

Philosophy 61: Moral Issues

Fall 2018

Instructor:	Nathan Osborne
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Office and Office Hours:	FO 208, TBA
Class Days/Time:	Tuesday Thursday 9-10:15am
Location:	BBC 222

Course Overview:

This course is a general introduction to ethical theories and topics. We will go over questions such as whether there are objective moral distinctions, what makes right acts right and wrong acts wrong, and how we know (if we do) that actions are right or wrong. We will cover the strengths and weaknesses of theories such as relativism, egoism, Existentialism, Utilitarianism, and Kantianism. We will also test these theories against real life ethical dilemmas, such as the darkest hour in Western History, and see many of these theories at play in selected works (such as in Alan Moore's *The Watchmen*).

Course Objectives:

This class will expose students to significant works of the human intellect and imagination, drawing from a broad range of different philosophies. Students will examine the historical and cultural circumstances which helped shape the various thinkers' philosophies. Students will also be able to relate these concepts back to their own lives and recognize their relevance in the contemporary world. These skills will enable students to fully participate in social and cultural communities, further enriching their personal and professional lives.

GE/SJSU Studies Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize how significant works illuminate enduring human concerns;
2. Respond to such works by writing both research---based critical analyses and personal responses; and
3. Write clearly and effectively.

Classroom Protocol:

A good philosophy class is centered not on a lecture and student regurgitation of information, but rather on dialog and debate in conjunction with a guided discussion designed to break down the readings into something more manageable. With this in mind, the class will have a strong emphasis on in-class discussion, and therefore attendance, preparation (having actually read the assigned reading), and participation will all be essential to your experience in this course and will make up a considerable portion of your final grade. We will frequently work in small groups, and it will be imperative that we all work together to foster a trusting and comfortable environment for everyone.

With that in mind, respect for one another is absolutely *essential* for this class. Feel free to disagree and debate with each other, but do so in a respectful manner. For example, try to refrain from interrupting others while they are talking, and remember to critique the *idea*—and not the *person*—you are debating. Coming to class and maintaining an open mind is also vital for good dialog to flourish.

We will be covering some contentious and sensitive issues that many of you will have different opinions on, and that is awesome because we can have many intriguing perspectives in the dialog. But any disrespectful conduct will not be tolerated. Please feel free to email or speak to me if at any time you feel uncomfortable with the classroom environment. Similarly, I will speak to you if I perceive any problematic assumptions, biases, or prejudices that are making others uncomfortable.

Required Readings:

The Fundamentals of Ethics – Shafer-Landau

The Sunflower – Simon Wiesenthal

Ethics of Ambiguity – Simone de Beauvoir (*online for free*)

Assignments and Grading Policy:

Lifeboat Ethics Essay: Hardin writes a very intriguing piece on his view of ethics. You will be required to take a position on his article and support your position by utilizing the theories we have learned so far.

The Watchmen Essay: Your second Essay will be on the film *The Watchmen* (based on Alan Moore's graphic novel).

Watchmen poses many ethical dilemmas, and certain characters beautifully embody the ethical theories we have covered so far. You will be required to analyze in detail one of these ethical dilemmas and discuss how specific characters reactions are akin to philosophical stances we have studied.

The Sunflower Paper: We will confront one of the darkest hours of human history and explore the possibilities and limits of forgiveness.

Group Presentation: You and a team of your peers will be responsible for analyzing a contemporary ethical issue

Final Essay: Ethics Applied Today. You will be required to explore a contemporary ethical quandary and utilize at least one of the thinkers we have studied to come to a conclusion about how to solve/approach it.

Participation: is a key component in your overall experience in the classroom, which is why it is being weighed so heavily. Participation is not merely showing up and sitting quietly (though a low attendance tends to correlate with a low participation grade); it is making your presence known by

participating in class and small group discussions and in class writing assignments. The frequency of participation and quality of comments will be taken into consideration when assigning a grade (this does not mean you will be marked down for asking questions, on the contrary I encourage you to ask questions about anything you don't understand); what this deals with namely goes back to being respectful of others and staying on a *relevant* topic during class discussions.

→ **Late Assignment Policy:** Unless otherwise stated, late assignments will have a -1 point penalty for every day it is late and will NOT be accepted after a week past the original due date. You MUST provide a hardcopy; you can email your paper, but you MUST give me a hardcopy next time you come to class otherwise it will not be graded.

Grading Criteria:

- A: Superior achievement; far exceeds demands of assignment.
- B: Goes beyond adequate achievement; exceeds demands of assignment.
- C: Achieves assignment purpose adequately; fulfills assignment.
- D: Problems outweigh strengths, does not quite fulfill assignment.
- F: Problems overpower strengths, clearly does not fulfill assignment.

Grade Breakdown:

- Participation – 20
- Hardin Essay – 10
- Watchmen Essay – 20
- Sunflower Paper – 15
- Group Presentation – 20
- Final – 15

Course Schedule: Phil 61 – Moral Issues

The schedule is subject to change (with fair notice). If any changes are made I will notify you in class and post a revised Schedule on the Class Website

Table 1 Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	8/21	Introduction and Syllabus
1	8/23	Relativism (FoE Ch 19)
2	8/28	Egoism Lecture (FoE Ch7)
2	8/30	Egoism Lecture (FoE Ch8)
3	9/4	Hardin's Lifeboat Ethics Lifeboat Ethics Paper Assigned
3	9/6	Utilitarianism (FoE Ch9-10)
4	9/11	Deontology (FoE Ch 11-12) Lifeboat Ethics Paper Due
4	9/13	Virtue Ethics (FoE Ch17)
5	9/18	De Beauvoir – <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i>
5	9/20	De Beauvoir – <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i>
6	9/25	Movie (<i>The Watchmen</i>) Watchmen Paper Assigned
6	9/27	<i>The Watchmen</i> (continued)
7	10/2	Hannah Arendt –The Banality of Evil lecture
7	10/4	Hannah Arendt –The Banality of Evil lecture
8	10/9	Watchmen Discussion Watchmen Paper Due
8	10/11	Group Presentation – Meet Up (Do Not Miss, as groups will be assigned and topics chosen!)
9	10/16	<i>The Sunflower Forgiveness</i> (Hans Habe, Mathieu Ricard, Robert McAfee Brown, José Hobday, Matthew Fox.) Sunflower paper Assigned
9	10/18	<i>The Sunflower – Limits of Forgiveness</i> (Primo Levi, Erich H Loewy, Herbert Marcuse, Joshua Rubenstein, Sidney Shachnow, Mary Gordon)

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
10	10/23	<i>The Sunflower – Other Responses</i> (Andre Stein, Harold Kushner, Roger Kamenetz, Dith Pran, Albert Speer)
10	10/25	<i>Sunflower Symposium</i> Sunflower Paper Due
11	10/30	Presentation 1
11	11/1	Presentation 2
12	11/6	Presentation 3
12	11/8	Presentation 4
13	11/13	Presentation 5
13	11/15	Presentation 6
14	11/20	Presentation 7
14	11/27	Presentation 8
15	12/4	Presentation 9
15	12/6	Presentation 10
16	12/12 @9:45	Class Symposium Final Paper Due