

PHIL 2367: CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL AND MORAL PROBLEMS

Summer 2025
The Ohio State University

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Instructor | Jason DeWitt |
| Office | 337e University Hall |
| Contact | dewitt.197@osu.edu |
| Office Hours | Tuesdays 3-5PM and by appt |
| Class Time | MTuTh 5:10 - 6:45pm |
| Class Location | Journalism Building 143 |

Description Welcome! I'm very excited to do some philosophy with you all!

Philosophy is fundamentally a conversation about how we should describe our world and our place in it. An important part of philosophy is ethics: deciding how we should live our lives and govern ourselves. This class is about the ethical issues which contemporary society presents to us. To address these social and moral issues, we will first think about ethical theory. We will consider these questions: Is ethics objective? Why try to be moral? What makes some action morally right? By addressing these more abstract questions, we will gather resources and considerations to employ as we turn to the more practical social and moral issues later in the course.

The practical ethical questions we will focus on in this course: How much should I be giving to charity? Is elective abortion morally permissible? Should we be eating factory-farmed animal products? Is there a moral duty to obey the law or is civil disobedience morally permitted? How should we address political polarization? How should we think of changing gender conceptions? Is a capitalist or socialist economic system morally preferable?

Together, through class discussion, and through analytical writing assignments, we will sharpen our ethical conclusions, and most importantly, our ability to think critically about contemporary social and moral problems.

General Education Information This course satisfies the following GE's:

Legacy GE: Social Diversity in the US

Goal: Students understand the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States and across the world in order to become educated, productive, and principled citizens.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students describe and evaluate the roles of such categories as race, gender and sexuality, disability, class, ethnicity, and religion in the pluralistic institutions and cultures of the United States.
2. Students recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.

Legacy GE: Writing and Communication: Level 2

Goal: Students are skilled in written communication and expression, reading, critical thinking, oral expression and visual expression.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Through critical analysis, discussion, and writing, students demonstrate the ability to read carefully and express ideas effectively.
2. Students apply written, oral, and visual communication skills and conventions of academic discourse to the challenges of a specific discipline.
3. Students access and use information critically and analytically.

New GE: Writing and Information Literacy**Goals:**

1. Successful students will demonstrate skills in effective reading and writing as well as in oral, digital, and/or visual communication for a range of purposes, audiences, and contexts.
2. Successful students will develop the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind needed for information literacy.

Expected Learning Outcome:

1. Compose and interpret across a wide range of purposes and audiences using writing as well as oral, visual, digital, or other methods appropriate to the context.
2. Use textual conventions, including proper attribution of ideas and/or sources, as appropriate to the communication situation.
3. Generate ideas and informed responses incorporating diverse perspectives and information from a range of sources, as appropriate to the communication situation.
4. Evaluate social and ethical implications in writing and information literacy practices.
5. Demonstrate responsible, civil, and ethical practices when accessing, using, sharing, or creating information.
6. Locate, identify, and use information through context-appropriate search strategies.
7. Employ reflective and critical strategies to evaluate and select credible and relevant information sources.

This course fulfills these learning outcomes for both new and legacy writing GEs through regular writing assignments to develop identification and extrapolation skills, longer essays to develop critical argumentative skills, and regular class discussions.

Class Conduct This class will be heavily discussion based. And we will often discuss very sensitive political, moral, and religious topics. So even if we disagree with someone else, we must voice that disagreement in a respectful manner and treat all the members of class with human dignity. If we want to, as a class, we may develop a list of conversational ground rules

for our discussions. Do not use cellphones once class starts and please do not email, Internet shop, or social media scroll during class.

Carmen All course content such as announcements, slides, assignments, grades and required readings will be made available on Carmen. You are expected to do the readings *before* the class for which the reading is assigned. Check Carmen regularly. What is assigned on Carmen takes precedence over the assignments/readings detailed on the syllabus.

Please **contact me via email, instead** of via the Carmen messaging.

Materials There is no required textbook for this class. All of the assigned reading material will be available for free on Carmen.

Requirements and Grading Your overall course grade will be assigned based on the following components (with the corresponding percentage of overall grade for the assignment given in parenthesis):

- Participation and attendance (20%).
- Initial reflection paper (5%).
- Argument summary (10%).
- Argument summary & critique (15%).
- Final paper draft (20%).
- Final paper revision (20%).
- Final reflection (10%).

Detailed assignment sheets for the papers will be distributed closer to the time of assignment, though some minimal detail for each portion of your grade can be found in the next section of this syllabus. Tentative due dates will be given below.

Descriptions of Major Course Assignments

There will be two **reflection papers**, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. Your initial reflection paper will be a very short paper in which you describe your personal philosophical beliefs regarding some of the topics of our class. I expect you to offer some reasoning for the beliefs you hold, but not much reasoning as we will have only just begun our introduction at this point in the semester. You will compare this paper with your final reflection paper at the course's end so that you can see how much you have grown as a philosopher. These will be short, lower-stakes assignments.

The **argument summary paper** will be a short paper in which you work on your exegetical skills. You will explain an argument or view from class in your own words, paying attention to charitability, concision, and accuracy. The **argument summary & critique paper** will ask you to not only summarize a philosophical argument, but will also task you with formulating a plausible critique of it. The *final paper* writing process will be broken into two steps – a draft phase and a revision phase. After I receive your drafts, you will be given feedback to incorporate into your final versions. The final paper will ask you to summarize a philosophical argument, offer a plausible critique of it, and respond to that critique. Collectively, these paper assignment wills contribute to our writing, communication, and information literacy goals. You will get detailed assignment sheets for these writing assignments.

Participation and attendance. Please read the assigned reading material *before* class for the day that it was assigned. Everyone is expected to participate in the class in some capacity, whether it be in small group discussion, by asking questions, or by participating in whole-class discussions. A note will be made of participation in lectures, and your participation grade will rise the more one conscientiously participates. A conscientious participant is one who makes respectful contributions to the discussion, not one who tries to dominate it or change the subject. Conscientious participation also requires being familiar with the material before class begins. As for attendance, it will be recorded and kept up with via exit cards. Most class periods, I will distribute index cards where you are to write a question or comment that you had about the material for the day. Make sure to write your full name on them legibly as they will serve as the way I take attendance during lectures. You are allowed up to **three** absences, no questions asked. That is, you can miss three lectures, for any reason whatsoever, with no penalty to you. Starting with the fourth day missed, however, a point will be dropped from your participation and attendance grade for every further day missed. This means, for example, if you miss six lectures, the **maximum** participation and attendance grade you will be able to receive will be an 17 out of 20. If you have any questions about the attendance policy (or any other grading policy), please just come see me or email me. I'm happy to discuss things with any of you.

Late Assignments Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances (or, of course, if you have an accommodation from SDLS which involves an extension). That being said, please email me ASAP if you need an extension because of some emergency. Late submissions of assignments will lose 5 points per day. No credit will be given after 5 days.

Instructor Feedback and Response Time For every assignment, I will have grades returned to the students within 14 days of submission. If you need to contact me out of class, please email me at dewitt.197@osu.edu directly. I have technical difficulties getting Carmen messages, so if you message me via Carmen do not expect me to receive your message. I will respond to emails within about 24 hours on weekdays and around 48 hours on weekends.

Grading Scale We will use the OSU Standard Grade Scheme:

- 93-100: A
- 90-92.9: A-
- 87-89.9: B+
- 83-86.9: B
- 80-82.9: B-
- 77-79.9: C+
- 73-76.9: C
- 70-72.9: C-
- 67-69.9: D+
- 60-66.9: D
- Below 60: E

Disability Services The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

Academic Misconduct Academic misconduct is a serious offense. You are responsible for knowing what counts as academic misconduct. You are also expected not to commit it. In accordance with Faculty Rule 3335-5-487, all suspected cases of academic misconduct will be reported to the university's Committee on Academic Misconduct who will then be responsible for investigating or establishing procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

Do not use ChatGPT or similar software for your assignments.

Religious Accommodations It is Ohio State's policy to reasonably accommodate the sincerely held religious beliefs and practices of all students. The policy permits a student to be absent for up to three days each academic semester for reasons of faith or religious or spiritual belief.

Students planning to use religious beliefs or practices accommodations for course requirements must inform the instructor in writing no later than 14 days after the course begins. The instructor is then responsible for scheduling an alternative time and date for the course requirement, which may be before or after the original time and date of the course requirement. These alternative accommodations will remain confidential. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all course assignments are completed.

Commitment to a diverse and inclusive learning environment The Ohio State University arms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

Your Mental Health As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learn, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. No matter where you are engaged in distance learning, The Ohio State University's Student Life Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) is here to support you. If you find yourself feeling isolated, anxious or overwhelmed, on-demand resources are available at go.osu.edu/ccsondemand. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-

292-5766, and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org. The Ohio State Wellness app is also a great resource available at go.osu.edu/wellnessapp.

Tentative Course Schedule

The schedule below is tentative. Any unexpected changes to the schedule will be announced on Carmen as the course proceeds.

Week One

June 2nd Introduction
 (1) Read the Syllabus. (2) Read “Moral Education” by Balg.
 June 3rd Philosophy & Ethics
 Read “Introduction: On the Study of Philosophy” by Perry, Bratman, and Fischer (2010).
 June 5th Ethical Theory
 (1) Read “Why Be Moral?” by Case. (2) Explore the Notre Dame “Why Be Good? Plato” site.
 June 8th Assignment
 Initial Reflection Due

Week Two

June 9th Ethical Theory
 (1) Read “The Challenge of Moral Relativism” by Rachels. (2) Read “Cultural Relativism” by Nobis.
 June 10th Ethical Theory
 (1) Read “Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” by Shafer-Landau. (2) Read “Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And So Are You)” by Enoch.
 June 12th Ethical Theory
 (1) Read selections from “Virtue Ethics” by Shafer-Landau. (2) Read “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” by Pryor.

Week Three

June 16th Ethical Theory
 (1) Read selections from “Virtue Ethics” by Shafer-Landau. (2) Watch “Kant & Categorical Imperatives: Crash Course Philosophy 35” by CrashCourse.
 June 17th Ethical Theory
 (1) Read “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?” by Rachels. (2) Read selections from *The Fundamentals of Ethics* by Shafer-Landau.
 June 19th Juneteenth
 NO CLASS
 June 22nd Assignment
 Argument summary due.

Week Four

June 23rd Ethical Theory
 Read “What is Act Utilitarianism” by Feldman.
 June 24th Charity
 Read “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” by Singer.

June 26th Abortion
 Read “A Defense of Abortion” by Thomson.

Week Five

June 30th Abortion
 Read “Refuting the Violinist Argument for Abortion” by Horn.
 July 1st Animal Ethics
 Read “All Animals Are Equal” by Singer.
 July 3rd Animal Ethics
 Read “Eating Animals the Nice Way” by McMahan.
 July 6th Assignment
 Argument summary & critique due.

Week Six

July 7th Animal Ethics
 Read “Why I Am a Vegan (and You Should Be One Too)” by McPherson.
 July 8th Civil Disobedience
 (1) Read “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by King. (2) Read “Plato’s Crito: When Should We Break the Law?” by Case.
 July 10th Polarization
 Read “Can We Talk?: Communicating Moral Concern in an Era of Polarized Politics” by Andersen.
 July 13th Assignment
 Final draft due.

Week Seven

July 14th Gender
 Read “Why be Nonbinary?” by Dembroff.
 July 15th Gender
 Read “Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction” by Bogardus.
 July 17th Political Economy
 Read selections from *Why Not Socialism?* by Cohen.
 July 20th Assignment
 Final reflection due.

Week Eight

July 21st Political Economy
 Read selections from *Why Not Capitalism?* by Brennan.
 July 22nd Catch-up/Review
 Catch-up and review day.
 July 24nd Office Hours
 Paper meetings.
 July 27th Assignment
 Final paper due.