

## PROVISIONAL — SUBJECT TO CHANGE

### **Phil 108: Contemporary Ethical Issues**

T, Th 9:30–11am  
289 Cory

#### **Instructor:**

Niko Kolodny

Office hours and contact info: <http://sophos.berkeley.edu/kolodny/>

#### **Graduate Student Instructor:**

Kirsten Pickering

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#### **Catalog Description:**

This course will be devoted to in-depth discussion of a variety of problems in moral philosophy raised by real-life questions of individual conduct and social policy. Its contents will vary from occasion to occasion. Possible topics include philosophical problems posed by affirmative action, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, terrorism, war, poverty, and climate change.

#### **Course Description:**

As a thoughtful person, living in this country, at this time, you have at some point asked yourself some of the following questions. Are you allowed to buy yourself an iPod when you could use the money to save people from starving? Should you buy a hybrid, rather than an SUV, when your individual choice is just “a drop in the bucket” and won’t really affect global warming? Is there any difference between terrorism and “collateral damage”? May we kill enemy soldiers or even civilians to protect ourselves? Is abortion wrong? Is it wrong to kill yourself to spare yourself a future of pain and debilitation? Is it wrong for a doctor to help you to do this? What is the point of punishing criminals? *Is* there any point in it? What do we owe to future generations? Is it wrong to bring children into this world?

These questions can be difficult for many different reasons. Self-interest, prejudice, and fear can cloud our judgment. Religious authorities that we accept on faith, such as the Bible, can give unclear or conflicting directions. Finally, it can be hard to be sure of relevant facts: for example, whether the justice system applies the death penalty consistently, or whether burning fossil fuels leads to climate change.

This course, however, is about another set of difficulties, which persist when we set aside our personal feelings, we see how far we can get without relying on faith, and we assume that we know the relevant facts. We may not be able to decide, by our own reflection and reasoning, which answers are correct, and even when we are sure that certain answers are correct, we may not be able to justify them. Our ethical ideas may seem not up to the task. Our aim in this course is to come to terms with these difficulties and to see to what extent they can be overcome.

**Prerequisites:**

One course in moral philosophy, such as Phil 2 or Phil 104; or two courses in other areas of philosophy.

**Readings:**

- **All readings are on bSpace, under “Resources.”**
- Most can *also* be accessed by the links, if you are on the UC Berkeley network, or connected to it via a VPN. See <http://www.net.berkeley.edu/vpn/>. **But if the links don't work, remember: all readings are on bSpace.**
- If you wish to have a paper copy, a reader can be purchased at Copy Central on Bancroft.

**Requirements:**

1. Attendance at lecture and section.
2. For each lecture, download the handout from the course website (<http://sophos.berkeley.edu/kolodny/14SPhil108.htm>, which is linked from the bSpace site) and bring either a paper copy or a laptop to lecture. (If you would like to have a paper copy for lecture, but find it a hardship to print one out beforehand, let us know.) Each handout will end with a set of “Review Questions.” Listening to the lecture and doing the assigned reading should be enough to enable you to answer these. (However, simply reading the handout will *not* be enough.)
3. Section participation: 10%. If you have not emailed the GSI about joining a section, please do so immediately.
4. Four 3-page papers: 17.5%. For the *fourth* paper, you will be given the following options:
  - Write no fourth paper at all. Your grade for your fourth paper will be the lowest grade among your first three papers.
  - Rewrite one of the first three papers on which *either* you got your lowest grade *or* no higher than B. The grade for the rewrite will count as your fourth paper grade.
  - Write a new paper on an assigned topic.
5. Final exam: 20%. Open book, open note, etc. Every question on the final will be a “Review Question.” So, if you come to lecture, do the reading, and make a habit of writing out the answers to these questions, you will be fully prepared for the final.

*Notes:*

- GSI will not comment on the final exam, but will be available to discuss it.
- Requirements may be **reduced** if enrollment is high.

**Introduction**

1. Introduction  
Tuesday, January 21

## Aiding

2. How much must we do to prevent suffering?

Thursday, January 23

Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, Ch. 1, 2 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780195108590/toc.html>

Tuesday, January 28

Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, Ch. 3 (§7-10 only), 4 (§1 only), 5 (§3–6 only), 6 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

Thursday, January 30

Murphy, “The Demands of Beneficence” (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0048-3915%28199323%2922%3A4%3C267%3ATDOB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>

Tuesday, February 4

Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence* Ch. 5 and 8 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

(<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780199258116/toc.html>)

### First paper assigned

## Harming: Theory

3. Is allowing people be harmed different from harming them oneself? (Is letting die different from killing?)

Thursday, February 6

Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect” (Oxford Scholarship Online)

[http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780199252862/p022.html - acprof-0199252866-chapter-2](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780199252862/p022.html-acprof-0199252866-chapter-2)

Tuesday, February 11

Thomson, “The Trolley Problem” (Yale Law Journal)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0044-0094%28198505%2994%3A6%3C1395%3ATTP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M>

Thursday, February 13

Quinn, “Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing” (Philosophical Review)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0031-8108%28198907%2998%3A3<287%3AAIACTD>2.0.CO%3B2-R>

4. Is foreseeing harm different from intending harm?

Tuesday, February 18

Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect" (Review)  
(Oxford Scholarship Online)

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780199252862/p022.html> - [acprof-0199252866-chapter-2](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780199252866-chapter-2)

Quinn, "Actions, Intentions and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect"  
(Philosophy and Public Affairs)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0048-3915%28198923%2918%3A4%3C34%3AAIACTD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>

**First paper due**

5. May we harm others to defend ourselves?

Thursday, February 20

Thomson, "Self-Defense" (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0048-3915%28199123%2920%3A4%3C283%3AS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B>

**Harming: Applications**

6. Is abortion permissible?

Tuesday, February 25

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0048-3915%28197123%291%3A1%3C47%3AADOA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-G>

**Second paper assigned**

Thursday, February 27

McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margin of Life* 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.5 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780195079982/toc.html>

Tuesday, March 4

McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margin of Life* 4.1, 4.2, 4.7  
(Oxford Scholarship Online)

7. May we kill in war?

Thursday, March 6

McMahan, "The Ethics of Killing in War" (Ethics)

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/422400>

8. Is there a difference between terrorism and “collateral damage”?

Tuesday, March 11

Rodin, “Terrorism without Intention” (Ethics)

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/383442>

Scheffler, “Is Terrorism Morally Distinctive?” (Journal of Political Philosophy)

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2006.00242.x/pdf>

**Second paper due**

9. May we punish criminals?

Thursday, March 13

Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Ch. I, XIII, XIV

<http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html>

Tuesday, March 18

Tadros, *The Ends of Harm*, Ch. 2, 3 (skip Sect. I), 4 (Oxford Scholarship Online)

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199554423.001.0001/acprof-9780199554423>

Thursday, March 20

Quinn, “The Right to Threaten and the Right to Punish” (Philosophy and Public Affairs)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0048-3915%28198523%2914%3A4<327%3ATRRTAT>2.0.CO%3B2-7>

**Third paper assigned**

Tuesday, April 1

Tadros, *The Ends of Harm*, Ch. 6 (skip Sect. II–III), 12 (skip Sub-sect II:ii) (Oxford Scholarship Online)

### **Individual or group action?**

10. What difference does one person make?

Thursday, April 3

Glover, “It Makes No Difference Whether Or Not I Do It” (Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplemental Volume)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0309-7013%281975%2949<171%3AIMNDWO>2.0.CO%3B2-Q>

Tuesday, April 8

Jackson, “Group Morality”

**Third paper due**

## Future people

11. What do we owe people whom we caused to exist?

Tuesday, April 15

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Ch. 16: “The Non-Identity Problem” (Oxford Scholarship Online)

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/private/content/philosophy/9780198249085/p087.html> - acprof-019824908X-chapter-16

### Fourth paper assigned

Thursday, April 17

Shiffrin, “Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm” (Legal Theory)

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid=LEG&volumeId=5&issueId=02>

## Applications: Climate change

12. Is commonsense morality up to task of climate change?

Tuesday, April 22 and Thursday, April 24

Broome, *Climate Matters*, Ch. 1–5

Jamieson, “Climate Change, Responsibility, and Justice,” sections 6–7 only

<http://as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1192/ClimateChangeResponsibilityJustice.pdf>

13. Do our grandchildren matter less?

Tuesday, April 29

Broome, *Climate Matters*, Ch. 6–8

*Optional:*

Ackerman, “Debating Climate Ethics: The Stern Review vs. Its Critics,” pp. 1–8 only

[http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/debate\\_climate\\_econs.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/debate_climate_econs.pdf)

Stern, “Ethics, Equity, and the Economics of Climate Change, Paper 2:

Economics and Politics,” Part I only

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/publications/WorkingPapers/Papers/80-89/WP84b-Ethics,-equity-and-the-economics-of-climate-change.-Paper-2.pdf>

### Fourth paper due

**Review:**

14. Parting thoughts

Thursday, May 1

**Final Exam:** Wednesday, May 14, 11:30–2:30pm

**Course Policies:**

*Extensions:*

Plan ahead. You may request extensions from your GSI *up until 72 hours* before papers are due. After then, extensions will be granted *only for medical and family emergencies*.

*Submitting Work:*

*Papers must be submitted, on paper, by you, to your GSI, in class, by 9:40am, before the lecture starts, unless your GSI approves another procedure for submission.* Papers submitted later will lose *one step* (e.g., B+ to B) *immediately* and then an *additional step every 24 hours*. If your GSI approves email submission, you are responsible for ensuring that your GSI gets your paper. Forgotten or unopenable attachments, bounced or lost emails, and so on, are your responsibility.

*“Re-grading”:*

You are strongly encouraged to discuss grades and comments on papers with your GSI or me. However, *grades on particular papers and exams will not be changed under any circumstances*. While there is no perfect system, selective “re-grading” at students’ request only makes things worse. “Second” grades are likely to be less accurate and less fair than “first” grades. This is because, among other things, the GSI does not have access to other papers for purposes of comparison, the student will inevitably supply additional input (clarifications, explanations, etc.) that the original paper did not, and there are certain biases of self-selection.

The only exception, to which none of these concerns apply, is a suspected arithmetical or recording error in your final course grade. Please do not hesitate to bring this to your GSI’s or my attention.

*Academic Dishonesty:*

Plagiarism or cheating will result in an “F” in the course as a whole and a report to Student Judicial Affairs.

“Any test, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor.

“In all of your assignments, including your homework or drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, web sites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. ‘Proper attribution’ means that you have fully identified the original source and extent of your use of the words or ideas of others that

you reproduce in your work for this course, usually in the form of a footnote or parenthesis.”—Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Subcommittee, June 18, 2004.

*Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:*

If you have an official accommodation letter that is relevant to this course, please notify both me and your GSI at a reasonable time. We will do whatever we can to help.