PHIL 1120: Social Ethics-001

Instructor:

Michael Otteson

Email: Send any and all communication to me via the Canvas messenger.

Office Hours: by appointment

TA: Brianna Richins

Email: a02257298@usu.edu

Course Description

This course deals with the intersection of ethics/morality and contemporary social and political topics. We will read about many prominent (and sometimes not so prominent) issues in the field of “applied ethics”. As you may have noticed, there is a great deal of disagreement and controversy in our present political landscape. People in this country and across the world disagree, often vehemently and to the point of violence, about what we owe to each other and how to create community. The project of this course is to reach for dialogue as a tool for engaging with and potentially resolving some of these disagreements rather than coercion or force.

The second theme that we will focus on in this course is the life of moral greatness. The assigned text is dedicated to telling the stories of people who have lived the life of radical charity and concern for others. I find this life and the people who live it to be deeply compelling and underappreciated, so we are going to specifically consider not just what we can and cannot do, but what great moral achievement looks like beyond merely not harming or interfering with the lives of others. Indeed, the lives of these moral saints will be the jumping off point for discussing the pressing social and political concerns of our time.

General Course Objectives

At the end of this course, you will be asked to evaluate the course’s success at meeting these objectives:

- Develop ethical reasoning and/or ethical decision making
- Learn to apply knowledge and skills to benefit others or serve the public good
- Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.
Specific Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Carefully consider the lives of those who are dedicated to helping other people within the context of morality and justice.
2. Improve your ability to write about and discuss important and controversial ethical questions in the social and political realm.
3. Compare and contrast serious and sophisticated philosophers who disagree with each other about social ethics.

Course Requirements

Strangers Drowning: Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Urge to Help, Larissa MacFarquhar

Evaluation Methods and Criteria

Reading Questions: 20%

Part of learning how to reason well and analyze material involves talking and discussing topics, question, and arguments with other people. Verbalizing or writing down summaries about the opinions and perspectives of others forces us to think about them in ways that otherwise would not because we must determine how to explain their ideas in our own thoughts and words. As such, class discussion will be essential for understanding, analyzing, and making our own ethical arguments and broadening/deepening our moral horizons.

This course deals with a collection of (sometimes difficult) philosophical texts. Our class discussions will not function unless you read the material for each class and have made a good faith effort to understand it. They will also not function if nobody other than me talks during class. We will go through the assigned reading every day and discuss it, which means that you will need to participate in our class discussions. As such, I want to reward keeping up with the reading as much as possible. Before each class, you will be responsible for sending in two substantive questions about the readings. You should also identify a key ethical argument or decision from the readings and explain it in your own words. You will submit this to Canvas under the assignments tab on Canvas. I strongly encourage you to ask these questions in class.
This should allow you to contribute to class discussion and develop your analysis and evaluation skills even if you cannot attend for medical or other excused absences. It might also help those of you who otherwise feel uncomfortable speaking up in front of the class directly. This policy allows you to miss class when you need to without missing points. However, you are responsible for getting notes from your peers if this is the case. If you want to discuss class material that you missed with me, email me to set up an appointment (do not just ask what you missed in the email). I do not see it as my job to police in class attendance, but again, regular attendance will almost certainly help you develop the skills we are looking to sharpen in this course.

I should also say this: this semester, participation will depend on your compliance with all of the COVID rules that USU has set out.

Writing the Exam: 10%

This assignment calls for students to write their own set of five multiple choice questions for the upcoming exam. This gives students the opportunity to develop ethical reasoning and critical thinking as they come up with good and incisive questions about the material we have read. The exams in this course will be some kind of aggregate of the questions you submit. If I accept 80% of your questions for each exam, you will get full credit. If this seems daunting, don't worry: we will read articles that discuss how to write good multiple choice questions. We will also cover this regularly in class in conjunction with the readings.

Exams: 30%

The purpose of the exams is to test how well you have been able to take in the course material and content. The arguments and case studies we review in the course will help you evaluate ethical and moral arguments that are relevant to applied social, political, and human questions, and the tests are a critical way for me to learn what you are and are not retaining from what we cover. As covered earlier, you, the class, will write this exam.

The Most We Can Do: 20%

In this course, we will read about the lives of people who are almost entirely devoted to helping other people and rescuing the proverbial “drowning stranger.” As we will see, there are philosophers and others who have endeavored to develop a kind of moral calculus for determining how people can do the most good with finite resources. We will enter into this project as a class. Right now, I have collected $1000 for our class to donate to a charity. You of course will not contribute any of your own money to this pot. Over the course of the semester, we will collectively decide as a class what charity or collection of charities we should donate this money to. It will be up to you to find the charity that you think does the most good and to formulate reasons for why this charity is most worthy of our donation. This will be an exercise that helps develop practice in ethical reasoning about how to do some good and to communicate the fruits of that reasoning to others.

There will be two phases to this assignment:
1) I will put you all in groups of ten (we have 50 people in this course) in Canvas. You will then record a video of yourself giving a presentation outlining what you think will be the best use of our money and why (the prompt for this is posted under the “Assignments” tab in Canvas). You will then watch the videos from the other people in your group and send the TA your assessment as to which charity we should send our money to (you cannot vote for your own). The presentation that receives the most votes will then move on to the next round.

2) After we have determined the five “finalists,” we will consider the merits of as a class in several discussions during class. At the end of this process, you will vote as a class to determine which charity or collection of charities we should donate to. You will be evaluated on your initial presentations and on your contributions to the class discussion about the finalists.

*The Life of Moral Excellence: 20%*

By the end of the semester, we will have read the stories of people who have devoted themselves to the service of others. I want to hear which you find most compelling or which constitutes the highest achievement. This assignment will help you practice evaluating various and diverse ethical perspectives and communicating the results of your deliberations in writing. You will write a short paper (no more than three pages) explaining to me which of the lives detailed in the book *Strangers Drowning* you think is best, most worth living, or most valuable (pick one). You will need to give some kind of justification for the position you take. If you like, you can use one of the moral theories we cover in the course to justify your answer.

**Grade Scheme**

The following grading standards will be used in this class:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100 % to 93.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A−</td>
<td>&lt; 93.0 % to 90.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>&lt; 90.0 % to 87.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>&lt; 87.0 % to 83.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B−</td>
<td>&lt; 83.0 % to 80.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>C−</td>
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Late Work:

In normal circumstances, I only accept late work in conjunction with an academic or other medical/emergency related excuse (the bar is pretty high here). Furthermore, I am far more sympathetic to requests for extensions in advance of deadlines rather than after them. However, we are not living in normal circumstances, and I understand that this semester poses unique challenges to both instructors and students. The standard is still that work be turned in on time, and at the end of the semester my hands are tied. However, if students have an emergency and/or contact me in advance, I want to be as accommodating as I can be with deadlines. Please reach out to me if you are going to have problems getting assignments in on time.

Class Decorum

It is crucial that we treat each other with respect during these class discussions. We are covering material that is both difficult to understand and that has potential bearing on some sensitive subjects. As such, we must be civil to each other if this class is to succeed. If you are disrespectful towards others, I will dock your participation points.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to regularly attend class on the days that they are required to be in-person. If you had academically-excused or medical reasons for not coming to class, please let me known as soon as possible. However, this is college, and as a rule I don't think it is my job to make you come to class everyday. If you have to miss class, you do not need to notify me unless you want to meet to discuss what you missed. Do not send me an email that asks what we covered in class without also trying to set up an appointment to cover the class material (I will ignore such emails). If you don't want to set up an appointment, you can get lecture notes from a student. If you are missing class because of Covid or other medical problems, let me know and we can work something out. This class was designed such that you can keep up even if you have to quarantine (and cannot come to class), so don't ever worry about missing class if you have symptoms or a positive test.

Changes to the Syllabus

This syllabus and the course schedule are subject to change. Please make note of any changes to it in class. I will post updated versions of the syllabus from time to time (as needed).

Content Warning:
This course deals with a lot of subject material that is extremely disturbing. It is likely that we will discuss sensitive and difficult topics in every class that we have. I am giving you a heads up so that you can be aware of this. The course schedule should help you navigate when we are discussing certain topics that are especially likely to be unsettling.

Nonattendance Policy

Students May Be Dropped For Nonattendance

If a student does not attend a class during the first week of the term or by the second class meeting, whichever comes first, the instructor may submit a request to have the student dropped from the course. *(This does not remove responsibility from the student to drop courses which he or she does not plan to attend.)* This option is typically used for classes that are full and the instructor is trying to make a seat available for another student, but may be considered for other courses. Requests must be made during the first 20 percent of the course and will be considered on an individual student basis. Students who are dropped from courses will be notified by the Registrar's Office through their preferred e-mail account (see *2018-2019 General Catalog [Links to an external site.]*).

Assumption of Risk

All classes, programs, and extracurricular activities within the University involve some risk, and certain ones involve travel. The University provides opportunities to participate in these programs on a voluntary basis. Therefore, students should not participate in them if they do not care to assume the risks. Students can ask the respective program leaders/sponsors about the possible risks a program may generate, and if students are not willing to assume the risks, they should not select that program. By voluntarily participating in classes, programs, and extracurricular activities, a student does so at his or her own risk. General information about University Risk Management policies, insurance coverage, vehicle use policies, and risk management forms can be found at: [http://www.usu.edu/riskmgmt/](http://www.usu.edu/riskmgmt/) *(Links to an external site.)*

Library Services

All USU students attending classes in Logan, at our Regional Campuses, or online can access all databases, e-journals, and e-books regardless of location. Additionally, the library will mail printed books to students, at no charge to them. Students can also borrow books from any Utah academic library. Take advantage of all library services and learn more at [libguides.usu.edu/rc.](http://libguides.usu.edu/rc) *(Links to an external site.)*

Online Course Fee
A fee of $15 per credit is applied to all online courses to sustain current digital technologies and support services required for engaging and effective online learning.

**Classroom Civility**

Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read Student Code Article V Section V-3 (Links to an external site.) for more information.

**University Policies & Procedures**

**COVID-19 Classroom Accommodations**

To ensure that you receive the appropriate accommodation for COVID-19 related challenges, the University requires you to fill out the COVID-19 Questionnaire (Links to an external site.). Upon doing so, the University COVID CARE Team (Links to an external site.) will contact you to determine your needs and how to support you. The CARE Team will also contact your instructors and provide important direction on how best to accommodate your needs. For additional reference, please see USU’s Attendance and Excused Absence (Links to an external site.) policy and the COVID-19 Classroom Accommodations (Links to an external site.) page.

**Reducing COVID-19 Risk**

You can help keep classes, events, and activities happening in person this semester by following these steps:

1. **Get vaccinated if you're able.** Vaccines are the best available tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19. They are safe, free, and easy to access.
2. **If you are vaccinated, let USU know.** Please upload your proof of full vaccination (Links to an external site.) to AggieHealth. If you are exposed to COVID-19, USU's case containment will not require you to quarantine if they know you are vaccinated and you do not have symptoms.
3. **Stay home if you're sick** and get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms or have been exposed. It’s important to not bring any illness to campus.
4. **Wear a mask indoors.** Public health experts recommend that even vaccinated people wear masks indoors in high COVID-19 transmission areas, which includes most of Utah.

If USU’s COVID Case Containment team identifies an uncontained situation in the classroom, you will be notified of any temporary changes to your course delivery method through a Canvas announcement. Please make sure you are receiving immediate notifications of new Canvas announcements. The situation will be handled
according to protocols on the COVID Classroom Exposure (Links to an external site.) page.

Class Seating Charts (For In-Person Classes)

In classes with more than 10 students, a seating chart will be used to track where you are sitting. After the first week of classes, your instructor will tell you how to enter your seat number in Canvas. **You must sit in the same seat for the rest of the semester.** This is extremely important for tracking cases of COVID-19 and helping classes remain in person.

Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibilities

Academic freedom is the right to teach, study, discuss, investigate, discover, create, and publish freely. Academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members in teaching and of students in learning. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in teaching, research, and creative activities, subject to the limitations imposed by professional responsibility. Faculty Code Policy #403 (Links to an external site.) further defines academic freedom and professional responsibilities.

Academic Integrity – "The Honor System"

Each student has the right and duty to pursue his or her academic experience free of dishonesty. To enhance the learning environment at Utah State University and to develop student academic integrity, each student agrees to the following Honor Pledge: "I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity." A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor Pledge:

- Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community;
- Understands that each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is awarded by this institution; and
- Is a welcomed and valued member of Utah State University.

Academic Dishonesty

The instructor of this course will take appropriate actions in response to Academic Dishonesty, as defined the University’s Student Code. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- **Cheating:** using, attempting to use, or providing others with any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, examinations, or in any other academic exercise or activity. Unauthorized assistance includes:
  - Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done “individually;”
  - Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
- Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
- Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
- Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
- Submitting substantially the same work for credit in more than one class, except with prior approval of the instructor; or engaging in any form of research fraud.

- **Falsification**: altering or fabricating any information or citation in an academic exercise or activity.
- **Plagiarism**: representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one's own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.

For additional information go to: [ARTICLE VI. University Regulations Regarding Academic Integrity](Links to an external site.)

**Sexual Harassment/Title IX**

Utah State University is committed to creating and maintaining an environment free from acts of sexual misconduct and discrimination and to fostering respect and dignity for all members of the USU community. Title IX and [USU Policy 339](Links to an external site.) address sexual harassment in the workplace and academic setting. The university responds promptly upon learning of any form of possible discrimination or sexual misconduct. Any individual may contact USU’s [Office of Equity](Links to an external site.) for available options and resources or clarification. The university has established a complaint procedure to handle all types of discrimination complaints, including sexual harassment ([USU Policy 305](Links to an external site.)), and has designated the Office of Equity Director/Title IX Coordinator as the official responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of sexual harassment.

**Withdrawal Policy and "I" Grade Policy**

Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term ‘extenuating’ circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor.

**Students with Disabilities**

USU welcomes students with disabilities. If you have, or suspect you may have, a physical, mental health, or learning disability that may require accommodations in this
course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, drc@usu.edu). All disability related accommodations must be approved by the DRC. Once approved, the DRC will coordinate with faculty to provide accommodations.

Students who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or who contract COVID-19 may also be eligible for accommodations.

Diversity Statement

Regardless of intent, careless or ill-informed remarks can be offensive and hurtful to others and detract from the learning climate. If you feel uncomfortable in a classroom due to offensive language or actions by an instructor or student(s) regarding ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, contact:

- Division of Student Affairs: https://studentaffairs.usu.edu, (435) 797-1712, studentservices@usu.edu, TSC 220
- Student Legal Services: https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/student-advocacy/legal-services, (435) 797-2912, TSC 326,
- Access and Diversity: http://accesscenter.usu.edu, (435) 797-1728, access@usu.edu; TSC 315
- Multicultural Programs: http://accesscenter.usu.edu/multiculture, (435) 797-1728, TSC 315
- LGBTQA Programs: http://accesscenter.usu.edu/lgbtqa, (435) 797-1728, TSC 3145
- Provost’s Office Diversity Resources: https://www.usu.edu/provost/diversity, (435) 797-8176

You can learn about your student rights by visiting:
The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode

Grievance Process

Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Student Code: Article VII.

Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures can be found at:

- Student Conduct
- Student Code
- Academic Integrity
- USU Academic Policies and Procedures
- Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy

Emergency Procedures
In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building by the sound of the fire/emergency alarm system or by a building representative. In the event of a disaster that may interfere with either notification, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., in an earthquake when shaking ceases or immediately when a fire is discovered). Turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs.

**Mental Health**

Mental health is critically important for the success of USU students. As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, 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 your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University provides free services for students to assist them with addressing these and other concerns. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at [Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)](Links to an external site.). Students are also encouraged to download the “SafeUT App” ([Links to an external site.]) to their smartphones. The SafeUT application is a 24/7 statewide crisis text and tip service that provides real-time crisis intervention to students through texting and a confidential tip program that can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide related issues.