

Phil 1330-601 Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Fall 2024: Tuesday/Thursday 5:15-6:45 pm in

Dr. Milton Wachsberg Meyer (e-mail: mwmeyer@phil.upenn.edu)

Office Hours: **VIA ZOOM** Monday/Wednesday 5:00-6:00 and by appointment

You are not allowed to use ChatGPT (or tools like it) for submitted work in this course. Using such tools will be considered a violation of Penn's [Code of Academic Integrity](#) and suspected use will be reported to the Center for Community Standards & Accountability. Please contact me if you have any questions about this policy.

Course Description

Four sorts of questions belong to the study of moral philosophy in the analytic tradition:

- (1) Practical ethics discusses specific moral problems, often those we find most contested (e.g. abortion, treatment of nonhuman animals, killing non-combatants in war).
- (2) Ethical theory tries to develop systematic answers to moral problems, often by looking for general principles that explain moral judgments and rules (e.g. consequentialism, contractarianism).
- (3) Meta-ethics investigates questions about the nature of moral theories and their subject matter (e.g. are they subjective or objective, relative or non-relative, intrinsically connected to a god).
- (4) Finally, there are questions about why any of this does, or should, matter to us (e.g. why should I be moral?).

We will investigate all four of these types of questions. A large part of the course will be focused on two highly contentious moral problems: abortion and killing non-combatants in war.

The central aims of the required readings and discussion are: a) to develop each question deeply and sharply enough for us to understand why it has been contentious; b) to see what new evidence could change the nature of the problem; and c) to suggest how to seek that further evidence.

We will focus on how to read complex contemporary philosophical prose in order to outline and evaluate the arguments embedded within it. This will provide the basis for writing papers in which you defend a position with evidence and arguments.

These skills are central to the practice of Philosophy. This course does not presuppose that students already have these skills. It is intended to teach them and presupposes a willingness on the part of students to do what is necessary to learn them.

What this involves is detailed in “Success in this Course”, which follows the syllabus below.

You should read "Success in this Course" to understand the commitment this course involves.

Course Work

The class will be conducted as a directed discussion seminar. Weekly exercises and informed participation are required (20%). There will be two short papers (5 pages), each with pre-screened outlines (20% each); a mid-term take-home exam (20%) and a take-home final (20%).

Required Reading

The Readings are on this CANVAS site, either in "Course Materials @ Penn Libraries" or in "Files".

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, PAPERS, MID-TERM AND FINAL EXAM

August 27: **Introduction: A Philosophical Approach to Morality**

"Is Pluto a Planet?" in Files

August 29: **Meta-Ethics: Morality and Religion (Metaphysical)**

Plato, *Euthyphro*

September 3: **Meta-Ethics: Morality and Religion (Epistemic 1)**

Wollstonecraft, Chapter 5 "Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt"

September 5: **Meta-Ethics: Morality and Religion (Epistemic 2)**

Boonin, "Framing the Debate" Chapter 1 (Section 1.2, pp. 9-13)

September 10: **Meta-Ethics: Cultural Moral Relativism 1**

Rachels, Chapter 16: "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

September 12: **Meta-Ethics: Cultural Moral Relativism 2**

Mackie, Chapter 19 "The Subjectivity of Values" (Section 8)

Boghossian (in Files)

(1st paper assigned)

Sept. 17 / 19 / 24: **Meta-Ethics: Moral Objectivity**

Mackie, Chapter 19 "The Subjectivity of Values" (All)

September 26: **Abortion and Fetal Moral Status**

Pope John Paul II (in Files)

Dombrowski Introduction in *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion*

October 1: **Abortion and Fetal Moral Status**

Hursthouse, Chapter Two: "The Moral Status of the Fetus"

Little, Chapter 3: "The Moral Permissibility of Abortion" (pp. 51-53)

October 3: **Fall Break**

October 8: **Abortion and the Right to Life**

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (Sections 1-3)

October 10: **Abortion and the Right to Life**

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (Section 4-end)

(2nd paper assigned)

October 15: **Abortion and Granting Entitlement to One's Body**

Thomson

Foot, "Killing and Letting Die"

October 17: **Abortion and Kinship**

Lee and George, Chapter 2: "The Wrong of Abortion"

October 22: **Abortion and Intimacy**

Little, Chapter 3: "The Moral Permissibility of Abortion" (pp. 54-62)

October 24: **Abortion and Feminism**

Markowitz, "Abortion and Feminism"

October 29: **Killing in War**

Clausewitz, Chapter 1: "What is War?"

Walzer: Chapter 3: "The Rules of War"

Walzer: Chapter 1: "The Triumph of Just War Theory"

bin Laden Fatwa (in Files)

October 31: **Moral Problems: Killing Non-combatants in War 1**

Walzer: Ch. 9 "Noncombatant Immunity and Military Necessity"

November 5: **Moral Problems: Killing Non-combatants in War 2**

Anscombe, Chapter 6: "War and Murder"

Anscombe, Chapter 7: "Mr. Truman's Degree"

November 7: **Moral Problems: Is Terrorism Ever Permissible? 1**

Walzer: Ch. 16 "Supreme Emergency"

Walzer: Ch. 3 "Emergency Ethics"

November 12: **Moral Problems: Is Terrorism Ever Permissible? 2**

Walzer, Ch. 4 "Terrorism"

Walzer, "A Critique of Excuses"

Nathanson, "Can Terrorism Ever Be Justified?"

November 14: **Moral Theory: Is Moral Absolutism Defensible? 1**

Nagel, "War and Massacre" (Sections I-IV)

November 19: **Moral Theory: Is Moral Absolutism Defensible? 2**

Nagel, "War and Massacre" (Sections V-VII)

(Morality and War take-home assigned)

November 21: **Thanksgiving**

November 26: **Moral Theory: Teleology**

Singer, "About Ethics"

Rawls, Chapter 26: "Classical Utilitarianism"

November 28: **THANKSGIVING**

December 3: **Moral Theory: Deontology**

Scanlon, pp. 103-115 (sections I-III)

December 5: **Moral Theory: Deontology, Meta-Ethics: Moral Motivation**

Scanlon, Chapter 5: "Contractualism and Utilitarianism", pp.
115-128

Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

(Final Exam assigned)

Success in this Course

Preparing for class

- 1) Read the Notes distributed from the previous class and write down any questions/comments you have about them so that you can ask them at the beginning of the next class.
- 2) Read the Discussion Questions provided for the next class' article(s). Write short answers in your notebook to be consulted during class discussion (and your Final Exam).
- 3) Read the article the first time with the Discussion Questions in mind. On this first reading you should:
 - a) get the author's conclusion(s)
 - b) get a general sense of the reasons/argument strategy the author uses to get to the conclusion(s)
 - c) mark the places in the text to find answers to the Discussion Questions.

Note: If you miss a class, you must send me answers to all of the **bolded** Discussion Questions before the next class. If you are in class, you do not need to turn in answers to the Discussion Questions, but writing down answers in your notebook will help you in the discussion and on the take-home final exam. All of the questions on the final will be drawn from these Discussion Questions.

4) Go over the article at least once more (and as many times as necessary) until you can reconstruct the argument(s) the author gives for the conclusion(s). These should be written in your notebook, to be consulted in class discussion. You will be called on to present your proposed arguments.

5) Write down your evaluation of the author's ARGUMENTS (not just your response to the conclusion(s)). An evaluation includes criticisms of the argument's steps (premises) and logic and ways the author might respond to these criticisms.

Just before class

1) Go over the notes from the previous class and prepare to ask questions/make comments about them at the beginning of class.

2) Go over the day's Discussion Questions and your notes on the author's conclusions and arguments and prepare to offer them in class.

During class

1) Take part in the discussion by responding to what classmates say (pro/con and why). Do not wait for me to respond to discussion points. Do not repeat what someone just said (even if you were going to say it).

2) The goal of the discussion is to get quite a bit deeper than the readings, but this is only possible if we can efficiently outline the arguments from the readings first.

3) Leave class understanding the main argument strategies and some issues to think about further.

After Thursday's class

1) Send me your answer to the Question of the Week by e-mail (due no later than Saturday night).