Phil 1200 Social Ethics

Course Description

In this course, we will think critically about contemporary moral issues. First, we'll consider various meta ethical questions: Is ethics subjective; do the right answers to moral questions depend on the sentiments of individuals? Is ethics culturally relative; do the answers to ethical questions vary from one culture to the next? Does ethics come from the commands of God?

Next, we'll discuss objective moral theories. Is utilitarianism true; should we make ethical decisions based on what achieves the greatest good for the greatest number? Is deontology true; does the moral status of an action depend on the intentions of the person performing it? Is virtue theory true; ought morality to be a matter of developing certain traits of character? Is care ethics true; do our moral obligations arise out of the care relationships that we take on?

Finally (and for the majority of the course) we'll discuss some of the most pressing social issues of our day. This course is, in many ways, "ripped from the headlines." We'll discuss issues that we all have to make moral decisions about in the here and now. Issues this semester will include: public health and the ethics of pandemics, civil disobedience and ethical issues pertaining to the criminal justice system, poverty and economic justice, environmental and animal ethics, and the ethics of technology.

Course Objectives

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

1. Work through moral issues in nuanced and thoughtful ways.
2. Identify, understand, and reasonably respond to the points of view of people with whom you disagree.
3. Articulate the major moral theories in a way that indicates familiarity with some of the history of moral thought.

Instructor

Rachel D. Robison-Greene, Ph.D.
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Office: Old Main 002H
Office Hours: Fridays from 2:30-3:20 and by appointment on Zoom.
Course Resources

Textbook:

- Other readings are available here on Canvas.

Course Requirements

Each student will:

1. Contribute to weekly discussion boards. Each student must provide their own response to the question prompt and respond in a meaningful way to the contribution of another student. (200 points, 20% of the course grade).
2. Take two exams, a midterm (250 points, 25% of the course grade) and a final (250 points, 25% of the course grade).
   - Midterm Exam available on Canvas February 24-February 26th.
   - Final Exam available on Canvas April 29th-May 5th.
3. Complete a series of Case Study Assignments, building to a final paper. (300 points, 30% of the course grade). Students will identify an ethical issue that is prominent in the news and write a case study on that issue. This assignment will be scaffolded; the student will do a series of assignments on Canvas throughout the semester that will assist them in completing their final case study paper at the end of the semester. Students may not write on abortion.
   - Case Study Assignment One (50 points). Due Monday, March 8th.
   - Case Study Assignment Two (50 points). Due Monday, March 22nd.
   - Case Study Assignment Three (200 points). Due Monday, April 12th.
Evaluation Methods and Criteria

Rubrics will be available for each assignment so students can get a sense of how they will be graded.

Grade Scheme

The following grading scheme will be used in this class:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100 % to 93.0%</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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PART ONE: METAETHICS AND NORMATIVE ETHICS

Week One (January 19th-January 22nd):

**Introduction to Ethics.** The big questions for this week are: What are ethics? How do ethics differ from etiquette? How do they differ from law? How do they differ from religion? What is normativity and why does it matter?

*Reading(s):*

* Morality and Moral Philosophy by William K. Frankena ([Links to an external site.](https://example.com)) (Exploring Ethics Chapter One)

*Due January 22nd: Discussion One: Introductions*

Week Two (January 25th-January 29th):

**Metaethics: Subjectivism, Relativism.** The big questions for this week are: Are ethical questions resolved by taste or sentiment? Do ethics vary from one culture to another? Or, instead, are ethics objective?

*Reading(s):*

* How Not to Answer Moral Questions by Tom Regan

* The Challenge of Cultural Relativism by James Rachels ([Links to an external site.](https://example.com))

*Due January 29th: Discussion Two.*

Week Three (February 1st-February 5th):

**Introduction to Ethical Theory and Virtue Ethics.** The big questions for this week are: What have the major ethical theories been throughout history? What does it mean to have a good moral character? What is the best way to develop good traits of character?

*Reading(s):*

* The Nature of Virtue by Aristotle ([Links to an external site.](https://example.com)) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Sixteen).

* Virtue Ethics by Julia Driver ([Links to an external site.](https://example.com)) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Seventeen).

*Due February 5th: Discussion Three.*

Week Four (February 8th-February 12th):

**Deontology.** The big questions for this week are: What reasons do we have for thinking that intentions are relevant to ethics? What is *universalizability* and why does it matter? What
does it mean to make an exception of oneself? What is the relationship between morality and autonomy?

Reading(s):
  * The Categorical Imperative by Immanuel Kant (from his work Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals) (Links to an external site.) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Twelve).
  * A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics by Onora O'Neill (Links to an external site.) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Thirteen).

Due February 12th: Discussion Four.

Week Five (February 16th-February 19th):

Utilitarianism. The big questions for the week are: What is the relationship between consequences and ethics? What kinds of consequences matter? Does ethics require impartiality? If so, why?

Reading(s):
  * Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill (Links to an external site.) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Fourteen).
  * The Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism by Louis P. Pojman (Links to an external site.) The Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism (Exploring Ethics Chapter Fifteen)

Due February 19th: Discussion Five.

Week Six (February 22- February 26th):

Care Ethics and Midterm Exam. The big questions for the week are: What role do our relationships play in our moral obligations? What is care? What is the relationship between care and ethics?

Reading(s):
  * The Ethics of Care by Virginia Held (Links to an external site.) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Eighteen).

Midterm Exam available on Canvas February 24-February 26th.

PART TWO: APPLIED ETHICS

Week Seven (March 1st-March 5th): Ethics and Pandemics Part One. The big questions for this week are: what are our moral obligations to members to other members of our community during emergencies like pandemics? What is moral luck and how does it apply to pandemics?

Reading(s):
Moral Luck, Universalization, and COVID-19 by Rachel Robison-Greene.

Due March 5th: Discussion Six.

Week Eight (March 8th-March 12th): Ethics and Pandemics Part Two. The big questions for this week are: What can a tragedy like the COVID-19 pandemic tell us about failures in our health care system? How might we think of our system of health in a broader way so that we can prevent inequitable treatment from occurring in the future? At this point we will have discussed some of the considerations in favor of lockdowns. What are the most compelling arguments against them?

Reading(s):

The Predictable Inequities of COVID-19 in the US: Fundamental Causes and Broken Institutions (Links to an external site.) by Sean A. Valles.

COVID-19 and Systemic Racism by Rachel Robison-Greene

To Lock Down or No to Lock Down by Peter Singer

Due March 8th: Ethics Case Study Assignment One.

Due March 12th: Discussion Seven.

Week Nine (March 15th-March 19th): The Ethics of Civil Disobedience and Protest. The big questions for this week are: What is civil disobedience and when, if ever, is it justified? What obligations do we have to obey the laws? What is non-violent direct action and how does one prepare for it? Under what conditions would it be justify to pursue social change by any means necessary?

Reading(s):

Crito by Plato (Links to an external site.) (Exploring Ethics Chapter Two)

Letter from a Birmingham Jail (Links to an external site.) by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Due March 19th: Discussion Eight.

Week Ten (March 22nd-March 26th): Animal Ethics Part One. The big questions for this week are: What characteristics does a being need to have in order for it to be deserving of moral consideration? What is the difference between saying that non-human animals have rights and saying that we should care about the welfare of non-human animals? What should we think about practices such as using animals for food, entertainment, clothing, and research?

Reading(s):
A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation by Peter Singer

Due March 22nd: Ethics Case Study Assignment Two.
Due March 26th: Discussion Nine.

Week Eleven (March 29th - April 2nd): Animal Ethics Part Two. What does it mean to say that animals have rights? How might our obligations to non-human animals be different if we conclude that they have rights than they might have been if we concluded only that we ought to care for their welfare? Do only beings that can exercise autonomy have rights? Does the possession of rights require the ability to understand those rights?

Reading(s):

The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights by Tom Regan
Why Animals Have No Rights by Carl Cohen (On Canvas)

Due April 2nd: Discussion Ten.

Week Twelve (April 5th - April 8th): Poverty and Economic Justice. The big questions for this week are: What are our obligations to the global poor? What arguments exist in favor of providing considerably more assistance to the global poor than we currently do? What arguments exist against that idea?

Reading(s):

Accessibility score: Medium Click to improve Famine, Affluence, and Morality by Peter Singer
Lifeboat Ethics by Garett Hardin (Links to an external site.)

Week Thirteen (April 12th - April 16th): Ethics and Technology. The big questions for this week are: How has the nature of our moral obligations changed as technology has developed? What kinds of technology present challenging new moral questions? How might trolley problems inform our decision making when it comes to making decisions involving new technologies? How ought we to program self-driving cars? Should they always favor the driver? Should they benefit the greatest number?

Reading(s):

Accessibility score: Low Click to improve The Trolley Problem by Judith Jarvis Thomson
Turning the Trolley by Judith Jarvis Thomson

Why Ethics Matters for Autonomous Cars by Patrick Lin

Due April 12th: Ethics Case Study Assignment Three

Week Fourteen (April 19th-April 23rd): Catch-Up and Review

Week Fifteen (April 26th- April 29th): Final Exam

Final Exam available on Canvas April 29th-May 5th.

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 (Links to an external site.)

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 Protocols

In order to continue to provide a high standard of instruction at USU, and to limit the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic, students are asked to follow certain classroom protocols. These protocols are in place not only for your safety but also the safety of the rest of the
campus community. You will be asked to clean your desk area at the start of each class, sit in designated seats, wear face coverings, and follow dismissal instructions. There may be individual medical circumstances that prevent some students from using face coverings. These circumstances will be rare, but if they do exist, we ask that everyone be respectful. It is imperative that we each do our part so that on-campus instruction can continue.

**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](http://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](#)

**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](#) 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](#) 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](#)), 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 Selected Academic Policies and Procedures
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).

Students are also encouraged to download the "SafeUT App" 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.