

PHIL 410: HISTORY OF MORAL & POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2023 (in-person) | Jan 11-May 3

Tues/Thurs 12:30-1:45 | Modern Languages Building, Room 411

Instructor: Andrew Lichter (he/him) (alichter@arizona.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-3, Social Sciences 130 or 140

Course Description

Sometimes, doing the right thing seems to require acting against our own interests. But why would we ever want to do that? If nice guys finish last, what good is being a nice guy? Questions like these have long preoccupied moral philosophers and lay people alike. We seem to confront some version of them every time we are tempted to tell a convenient lie.

This class examines how major figures in the Western philosophical tradition have asked and answered the question *Why be moral?* over time. Along the way, we will consider whether morality is “for suckers”—a ruse to keep the little guy down. We will ask whether we can convince the thoroughgoing egoist that it’s in his interest to be moral—and whether we owe this character an explanation in the first place. We will consider whether some of our other commitments—to our own wellbeing or to the importance of our own choices—mean we have no coherent way of denying the importance of the lives and choices of others. We will also ask whether the question *Why be moral?* even makes sense.

Learning objectives

During the course, students will grapple with the timeless question of our reasons to be moral. They will cultivate their own beliefs about the significance of this question, as well as the most compelling versions of and answers to it. They will read challenging historical philosophical texts, comparing and contrasting various influential treatments of this issue.

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to discuss key features of the views of several major figures in the Western philosophical canon. They will be able to compare influential versions of and answers to the question *Why be moral?* and trace the development of this question over time. They will demonstrate expertise on these matters by writing a comprehensive final paper.

Course Materials and Format

Materials. You do not need to acquire a text for this course; all readings can be found on D2L.

Format. I will try to avoid lecturing in class; most meetings, I will post lecture videos alongside the assigned readings. Then, in class, we will spend our time critically engaged with the material. Class time will be devoted to discussions, think-pair-share exercises, and the like, as well as writing assignments aimed at giving you a chance to express your views on what we’ve read and discussed. Discussions will often be structured by the discussion items submitted by students. All of this means you’re expected to come to class ready to explain and discuss what puzzled, perturbed, surprised or impressed you about these classic texts, and to work through difficult philosophical issues with your peers.

Coursework

You will be graded on four types of assignment in this course. More information about each of these assignments will be provided in separate documents.

Discussion Items (DIs) | 10 pts (24 items, .5 pts each; lowest 4 dropped or extra credit)

For each class meeting we have a reading assignment, you will submit a question about the reading or an objection to an argument/position found in the reading. The idea is to bring something up that you think would be worth discussing in class. DIs are due two hours before class on D2L.

In-Class Reflections (ICRs) | 15 pts (7 reflections, 3 pts each; lowest 2 dropped or extra credit)

I will periodically administer unannounced writing assignments in class. You'll be asked to write a page or two defending a position on a question we've been discussing.

Participation | 10 pts (1 pt per contribution, up to 10)

You can earn participation points by either making a substantive contribution to class discussions or by visiting me in office hours.

Unit Papers | 40 pts (2 papers worth 20 pts each)

You will write a paper each for two of the three units in the course. Each paper should be ~2,000 words. You will receive a list of prompts associated with each Unit. Which two units you write on is up to you. Unit papers are due one week after the final Sunday of the unit at 11:59pm.

Revised Paper | 25 pts

You will revise and resubmit one of your two Unit papers. Your revisions should take into account the feedback you receive on your Unit paper, as the Revised Paper will be held to a higher standard. The Revised Paper is due May 7 at 11:59pm.

Grading

Your grade will reflect how many points you earn out of 100. This means it's easy to check how you're doing in the course as we go by adding up the points you've earned.

The grading scheme is as follows:

≥90 = A
89-80 = B
79-70 = C
69-60 = D
59-0 = E

And here is how the grading breaks down:

Questions (.5pts x class w/ reading assignment [24])	10*
ICRs (7 x 3pts)	15*
Participation (1pt per contribution up to 10)	10
Unit papers (2 x 20pts)	40
Revised Paper (1 x 25pts)	25
Total	100

* EC available. The highest possible grade in the course is 108/100

Schedule

Each week, you are responsible for reviewing the material listed below. You are also responsible for watching any lecture video(s) associated with each week.

Syllabus Week (Jan 11- 15) Th: Review all “Course Essentials” material on D2L

Unit 1: Morality & Self-Interest in Antiquity

Week 1 (Jan 16-22) T: Plato, *Republic* Book I (336a-354c)
Th: Rachel Barney, “Socrates’ Refutation of Thrasymachus”

Week 2 (Jan 23-29) T: Plato, *Gorgias* (482c-508c)
Th: Rachel Barney “Callicles and Thrasymachus”

Week 3 (Jan 30-Feb 5) T: Plato, *Republic* Book II (357a-367e)
Th: Plato, *Republic* Book IV (427d-445e)

Week 4 (Feb 6 -12) T: Plato, *Republic* Book IX (571a-592b)
Th: Rachel Singpurwalla “Plato’s Defense of Justice in the *Republic*”

Unit 2: Morality & Self-Interest in Modernity & the 20th Century

Week 5 (Feb 13-19) T: No Substantive Philosophy Reading. Paper Writing Boot Camp.
Th: No Reading. Game Night ☺

Unit 1 paper due Feb 19

Week 6 (Feb 20-26) T: Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Ch. VI [¶1-6, 57, 58], X [¶1-35], XI [¶1-13])
Th: Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Ch. XIII, XIV, XV [¶1-15])

Week 7 (Feb 27-Mar 5) T: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (§III, §IX [Part II])
Th: David Gauthier, “Three Against Justice”

Spring Break (Mar 6-12)

Week 8 (Mar 13-19) ☹️
T: H.A. Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”
Th: Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”

Unit 3: Beyond Self-Interest

Week 9 (Mar 20-26) T: Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Ch. 3)
Th: Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Ch. 4)

Unit 2 paper due Mar 26

Week 10 (Mar 27-Apr 2) T: Christine Korsgaard, “Reflective Endorsement” (*optional*: section on Bernard Williams)
Th: Christine Korsgaard, “Introduction” to *Groundwork*; Kant, *Groundwork* (§1)

Week 11 (Apr 3-9) T: Kant, *Groundwork* (§2)
Th: Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (III.xi, III.xiii)

Week 12 (Apr 10-16) T: Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (II.v, Concluding Chapter). **ICR.**
Th: **Amia Srinivasan, “The Aptness of Anger”**

Coda: Cool Contemporary Ideas

Week 13 (Apr 17-23)

T: Bernard Williams, "Morality, the Peculiar Institution"
Th: Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Unit 3 Paper Due Apr 23

Week 14 (Apr 24-30)

T: **TBA**
Th: **No Class. Paper Swap Worksheets due at 1:45**

ICR #7 due Apr 30

Week 15 (May 1-3)

T: *No Reading.* Catch up day/Paper Revision Meeting

Last day for meetings to discuss Revised Paper: May 2 (the last day of class)

Revised Paper due May 7

Course Policies

Late Work

If you are worried you will not be able to complete an assignment on time due to any manner of personal or health issue, please let me know *in advance of the assignment's due date* and we can try to work out a fair accommodation. You do not need to give me any details. You just need to say that you need a little extra time. I will give it to you. If you do not ask me for an extension in advance (and it was possible for you to do so), late work will be docked 10% per day late. An exception to this policy is DIs. A DI submitted late and without excuse will receive no credit.

Grade Contestation

Should you wish to appeal a grade on an assignment, you must send me an email in which you explain why you believe I've made a mistake and you deserve a different grade. (Note that grades may go up or down as result of the appeals process.) Your final grade is a function of the points you earn throughout the semester by completing assignments. Any and all contestations must take the form of assignment contestation.

Email

Don't hesitate to shoot me an email if you want to set up a meeting or have comments and questions about what's going on in the course. But please keep the following in mind:

- ◆ Please give me at least 24 hours to reply during the week and 48 hours over the weekend. After that, feel free to bug me; I won't be offended.
- ◆ Before sending me an email, please check the syllabus and related course documents to see if they contain the information you're after.
- ◆ I won't usually provide in-depth answers to substantive philosophical questions via email. It just takes too long and usually we'd both be better off if we talked it through face-to-face. If you have such a question, just let me know so we can find a good time to chat.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is clearly and strictly prohibited in our [University's Code of Academic Integrity](#) and will not be tolerated in this course. To plagiarize is to take another person's original work and pass it off as your own. It is, in essence, a form of intellectual theft. If you'd like to read more about counts as plagiarism, you can review [this helpful UA Library resource](#).

Should it be determined that any of your work in this course is plagiarized, you will most likely receive a zero on the assignment in question. More serious or repeated offenses may result in more serious disciplinary measures, such as failure or a recommendation of expulsion.

Finally, note that if you decide to take this course, you are agreeing to submit your work online, when so instructed, to a plagiarism-prevention program called TurnItIn, which checks your submissions for similarity to sources available online and a large database of student work.

Other Resources

The following links may be of use to students experiencing a variety of personal difficulties:

<p>Campus Health Campus Health provides quality medical and mental health care services through virtual and in-person care.</p>	<p>Counseling and Psych Services (CAPS) CAPS provides mental health care, including short-term counseling services.</p>
<p>The Dean of Students Office's Student Assistance Program Student Assistance helps students manage crises, life traumas, and other barriers that impede success.</p>	<p>Survivor Advocacy Program The Survivor Advocacy Program provides confidential support and advocacy services to student survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The Program can also advise students about relevant non-UA resources available within the local community for support.</p>

For help with technical difficulties, contact UA's [D2L Consulting](#) desk or [IT Support Center](#).

University Course Policies

Here are the University's standard course policies, also available [here](#):

Absence and class participation

The UA's policy concerning Class Attendance, Participation, and Administrative Drops is available [here](#).

[The UA policy regarding absences for any sincerely held religious belief, observance or practice](#) will be accommodated where reasonable.

Absences for groups of more than three students that are pre-approved by the UA Dean of Students (or Dean Designee) will be honored. See [here](#).

Threatening Behavior Policy

The UA Threatening Behavior by Students Policy prohibits threats of physical harm to any member of the University community, including to oneself. See [here](#).

Accessibility & Accommodations

At the University of Arizona we strive to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact Disability Resources (520) 621-3268 to explore reasonable accommodation.

If our class meets at a campus location, please be aware that the accessible table and chairs in this room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not usable. See [here](#).

Code of Academic Integrity

Students are encouraged to share intellectual views and discuss freely the principles and applications of course materials. However, graded work/exercises must be the product of independent effort unless otherwise instructed. Students are expected to adhere to the [UA Code of Academic Integrity](#) as described in the UA General Catalog. See more resources [here](#).

Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy

The University of Arizona is committed to creating and maintaining an environment free of discrimination. In support of this commitment, the University prohibits discrimination, including harassment and retaliation, based on a protected classification, including race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information. For more information, including how to report a concern, please see [here](#).

Subject to Change Statement

Information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policy, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor; see [here](#).

