

San José State University

Department of Philosophy

PHIL 61: Moral Issues, Section 07, Fall 2018

Course and Contact Information

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<i>Office Hours:</i>	Fridays: 12:30-2:30
<i>Class Days/Time:</i>	Fridays 9:30-12:15
<i>Classroom:</i>	Dudley Moorhead Hall 149B
GE Studies Category:	GE Area: C2

Course Description:

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, Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, and Deontology. We will also test these theories against real life ethical dilemmas and contemporary issues.

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 philosophical 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:

1. 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.

2. 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. This is a great thing because we will have many intriguing perspectives in the dialog. However, 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.

3. TECHNOLOGY: Because technology can be a valuable resource to a student and a classroom when used appropriately, I will allow students to access them in class. HOWEVER, technology should not distract anyone in the classroom and should be used for academic and important personal reasons. We will discuss these uses and misuses in more detail the first-class meeting.

Required Readings:

-*The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 4th edition (but 3rd edition is fine too) – Shafer-Landau

-Online readings posted on Canvas

Recommended Readings:

-*Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (1st Edition) – Simon Blackburn

-Recommended readings posted on Canvas

NOTE: I will be using Canvas in this course, so please make sure you have access in order to see the readings. If you need help accessing Canvas, please let me know.

Assignments and Grading Policy:

Participation: This 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, 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. There will occasionally be in class writing assignments, usually at the end of class, which will be turned in when you leave. These will be about a half to a page long and will contribute to your participation grade. Ultimately, I want you to enjoy coming to class and looking forward to contributing to the conversation. Given the relevance of the subject matter, I'm certain you'll have much to say.

FILMS: I will be showing 2 films in the course, each of which exemplify the theories and issues we will be covering in the course. The second paper will be keeping one of these films directly in mind.

Readings:

Please do the readings before the class for which they are assigned. The schedule will specify the chapter for that week (FoE) and will also specify the readings on Canvas by author (Author). Some readings won't require you to read the entire document; I will specify what pages to read for that week as needed.

The schedule will have all the posted readings and online readings are available at the course website: on Canvas Learning Management System course login website at: <http://sjsu.instructure.com>.

Papers: Papers will play an important role in your grade and are meant to be an opportunity to demonstrate not only what you've learned in your readings and discussions in class, but to also demonstrate how you're able to apply that knowledge in real life issues.

1st Paper: This first paper is more descriptive in nature and will require that you describe one of the theories we have learned about so far and give an assessment of it. You can accomplish this many different ways, but the idea is to either agree or disagree with the methodology employed by the theory and give examples in which the theory is useful or fails to be useful (or even detrimental). This paper is meant to show that you understand a theory, its methodology, and its potential strengths and weaknesses. (More on this in class)

2nd Paper: This paper will be directly connected to the second film in the class. In this paper you will need to describe a situation in which a character based a decision on some moral belief system we have discussed in the class and offer your evaluation of that choice. For example, if a character bases a decision on utilitarian principles, you would need to evaluate whether you agree with the application of that system to the context and offer a potentially better course of action. The focus is to apply the theories we've learned in class and see how they are being used by those in the film and if perhaps a different theory would have been a better choice than that seen in the film. (More on this in class)

Final Paper: For the final, you will be using at least one or two of the theories we have discussed in the class, and you will apply to them to a contemporary issue that you are concerned with. This paper will be an extension of your previous papers and you will be expected to engage critically with a topic. Appropriately, your final paper will tackle a "Moral Issue" using the knowledge you've gained in the course.

Note: I will be providing details on the final paper as the course goes along, and you will have plenty of time to write/revise the paper. If you have any questions or need help, please see me in office hours. If you can't make office hours, we can schedule to meet at a more convenient time.

Final Paper Symposium: We will be devoting a class meeting to your final papers. In this symposium you will be briefly presenting on your final paper topic and what you plan to write about. This is required and will be factored into your Final Paper grade. Your presentation should be roughly 5-7 minutes long. More details will be provided as the date approaches.

Final Exam: The final exam will be a culminating experience which will have us discussing the highlights of the course and reflecting on the material in an engaging way. Participation is absolutely required for the final and you will be evaluated based on the quality of your contribution to the discussion. Details about the final will be announced as we approach the date.

Grading Information: Grades are based on the requirements and assignments above in accordance to the weights specified. Late work is accepted but penalized if you consult with me ahead of time. The grading scale is as follows: 100≥A+≥97, 97≥A≥93, 93≥A-≥90, 90≥B+≥87, etc.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation – 25%
 1st Paper – 10%
 2nd Paper – 15%
 Final Paper – 25%
 Final Exam – 25%

Dropping and Adding:

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drop, grade forgiveness, etc. Refer to the current semester’s Catalog Policies section at <http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/policies.html>. Add/drop deadlines can be found on the current academic calendar web page located at: http://www.sjsu.edu/academic_programs/calendars/academic_calendar/. The Late Drop Policy is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/policies/latedrops/policy/>. Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for dropping classes.

University Policies

University Policies Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ Syllabus Information web page at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>

Academic Integrity

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person’s ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include your assignment or any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU’s Academic Policy S07-2 requires approval of instructors. In other words, submit your own work, I want to hear YOUR ideas. If you are not sure if something constitutes plagiarism, please ask me for clarification.

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	8/24	Introduction and Syllabus
2	8/31	UNIT I: Ethical Theories <i>Skepticism, Relativism</i> Required: (FoE Ch 19 “Ethical Relativism”)
3	9/7	<i>Hedonism and Egoism</i> Required: (FoE Ch 1 “Hedonism”, FoE Ch 8 “Ethical Egoism”)
4	9/14	<i>Deontology/Kant</i> Required: (FoE Ch 11 “The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice”)

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		Enthusiast: (FoE Ch 12)
5	9/21	<i>Virtue Ethics</i> Required: (FoE Ch17 “Virtue Ethics”)
6	9/28	<i>Consequentialism/Utilitarianism Part 1</i> Required: (FoE Ch 9 “Consequentialism-It’s Nature and Attractions”) (Singer 229-236); FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED
7	10/5	<i>Consequentialism/Utilitarianism Part 2</i> Required: (FoE Ch 10 “Consequentialism-Its Difficulties”) (Singer 236-243)
8	10/12	<i>Moral Nihilism</i> Required: (FoE Ch 20 “Moral Nihilism”) (Ayer) Enthusiast: (Mackie)
9	10/19	UNIT II: Applied Ethics <i>Abortion</i> Required: (Marquis “Abortion is Immoral”, Thomson “A Defense of Abortion)
10	10/26	<i>Justice and Capital Punishment</i> (No Reading); In class film FIRST PAPER DUE and SECOND PAPER ASSIGNED
11	11/2	<i>Animal Rights</i> (Singer “All Animals Are Equal”, Regan “Animal Rights”)
12	11/9	<i>Feminist Ethics</i> (FoE Ch 18)
13	11/16	<i>Technology and the Future</i> (Reading TBA); In class film; FINAL PAPER ASSIGNED
14	11/23	NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Holiday; SECOND PAPER DUE
15	11/30	Final Paper Symposium Day 1
16	12/7	Last Day of Instruction; Final Paper Symposium Day 2 and Final Paper Workshop
17	12/14	FINAL EXAM @ 7:15-9:30 AM, FINAL PAPER DUE