

PHILO 130: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

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Office Hours: MW 3:30-4:30 & By appointment.

Course Description: What does morality require of us? How should we figure this out? Our are ordinary practices morally permissible? Are our social institutions just? What makes something just? In this class, we will address these and related questions.

Note about Philosophy: Philosophy classes differ from other kinds of classes. You will be a **truth-seeker** in this class, **not a mere information consumer**: you will try to answer the questions raised in the course through rational means, rather than just learning what others have thought. This means you are expected to play an **active** role in class discussions.

Learning Objectives: In this course, you will:

- Search for complexity and plausibility where you expect simplicity and implausibility.
- Question arguments for conclusions with which you agree.
- Develop a disposition for finding the philosophical in the familiar.
- Uncover philosophical questions about your own discipline.
- Experience the social side of philosophical inquiry.
- Develop important intellectual virtues (e.g., humility and honesty).
- Learn what philosophers have said about some important philosophical problems.

Texts: All readings will be available on Canvas. You should bring hard or digital copies to class.

Some of my thoughts on grades

Concern for grades often interferes with learning. There's evidence that students who care primarily about learning – about raising questions, discovering answers, making connections, and so on – tend to do better in college than those who focus primarily on grades. There's also evidence that students who have control over their education tend to do better in college than those who don't. If I knew that you would learn without the promise (or threat) of certain grades, I would give you all A's and we could dedicate our energy in this class solely to learning philosophy without the distraction of grades. Unfortunately, if I were to give you all A's right from the start, I expect that many of you would learn little in this class.

Instead, I've created a more realistic, but unusual grading policy that has some of the benefits of the "everyone gets an A from the start" policy. The point of the policy isn't to sort you into A, B, and C students. The point is to help you learn. It also gives you quite a bit of choice, as you'll see. **This is your education. You will get out of it what you put into it.** If you take the assignments seriously, you can learn a lot in this class, and you'll probably get an A. If you don't take the assignments seriously, you might not learn much.

This policy will stress some of you out. It's different. But this difference is good. Don't just take my word for it: in past classes where I used this policy, when asked what I should NOT change about the class, *many* students – including students who initially disliked the policy – insisted that I should not change this grading policy. Failing the class will be very difficult. Getting an A will be challenging, but doable if you focus on the learning. If you really feel uncomfortable with this way of grading, feel free to discuss it with me or enroll in a different class.

Please feel free to check in with me **in person** at any time to confirm your standing in the course if you are unsure.

Grade Policy

The Core Assignments are:

- Exam 1
- Exam 2
- Philosophy in Life Post 1
- Philosophy in Life Post 2
- Philosophy of X Assignment
- Presentation-Debate

You will receive an A (before “grade changers” are taken into account) if you:

1. Pass all of the Core Assignments.

2. Pass 2 Additional Assignments.
3. Participate regularly.
4. Receive 3 “Exceptional” marks.

You will receive a B (before “grade changers” are taken into account) if you:

1. Pass all of the Core Assignments.

2. Pass 1 Additional Assignment.
3. Participate regularly.
4. Receive 2 “Exceptional” marks.

You will receive a C (before “grade changers” are taken into account) if you:

1. Pass all of the Core Assignments.

OR

You will receive a C if you don’t pass exactly one of the Core Assignments.

You will receive a D (before “grade changers” are taken into account) if:

- You don’t pass exactly two of the Core Assignments.

You will receive an F if:

- You don’t pass three or more of the Core Assignments

Grade Changers

- If you have 5 more or more absences, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade.
- For every 2 late assignments, you will lose one Exceptional mark.
- If you have 4 Exceptional marks, you may change an “Incomplete” on an attempted assignment to a “Pass.”
- If you fail 3 or more quiz pairs, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade.

Brief Assignment Descriptions

More details can be found in the “Assignment Guide” on Canvas.

Attendance: Attendance is required because you won’t do well in this course if you don’t attend. To find out what you missed when you miss class, come to office hours or ask:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Exams: You will take two exams. Exams test your understanding of course content, not your opinion. They assess your grasp of the readings and in-class discussions, provide you with more incentive to reflect on the material, and allow you to demonstrate what you’ve learned.

Reading Quizzes: 7 *quiz-pairs*. Reading is required for this course. Most of the readings will be short. I will outline the important points from the readings in class, but to understand what’s going on you’ll need to understand the articles. To help you keep up with the readings, there will be 7 reading “quiz-pairs.”

This assignment will seem weird at first. By the end of the semester, you’ll like it. Here’s how it works:

You will be expected to read each article twice. As you read it, come to class, and read it again, you will develop a deeper understanding of the article. During the second reading, you will be able to draw on the discussion we have in class on the previous day. You will have to take each quiz twice: the day we discuss the reading in class and the next day of class. (Hence, “quiz-pair.”) There will be four questions on each quiz. My goal in using quizzes this way is to help you get the most out of the readings: You can use the quiz you take on one day to help guide you as you re-read the material in preparation for the next class. And since you already know the questions that will be on the second quiz – they will be the **same questions** that were on the first quiz – you can read carefully the second time around to ensure that you get a perfect score.¹

Participation: Participating in class benefits you and others. We often learn while we attempt to express our thoughts. And since you have a unique perspective, everyone else in the class learns when you share that perspective. Here are **some ways to participate**:

¹ **A Note on Reading Philosophy:** Reading philosophy is difficult. Unlike many texts you’ll read in college, most philosophical texts are not written for students. For tips on reading philosophy, see these links:

- <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>
- <https://www4.uwsp.edu/philosophy/dwarren/IntroBook/GettingStarted%5CReadingWritingPhilosophy%5Creading%20philosophy.htm>

1. Ask questions about the readings or lectures.
2. Answer questions when asked.
3. Contribute your perspective to a discussion.
4. Raise objections to arguments.
5. Mention a relevant life experience at an appropriate time.
6. Discuss course material with me outside of class.
7. Participate during small group activities.
8. Complete in-class writing assignments.

Philosophy in Life Posts: To help you get in the habit of approaching your life philosophically, you will complete two “philosophy in life” posts in the discussion forums on Canvas. For these assignments, you will write about connections between your life and what you’ve learned or thought about in this course. You will also read and comment on some of your peers’ posts.

Philosophy of X Assignment: Whatever your major, there are philosophical questions in your field. For this assignment, you will attempt to uncover some of those questions and informally report your findings back to the class.

Presentation Debates: During the last 5 classes of the semester before dead week, you will tackle five traditional ethical issues. You will be split into 10 groups. Each group will read two assigned articles on a relevant ethical issue, and the pair of groups will teach the class the arguments for and against the relevant positions on their presentation date. Then they will briefly debate the issue between the groups. Then the discussion will open up to the rest of the class. Attendance is mandatory for all on these days.

Additional Assignments

To receive a grade of B or better in this class, you must Pass at least one Additional Assignment.

Cave Project: This assignment is meant to give you an opportunity to reflect on something that interests you, while attempting to understand as far as possible the position of people with whom you strongly disagree. You will consider some philosophical, political, or moral issue that you care deeply about, examining some belief or stance on this issue that others have that you find very implausible. You will research and attempt to uncover what’s plausible in the *other* side of the dispute.

Agree with the Conclusion, Disagree with the Argument: One very important lesson I want you to learn about logical reasoning is that there are bad arguments for true conclusions. This means even if we agree with an argument’s conclusion, we must still scrutinize the argument itself. For this assignment, you will talk with likeminded people about some belief you share. You will ask these people why they think this belief is true. Once you hear an argument you disagree with, you’ll explain that argument in writing and explain why you think the argument is flawed even though you think the conclusion is true.

Your Culture and Your Beliefs: What is some philosophical, political, or moral belief you have that differs from your parents? What made you think differently? What is some philosophical belief you have that is the same as your parents? Do you believe it just because they raised you to believe it or for some other reason? For this assignment, you’ll answer these questions in detail.

Luck and Success: Seriously reflect on the extent to which luck, things for which you are not responsible, and things beyond your control have impacted the extent of your success in college, work, or life in general. Then consider how luck bears on justice.

Philosophy in Art: Find a passage in a poem, novel, play, song, or some visual piece of art that relates to course material. Provide the passage, a link to the song, a picture of the visual art, etc., and explain how it relates to the course. (Submitting your own art as part of this assignment is welcome!)

Change of Mind: During your time in this course, you may change your mind about some course-relevant issue. Explain the issue, describe your previous opinion and why you used to think that, and then explain what you now think and why your opinion changed. When appropriate, be sure to explain an argument, theory, or reading that caused you to change your mind.

Other: You may propose other “Additional Assignments.” If you want to do this, you’ll need to explain to me how it helps meet one of the course learning objectives.

Communication

Office Hours: I will have regular office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays throughout the semester. This means I will be available in my office to discuss course material (or other issues). If my scheduled office hours aren’t convenient, feel free to schedule a different time to meet.

“I wish I had come to office hours all semester!”

You can benefit from discussing course material outside of class. **True story:** One semester, a student of mine who never came to office hours earned one of the lowest grades on the midterm. Then he started regularly attending office hours. Right before the final, he told me, “I wish I had come to office hours all semester.” He ended up getting one of the highest grades on the final. Don’t wait! The course material is difficult. Come discuss it with me.²

Contact Policy: Outside of office hours, you can reach me at the email address above. I will respond promptly within 24 hours to most emails. If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please talk to me in class or send another email as a reminder. **If you have a question about the course mechanics or schedule, please check the syllabus before emailing.**

Your Responsibilities: I expect you to regularly check your email and Canvas for announcements.

Electronics

Electronic devices are permitted in class, but must be used solely for class purposes. Browsing Facebook, catching all of the Pokemon, and captioning animal pictures are not class purposes. I will prohibit devices if they are not being used appropriately.

Cheating and Plagiarism

If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing in this course, you will receive an XF as your final grade for the course. You’ll also be required to take the K-State Development and Integrity Course.

Completing this course will remove the X from your record, but not the F. Here is the university’s official statement on Academic Honesty:

Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance that, in academic matters, one’s work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor and Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate

² Why should you go to office hours? <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/11/28/office-hours/> What are some things you might say in office hours? <https://studentlife.uoregon.edu/node/381050>

and graduate courses on-campus, off-campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System website can be reached via the following URL: www.k-state.edu/honor. A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is implied, whether or not it is stated: “On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work.” A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation.

Feel free to ask before completing assignments whether some behavior counts as cheating or plagiarism.

Disabilities

I will do my best to help students with disabilities or learning challenges succeed in this course. Students with disabilities who need classroom accommodations, access to technology, or information about emergency building/campus evacuation processes should contact the Student Access Center and/or their instructor. Services are available to students with a wide range of disabilities including, but not limited to, physical disabilities, medical conditions, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, depression, and anxiety. If you are a student enrolled in campus/online courses through the Manhattan or Olathe campuses, contact the Student Access Center at accesscenter@k-state.edu, 785-532-6441; for K-State Polytechnic campus, contact Academic and Student Services at polytechnicadvising@ksu.edu or call 785-826-2974.

Tentative Schedule

<u>Week 1</u>	
Mon., Aug. 20 Introduction: Getting to Know Each Other	
Wed., Aug. 22 Allegory of the Cave	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
Fri., Aug. 24 Trolley Problem	Start Logic Lecture

<u>Week 2</u>	
Mon., Aug. 27 Logic	Logic Lecture
Wed., Aug. 29 Morality & Culture	Rachels “Challenge of Cultural Relativism”
Fri., Aug. 31 Morality & Religion	
<u>Assignments</u>	
8/29: Reading Quiz 1	

<u>Week 3</u>	
Mon., Sep. 3 LABOR DAY	
Wed., Sep. 5 Moral Reasoning	Berg “Abortion & Miscarriage”
Fri., Sep. 7 Moral Reasoning	
<u>Assignments</u>	
9/5: Reading Quiz 2	

<u>Week 4</u>	
Mon., Sep. 10 Doing Good	Singer “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
Wed., Sep. 12 Doing Good	
Fri., Sep. 14 Separateness of Persons	Le Guin “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”
<u>Assignments</u>	
9/10: Reading Quiz 3	

<p><u>Week 5</u> Mon., Sep. 17 Respecting Persons Wed., Sep. 19 Respecting Persons Fri., Sep. 21 Catch-Up/Review</p>	<p>Chapman “Kantian Ethics in 1000 Words”</p>
<p><u>Assignments</u> 9/17: Reading Quiz 4</p>	

<p><u>Week 6</u> Mon., Sep. 24 Exam 1 Wed., Sep. 26 Failure, Praise, and Learning Fri., Sep. 28 Failure, Praise, and Learning</p>	<p>Willingham “Growth vs. Fixed Mindset”</p>
<p><u>Assignments</u> 9/24: Exam 1</p>	

<p><u>Week 7</u> Mon., Oct. 1 Animal Ethics Wed., Oct. 3 Animal Ethics Fri., Oct. 5 Animals Ethics</p>	<p>Norcross “Puppies, Pigs, and People” Kant “We have no duties to animals”</p>
<p><u>Assignments</u> 10/1: Reading Quiz 5 10/4: Philosophy in Life Post 1</p>	

<p><u>Week 8</u> Mon., Oct. 8 Economic Justice: Game Description Wed., Oct. 10 Economic Justice: Game Setup Fri., Oct. 12 Economic Justice: Game Play</p>	
<p><u>Assignments</u> 10/9: Additional Assignment: Philosophy in Art</p>	

<p><u>Week 9</u> Mon., Oct. 15 Economic Justice: Game Play/Discussion Wed., Oct. 17 Libertarianism vs. Rawlsianism Fri., Oct. 19 Luck & Justice</p>	<p>Swift “Political Philosophy” Paine “Agrarian Justice”</p>
<p><u>Assignments</u> 10/17: Reading Quiz 6</p>	

<p><u>Week 10</u> Mon., Oct. 22 Luck & Justice/Catch-Up Wed., Oct. 24 Race, Segregation, Redlining Fri., Oct. 26 Segregation & Education</p>	
<p><u>Assignments</u> 10/23: Additional Assignment: Your Culture, Your Beliefs</p>	

Week 11

Mon., Oct. 29 Segregation & Wealth

Anderson "Why Integration Remains an Imperative"

Wed., Oct. 31 Wealth and Education

Willingham "Why does family wealth affect student outcomes?"

Fri., Nov. 2 Catch-Up/Review

Assignments

10/29: Reading Quiz 7

10/30: Additional Assignment: Luck and Success

Week 12

Mon., Nov. 5 Exam 2

Wed., Nov. 7 Philosophy of X Discussion

Fri., Nov. 9 Philosophy of X Discussion

Assignments

11/5: Exam 2

11/7-11/9: Philosophy of X Discussion

Week 13

Mon., Nov. 12 Preparation: Presentation-Debates

Wed., Nov. 14 Presentation Debates

Fri., Nov. 16 Presentation Debates

Assignments

11/14-11/16: Presentation Debates

11/13: Additional Assignment: Agree with Conclusion, Disagree with Argument

Week 14

Mon., Nov. 19 FALL BREAK

Wed., Nov. 21 FALL BREAK

Fri., Nov. 23 FALL BREAK

Week 15

Mon., Nov. 26 Presentation Debates

Wed., Nov. 28 Presentation Debates

Fri., Nov. 30 Presentation Debates

Assignments

11/26-11/30: Presentation Debates

11/27: Philosophy in Life Post 2

11/29: Additional Assignment: Cave Project

Week 16

Mon., Dec. 3-Fri., Dec. 7 DEAD WEEK

Assignments

12/3: Additional Assignment: Change of Mind

This syllabus is subject to change throughout the semester.