

PHL 270: Philosophical Ethics | Fall 2023

Instructor: Dr. Marc Johansen ✉ marcjohansen@creighton.edu

Section E: Monday & Wednesday 12:30 – 1:45 / DHHC 11

Section G: Monday & Wednesday 2:00 – 3:15 / DHHC 11

Office hours: Monday & Wednesday 3:30 – 4:30 & by appointment / DHHC 111 & Zoom

This is a course in ethical theory, primarily *normative* ethical theory. A normative ethic aims to articulate the basic principles of right action. It's an attempt to answer the question, "What makes morally right actions right and morally wrong actions wrong?" We'll explore three kinds of answers to that question — consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics — and their implications for real-world ethical dilemmas.

Course objectives

- Identify and define terms, concepts, principles, and critiques of moral theories.
- Analyze and evaluate fundamental theories about the sources of moral obligation, moral virtue, justice, wisdom, and a good human life.
- Apply fundamental moral theories to complex practical situations.
- Critically evaluate our own ethical presuppositions and commitments in light of fundamental moral theories.

Texts

- Russ Shafer-Landau (ed), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (Blackwell 2012)
- Additional articles will be available via BlueLine.

Grading

Course grades are determined by the weighted average of the following items. A score of 93–100 is an A, 90–92 is a A-, 87–89 is a B+, 83–86 is a B, 80–82 is a B-, 77–79 is a C+, 73–76 is a C, 70–72 is a C-, 60–69 is a D, and a score below 60 is an F.

- **Review quizzes (10%)** There will be a short quiz at the end of most weeks that covers some of the central ideas that have been covered that week. Quizzes will be conducted on BlueLine. **They will become available by 5:00pm on Thursdays and must be completed by 11:59pm on the following Sunday.** Quizzes cannot be made up and will not be accepted late. If you miss a quiz due to an excused absence, the quiz will be waived for you.
- **Reading responses (10%)** You will need to write a brief response (200 – 250 words) to four reading assignments of your choice. **Two must be completed by October 4. Two must be completed after October 4.** Responses should thoughtfully and critically engage with the reading. They can present an objection, raise and develop a question, draw out an interesting implication, or otherwise thoughtfully comment on the reading. They are not to be summaries

of the reading. Unless otherwise noted, **responses are due by 8:00am on the day we begin discussing the reading they address** and should be submitted on BlueLine. Missed responses cannot be made up and will not be accepted late without my stated permission.

- **Exams (20% each)** There will be three exams covering the readings and lectures. Exams will be held on the following dates: **September 20, November 1, and December 6 @ 8:00 – 9:40** (PHL 270E) / **December 7 @ 8:00 – 9:40** (PHL 270G).
- **Paper (20%)** The paper will ask you to present and evaluate an ethical debate. In it, you'll present two (or more) opposing positions, their supporting arguments, and provide your own critical evaluation of that debate in which you argue in support of one side. Paper topics and other assignment details will be posted to BlueLine. Papers are to be 1500 – 2000 words. Due electronically on **Monday, November 20 @ 11:59pm**.

The work you submit must be your own. I encourage you to study and discuss course material in groups. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing it and one of the best ways to do philosophy is to talk about it with other people. However, when it comes time to take what you've learned and produce work for evaluation, you must be the sole author of that work.

Schedule

Readings found in Shafer-Landau are indicated with 'SL' and their chapter number. All other articles will be available on BlueLine (BL). This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on BlueLine.

Aug 16 Course introduction

The status of morality

Aug 21	Plato: The immoralist's challenge	(SL 15)
Aug 23	Gensler: Cultural relativism	(SL 6)
Aug 28	Mackie: The subjectivity of values (selections)	(SL 3)
	Enoch: Why I am an objectivist about ethics...	(BL)

Consequentialism

Aug 30	Mill: Utilitarianism	(SL 48)
Sep 4	— Labor Day Break —	
Sep 6	Smart: Extreme and restricted utilitarianism	(SL 49)
Sep 11	Singer: The Singer solution to world poverty	(BL)
Sep 13	TBA	
Sep 18	Wrap up and review	

Sep 20 — Exam 1 —

Sep 25 Le Guin: The ones who walk away from Omelas (BL)
 Sep 27 Nozick: The experience machine (SL 30)

Deontology

Oct 2 Kant: Selections from *Groundwork...* (SL 55)
 Oct 4 Kant: Selections from *Groundwork...* (SL 55)

Oct 9 — Fall Break —
 Oct 11 — Fall Break —

Oct 16 TBA
 Oct 18 O'Neill: Kantian approaches to some famine problems (SL 57)

Oct 23 Thomson: Killing, letting die, and the trolley problem (SL 61)
 Oct 25 TBA

Oct 30 Wrap up and review
 Nov 1 — Exam 2 —

Nov 6 Nagel: Moral luck (SL 39)

Virtue ethics

Nov 8 Aristotle: The nature of virtue (SL 66)

Nov 13 Aristotle: The nature of virtue (cont.)
 Nov 15 Hursthouse: Normative virtue ethics (SL 68)

Nov 20 Annas: Being virtuous and doing the right thing (SL 71)
 Nov 22 — Thanksgiving Break —

Nov 27 TBA
 Nov 29 Wrap up and review

Dec 6 — Section E: Final exam (8:00a – 9:40a) —
 Dec 7 — Section G: Final exam (8:00a – 9:40a) —

Some advice on reading...

Reading philosophy can be difficult. Because the questions it takes up are often very general, the answers it arrives at tend to be fairly abstract. This takes some getting used to. I've tried to select readings in which the difficulty arises naturally from the ideas and arguments themselves and not just poor presentation, but there's no avoiding the fact that the reading will be challenging. Keep that in mind when you approach the readings. Especially at first, I recommend that you budget more time per page to complete these readings than you might otherwise be accustomed to.

You don't need to have mastered each reading before class. Your goal should be to come to class conversant enough in the reading to participate in discussion and ask good questions.

Course, College, and University policies

- **Attendance** If you must be absent because of an emergency, illness, or other health issue, please make every effort to contact me about it beforehand, if possible, or before the next class, and be prepared to present official documentation of the reason for your absence (doctor's note, etc.). It is also expected that students will make every attempt to schedule all non-emergency medical appointments outside of class time.

If chronic mental or physical health issues may/will lead to repeated absences or absences beyond course syllabus expectations, please contact Student Accessibility Services located in the Old Gym (suite 437; 402 280-2166) to ensure accommodations are granted and communicated with your instructors.

Your success in this class is important to me. If there are circumstances (mental health or otherwise) that may affect your attendance or performance in this course, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Creighton University is committed to supporting the mental health and well-being of all students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, or in need of support, please contact: Creighton Counseling by calling 402-280-2735 or visit <https://my.creighton.edu/studentlife/wellness/health-and-counseling/student-counseling-services> for resources. Students often can meet with a counselor in the same week to talk about what is going on and help decide next steps.

- **Late work policy** If you know you are to be absent for an assignment, please work with me to complete it prior to your absence. Specific policies on late work can be found above in the assignment descriptions. Unless otherwise noted, work that is submitted late for any reason will be deducted 20% per day that it is late, and it will not be accepted after five (5) days. However, please see me if there is an emergent or unique situation that keeps you from completing your work on time.

- **Academic honesty** All work is expected to be your own, unless it is explicitly designated as group work. On homework, discussion with peers is permitted; however, discussion should only occur after you have made a significant effort on your own. I strongly discourage the sharing of written work, but instead invite you to ask questions of me or your peers, and review materials from the course. Academic dishonesty includes using unauthorized sources for the completion of a particular assignment, such as online services like chegg.com or other websites to complete your work.

Please read the current [College Policy on Academic Honesty](#).

Any assignment, quiz, or exam that fails to meet this policy on academic honesty will receive zero credit. All violations of this policy will be reported to the College of Arts and Sciences. Students have the right to appeal charges of academic dishonesty.

- **Generative AI** The use of generative artificial intelligence (e.g., Chat GPT) in the creation of written work for this class is strictly prohibited. I will not accept written work that includes text generated by AI or that was produced with the help generative AI tools. For example, using generative AI tools to create a draft or outline that you then rewrite is prohibited. If you have any questions about what constitutes the use of generative AI, please contact me.
- **Office hours** Office hours are time that I've reserved for you outside of class. If you have questions or concerns about the course or course material, need help with a writing assignment, etc., I encourage you to stop by. To help that run smoothly, I ask that you let me know in advance that you'd like to meet — an email or word after class is more than enough. This will help me accommodate more students, especially around deadlines and exams.
- **Class cancellation** If class is canceled I will notify you as soon as possible through Blue Line and/or email. There are a variety of assignments in Blue Line that I will use if class is canceled due to my own illness or emergent situation. If I am not able to contact you for some reason, please watch for an email from the chair of the department, Dr. Kevin Graham.
- **Recording & materials** Learning takes place in the face to face and virtual classrooms through a variety of means, including lectures, discussions (live or written), activities, etc. For learning to take place, these environments need to be a safe space. As part of that safe space, we should speak respectfully to and with each other. That is not to suggest that any of us will never misspeak because learning is a process. To learn from these conversations, we need to ensure that what happens in our face to face and virtual interactions (e.g. BlueLine or other online learning environments, such as textbook platforms, etc.) stays in the classroom.

For this reason all course materials generated by either the course instructor or students registered in the course that are posted on the course BlueLine or other online learning environments are intended to be viewed and used only by students who are enrolled in that class, for the purposes of fulfilling the course objectives. Such materials may include handouts, lecture and discussion materials like powerpoint slides, videos, lecture, discussion recordings, and/or discussion posts.

Only the instructor may record common class sessions, and only the instructor may distribute any recorded materials - visual or written, including individual student discussion posts or comments. Sharing any of these materials with others outside of the course will be considered "misuse of academic resources," as defined in the Creighton University Student Handbook, which is an act of academic misconduct. Students can be penalized, up to and including failure of the course. In the case of recorded live lecture and/or discussion materials, students should be aware that recording may continue during class breaks. Therefore, private conversations should be held elsewhere in order to avoid inadvertent recording.

Violations may also lead to additional consequences as outlined in the college's disruptive student policy. There are additional consequences for cyberbullying or otherwise using a recording in violation of our code of conduct or Title IX policies.

- **Force majeure statement** Creighton University may modify, suspend, or postpone any and all activities and services immediately and without notice because of force majeure causes beyond Creighton's control and occurring without its fault or negligence including, but not limited to, acts of god, fire, war, governmental action, terrorism, epidemic, pandemic, weather, national emergencies, or other threats to the safety of students or staff. Creighton may, at its option, alter the academic schedule or provide alternate instruction modalities to meet course objectives and competencies and program outcomes, including, but not limited to, distance or remote learning, until such time as Creighton determines normal operations may resume safely.
- **Disruptive conduct** According to the Creighton University Student Handbook, all Creighton students are to uphold the following standards of conduct: (1) Act with professional, academic, and personal integrity. (2) Respect and promote the dignity of all persons. (3) Respect the policies and procedures of the Creighton University community and the rights of its members both on and off campus, as well as the just laws of the civic community and the rights of its members. (4) Support the personal, professional, academic, and vocational development of the members of the Creighton University Community.

Upon the first violation of this standard of conduct, you will be notified in writing (via university email) or via a face-to-face meeting with the instructor. If the behavior continues, you will be asked to leave class and referred to the Office of Community Standards and Well-Being. You will not be permitted to return to class without instructor permission. For any conduct perceived to pose an immediate threat to the well-being of others in the classroom, Public Safety (402-280-2911) shall be contacted immediately for assistance, at the instructor's discretion.