

Philosophy 2367: Contemporary Social and Moral Problems

Instructor: Evan Thomas

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This syllabus is tentative and subject to change.

Class Meetings:

TuTH 3:55Pm-5:15PM Smith Lab 1042

Office Hours:

M 10:00am-12:00pm on Zoom

Required Text : All readings will be posted to Carmen.

Course Description

We live in a very unequal world. This course explores two related questions about this inequality. Firstly, what if anything do we owe to those that are less fortunate than us? Secondly, how should we think about inequalities relating to class, race, gender, disability, and species membership.

General Education Information

This course satisfies the following GE's:

GE Diversity: Social Diversity in the US - The goal of courses in this category is to foster an understanding of the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States.

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.

We will achieve these outcomes by philosophically engaging with social and moral issues.

GE Writing and Communication: level 2 - The goal of this category is to develop skills in writing, reading, critical thinking, and oral 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.

We will achieve these outcomes through the practice of philosophy.

What to Expect in the Classroom

Pretty much everything that we discuss in this course is going to be challenging and controversial. Almost certainly, you will be exposed to ideas and arguments that you disagree with and which you might even find offensive. Because of this, I cannot guarantee that you will be comfortable in class-- discussing challenging and controversial content can often be uncomfortable. What I can guarantee you is that I will always strive to promote respectful and compassionate dialogue. I ask that you do the same, and that you come to class open either to changing your mind or at least to learning more about opposing viewpoints. If you think that it might be particularly difficult for you to discuss certain topics, then you might consider not coming to class on the days we discuss those topics.

A typical class period covering a course reading might look like the following. I will get class started by giving a very brief lecture to make sure that we are all on the same page about core ideas and arguments from the reading. After that, the remainder of the period will primarily be spent discussing issues raised by the reading. So, you should come prepared to discuss. In these discussions, I will challenge and raise questions for the various perspectives articulated by students so that we all have an opportunity to think more deeply about our own and opposing viewpoints. I won't necessarily shy away from sharing my own views, and I encourage you to challenge and raise questions about them as well. The more that discussion facilitation is a responsibility shared by everyone involved, the better!

Respect and Inclusivity

I expect everyone, including myself, to communicate in this course in a way that affirmatively demonstrates respect for everyone in the room and that does not disparage the inherent worth and dignity of any person or group of people.

Academic Integrity

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish 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. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

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.

Grading

Attendance:

- Attendance is not mandatory, but can boost your final grade. If you have “excellent” attendance, then your final grade will be boosted by 2/3 of a letter grade. If you have “fair” attendance, then your final grade will be boosted by 1/3 of a letter grade. Excellent attendance means that you have no unexcused absences. An absence is excused as long as you communicate with me either before or 24 hours after the absence. So, for example, if you shoot me an email saying you won’t be coming to class today for health or personal reasons, then the absence is excused. Fair attendance means that you have no more than 3 unexcused absences.

Short Question/Engagement Posts: 20%

- On the Carmen “People” page, you will be sorted into 4 groups: Group A, B, C, D.
- On the syllabus reading schedule, you will see which days of class you are required to make a short question/engagement post on a Carmen discussion board the **day before** the material you engage with is discussed in class. Come to class prepared to discuss your post.
- Posts should meet the following expectations:
 1. Posts should either i) request clarification or ask a substantive non-rhetorical question, ii) raise a problem for an idea or argument from the reading, iii) make an argument that develops ideas or arguments from the reading.
 2. Any question you ask should not be easily answerable using google.
 3. Any question should be one that I am prepared to engage with given my expertise in philosophy and ethics. Your question should not, for example, be about sociology, the law, history, natural sciences, or some other field that I am not an expert in.
 4. If you ask a question requesting clarification you need to make sufficiently clear *why* you are confused about some part of course material. It will not suffice, for example, to write a single sentence requesting clarification about topic X. Instead, you need to explain what you think about the topic and what in particular is tripping you up about the topic.
 5. In order to go into sufficient detail, it will be necessary to write at least a large paragraph.
 6. Avoid open ended questions that aren’t clearly relevant to assessing the philosophical merit of the ideas and arguments of the readings. Also avoid asking a series of questions as opposed to one solidly developed question.

Home work 15%

- There are 4 homework assignments due before the Thursday class sessions of weeks 2-5.
- Bring your homework assignments to class on Thursday (digital copies are fine) and be prepared to share them with your peers.

1st Writing Assignment 2-3 pages: 20%

- Due before class on **2/17**.
- In this assignment you'll be asked to charitably explain an argument from one of the assigned readings and make a substantial objection to the argument. A prompt will be provided.

1st Paper Revision 2-3 pages: 20%

- Due before class on **3/24**.

Final paper 3-5 pages: 25%

- Due before class on **4/21**.
- In this assignment you'll be asked to charitably explain an argument, make a substantial objection, and then reply to this objection. A prompt will be provided.
- The final paper can be based on your first paper or be on a topic of your choosing. If you choose your own topic, you must get it approved by me.

Late Assignments

- For each day late that a writing assignment is turned in, your grade for that assignment will suffer a 10% penalty.

Questions about Grades

- If you are interested in meeting to discuss feedback or a grade, please wait at least 24 hours after you receive the grade back before scheduling to meet with me. Then please shoot me a brief email explaining what questions you have.

Reading Schedule (see the following two pages)

<p><i>Week 1</i> 1/11: Syllabus & Class Discussion Reading: None</p>	<p>1/13: Responsibility Reading: "It's not Your Fault, but it is Your Responsibility" Evan Thomas (your instructor) Group A Posts</p>
<p><i>Week 2</i> 1/18: Equality & Justice Reading: "Economic Justice and Economic Inequality" Russ Shafer-Landau Group B Posts</p>	<p>1/20: Intro to Logic No new readings HW 1 due</p>
<p><i>Week 3</i> 1/25: Equality and Justice Reading: "The Entitlement Theory of Justice" Robert Nozick Group C Posts</p>	<p>1/27: How to Write a Philosopher Paper No new readings HW 2 due</p>
<p><i>Week 4</i> 2/1: Equality and Justice Reading: "A Theory of Justice" John Rawls Group D Posts</p>	<p>2/3: Writing Intros No new readings HW 3 due</p>
<p><i>Week 5</i> 2/8: Equality and Justice Reading: Sections from "What is the Point of Equality?" Elizabeth Anderson Group A Posts</p>	<p>2/10: Writing Premise-Paragraphs No new readings HW 4 due</p>
<p><i>Week 6</i> 2/15: Oppression Reading: "The Five Faces of Oppression" Iris Marion Young Group B Posts</p>	<p>2/17: No new readings First Paper Due</p>
<p><i>Week 7</i> 2/22: Racism and Racial Justice Reading: "The Case for Reparations" Ta-Nehisi Coates Group C Posts</p>	<p>2/24: No new readings</p>
<p><i>Week 8</i> 3/1: Racism and Racial Justice "Racism and Neo-Racisms" Naomi Zack Group D Posts</p>	<p>3/3: Reading: "Racisms" Kwame Anthony Appiah Group A Posts</p>

<p><i>Week 9</i> 3/8: Racism and Racial Justice Reading: "What is Racism" Ijeoma Oluo Group B Posts</p>	<p>3/10: Sexism and Gender Justice Reading: "Feminism Parts 1 and 2" Annaleigh Curtis Group C Posts</p>
<p><i>Week 10—Spring Break</i> 3/15: No class</p>	<p>3/17: No class</p>
<p><i>Week 11</i> 3/22: Sexism and Gender Justice Reading: "The Politics of Work and Family" Jennifer Mather Saul Group D Posts</p>	<p>3/24: Intersectionality Reading: TBD Revised First Paper Due Group A Posts</p>
<p><i>Week 12</i> 3/29: Abortion Reading: "Why Abortion is Immoral" Don Marquis Group B Posts</p>	<p>3/31: Reading: "A Defense of Abortion" Judith Jarvis Thomson Group C Posts</p>
<p><i>Week 13</i> 4/5: Ableism and Disability Justice Reading: "People with Disabilities" Anita Silvers Group D Posts</p>	<p>4/7: Workshop papers No new reading</p>
<p><i>Week 14</i> 4/12: Ableism and Disability Justice Reading: "Equality, Dignity, and Disability" Eva Feder Kittay</p>	<p>4/14: Workshop papers No new reading</p>
<p><i>Week 15</i> 4/19: Speciesism and Species Justice Reading: "Against Human Supremacy" Evan Thomas</p>	<p>4/21: Reading: "The Commonsense Argument for Plant-Based Diets" Evan Thomas Final Paper Due</p>