cases?	Bentham, <i>The Principle of Utility</i> “To Test a Vaccine for COVID-19, Should Volunteers Risk Their Lives?” Richard Yetter Chappell and Peter Singer, “Pandemic ethics: The case for experiments on human volunteers” Longstaff, “Rationing life: COVID-19 triage and end of life care”
Week 5	What is Kantianism as a moral theory? What are the arguments for and against this theory? How do we apply this theory to cases?	Kant, <i>Good Will and the Categorical Imperative</i> O’Neill, <i>Kant and Utilitarianism Contrasted</i> Humphreys, “Are we all Kantians now? The Covid-19 effect on moral philosophy”
Week 6	What is Happiness, and what does it mean to live a good life? Is living a good life connected to being a moral person? How did Aristotle see this? What is virtue ethics as a moral theory? What is the virtuous response to the pandemic?	Nozick, <i>Happiness</i> Aristotle, selections from <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Podcast) “How to ethically navigate the pandemic’s new normal as restrictions begin to lift”
Week 7	More on virtue ethics, intro to “care” as a virtue. Is “caring” a virtue? How can it be characterized? How can it be cultivated? Do we have a moral obligation to care? How do we express care to strangers?	Noddings, <i>An Ethic of Caring</i> Beard, “It’s easy to ignore the people we can’t see” Beard, “How to deal with people who aren’t doing their bit to flatten the curve” Beard, “Is it ok to visit someone in need during COVID-19?”
Week 8	“Care ethics” continued. What is care ethics as a moral theory? What is partiality? Should our morality permit, even endorse partial thinking? How does this theory apply to cases? How does it compare to the other theories?	Noddings, <i>An Ethic of Caring</i> Authers, “How Coronavirus is Shaking up the Moral Universe” (Podcast) “Danielle Allen: How Can Democratic Values Guide Us When Facing A Global Crisis?”

Week 9	Comparing all 4 moral theories and wrapping up the theoretical unit. How do the theories we discussed connect to one another? How can we revisit the questions we raised about pandemic ethics in light of moral theory? Is one theory better suited than the rest to solve particular questions?	McKeown, " We are not all Rawlsians now " McIntyre, " A philosopher answers everyday moral dilemmas in a time of coronavirus " WHO, " Ethics and COVID-19: resource allocation and priority setting "
Week 10	What is the best definition of racism? How is (or is not) "racism" distinct from racial prejudice or discrimination? How deeply is racism embedded in our minds and/or institutions?	Gordon <i>Racism as a Form of Bad Faith</i> Blum, <i>Racism: What it is and What it isn't</i> Appiah, <i>Racisms</i>
Week 11	What are some specific social issues brought on by racism? Topics may include: protests, monuments, affirmative action, reparations, police violence, the school to prison pipeline, abolition vs reform, the death penalty, racialized impacts of COVID-19, or other issues students may raise	Cholbi and Madva, <i>Black Lives Matter and the Call for Death Penalty Abolition</i> Schedler, <i>Are Confederate Monuments Racist?</i> " Black Americans Face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States " " Long-Standing Racial And Income Disparities Seen Creeping Into COVID-19 Care " " Chinese-Americans, Facing Abuse, Unite to Aid Hospitals in Coronavirus Battle "
Week 12	What, if any, moral obligations do we have to animals? Is it moral to eat factory farmed animals? Is it moral to consume dairy? Is it moral to consume humanely raised animals? Is it moral to keep and/or breed pets?	Norcross, <i>Puppies, Pigs, and People</i> Francione, <i>The Case Against Pets</i>
Week 13	What, if any, moral obligations do we have to unborn fetuses at varying stages? Does answering this question matter for determining whether abortion is moral? Does answering <i>that</i> question matter for determining whether, or to what extent, legal restrictions should be placed on whether/when a pregnancy can be terminated?	Thomson, <i>A Defense of Abortion</i> Marquis, <i>Why Abortion is Immoral</i> Warren, <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i>
Week 14	No required class- designated reading day	Draft of Final Paper due
Finals week	<i>Final paper due</i>	

