

# PHIL 106-150 PHILOSOPHY & CURRENT ISSUES: RELATIVISM, CHARITY, ANIMALS, & RACE

## DESCRIPTION

Sometimes it's easy to know what one should do: study hard, brush your teeth, eat healthy meals, be kind to your friends, don't steal. This class considers four topics in which figuring out what one should do, and *why*, is anything but easy. Imagine you are about to spend \$20 on a nice meal. Should you spend that money on yourself when that same \$20 could pay for the deworming of 60 school children in the developing world—one of the best ways to increase school completion rates? In general, our time, effort, money and attention can do tremendous good if it is directed towards the very needy instead of to ourselves or our friends and family; *should* we give our money, time or even our careers to helping those in need? Is it *immoral* not to? Having considered these questions about how we should treat human beings, we will turn to the topic of non-human animals. Can we eat them? Use them for scientific experimentation? Why or why not? And what, if anything, are our obligations towards them? Lastly, we will turn to the topic of race and racism: what is race? What is racism? How do they shape us? And how should racism be addressed?

This class does not offer simple answers; it equips students with the philosophical tools necessary for clear, systematic, and rigorous thought about these and other topics in ethics that we encounter in our everyday lives. Students in this writing intensive course will grow as creative and independent thinkers, with heavy emphasis placed on developing students' argumentative writing and developing the skills to read and unpack the arguments and ideas of others.

This course satisfies ACE 8 Ethics or ACE 9 Diversity (via the final assignment). It also meets the Human Diversity in U.S. Communities requirement for the College of Arts and Sciences.

## PREREQUISITES:

None

## INSTRUCTORS:

Prof. Quinn White, [qwhite@unl.edu](mailto:qwhite@unl.edu)

Guillermo Gonzalez, [ggonzalez7@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:ggonzalez7@huskers.unl.edu)

## MEETING TIMES:

Lectures: T/R 11-11:50 am, Zoom link (found in announcements)

Office Hours

Prof. White: Tuesday 12-2 pm (or by appointment), PHIL 315R

Recitation sections meet on Fridays; see your schedule and announcements to verify what section you are in.

## COURSE READINGS:

All readings will be available on the course website.

## GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

- Attendance, participation (20% of final grade).
  - Attendance at all lectures and sections is required.
  - To receive full credit in participation, a student must speak at least once a week, either in lecture or in section.
- Papers: (must be submitted via canvas)
  - Paper 1: Reconstruction (500 words) Due by 9/24, 5pm (20% of final grade)
  - Paper 2: Reconstruct and Evaluate (1000 words) Due by 10/29, 5 pm (25% of final grade)
  - Paper 3: Reconstruct and Evaluate (1250 words) Due by 12/11, 5 pm (35% of final grade)
- Late Policy
  - Students will have 3 free late days to use throughout the semester as they see fit. You can use these three days to turn papers in late without penalty and without having an excuse or prior approval. (For example, you could turn in Paper 1 two days late, Paper 2 on time, and Paper 3 one day late.) Unexcused late work beyond the first two days will lose  $\frac{1}{3}$  grade per day (e.g., a B paper will receive a B-). Extensions beyond the three late days will be granted with *prior* approval from either Prof. White or a TA for good reason.
- All Grades will be given on a 100 point scale (A+ is 97-100, A is a 96-93, A- is 92-90, and so on).

## ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- You should expect to disagree with things we read, your peers, me, and your TA. These disagreements may be vigorous but must always be reasoned and respectful.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. If in doubt about what counts as plagiarism, or about how to properly reference a source, me or your TA. Other forms of academic dishonesty include: double submission of papers, aiding dishonesty, and falsification of records. Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action and are granted due process and the right to appeal any decision. If academic dishonesty is proven, this can result in severe disciplinary consequences, which could include any or all of the following: a redo of the assignment for a reduced grade; failure on the assignment; failure of the course; a letter in the student's or referral to university disciplinary authorities. If you are tempted to plagiarize because you are in crisis, it is always better to speak to your me, your advisor, the academic deans, the counseling center, or another trusted authority on campus who can help you handle the crisis. For details about expectations, see the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

## SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary

medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options privately. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). If you are eligible for services and register with their office, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so they can be implemented in a timely manner. SSD contact information: 232 Canfield Admin. Bldg.; 402-472-3787.

## **WRITING CENTER**

The Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class as well as every course in which you enroll. Trained undergraduate and graduate peer consultants are available to talk with you about all forms of communication. You are welcome to bring in everything from lab reports, presentations, and research papers to cover letters, application essays, and graduate theses and dissertations. Writing Center Consultants can work with you at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming and organizing your ideas through polishing a final draft.

In 2020-21, there are two ways you can connect with a Consultant: Online (a real-time, video conversation) and eTutoring (email feedback). To learn more about these options and view video tutorials, please visit our Online Writing Services Page. You can sign up any time by visiting [unl.mywconline.com](http://unl.mywconline.com). For more information about the Writing Center, please visit [unl.edu/writing](http://unl.edu/writing).

## **ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES**

You can schedule free appointments for individual academic coaching with First-Year Experience and Transition Program staff through MyPLAN. You can also take advantage of study stops--which provide individual and group study with learning consultants in a variety of disciplines--and free group workshops on topics such as time management, goal setting, test preparation, and reading strategies. See [success.unl.edu](http://success.unl.edu) for schedules and more information.

## **COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

UNL offers a variety of options to students to aid them in dealing with stress and adversity. Counseling and Psychological & Services (CAPS); is a multidisciplinary team of psychologists and counselors that works collaboratively with Nebraska students to help them explore their feelings and thoughts and learn helpful ways to improve their mental, psychological and emotional well-being when issues arise. CAPS can be reached by calling 402-472-7450. Big Red Resilience & Well-Being (BRRWB) provides one-on-one well-being coaching to any student who wants to enhance their well-being. Trained well-being coaches help students create and be grateful for positive experiences, practice resilience and self-compassion, and find support as they need it. BRRWB can be reached by calling 402-472-8770.

## **FACE COVERINGS ARE REQUIRED**

An individual in this course has a documented need for face coverings to be required in this course. Without divulging personal or identifying information, such a documented need might be that a member of their household is unable to be vaccinated or has a health condition that makes vaccines less effective for them. As a result, the College of Arts and Science has determined that *face coverings*

*will be required in this course.* If you are unwilling to comply with this requirement, please visit with your advisor about different sections or possible alternative courses that you might take in lieu of this one.

## **SCHEDULE AND READINGS**

8/24: What is Ethics?

No readings

### **I. MORAL RELATIVISM**

8/26: What is Moral Relativism?

Harman, "Moral Relativism" (pp. 3-6)

8/31: The Argument from Disagreement

Harman, "Moral Relativism" (pp. 8-19)

9/2: Against Relativism

Thomson, pp. 204-6

Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (pp. 14-19, 21-24)

9/7: Against Relativism

Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (pp. 19-20, 24-31)

### **II. CHARITY**

9/9: Strangers in Need

Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

9/14: Looking to the Consequences

Mill, Utilitarianism, *selections*

Moyo, "Why Foreign Aid is Hurting Africa"

9/16: Charity or Politics?

Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, Ch. 10 "Kindness to Strangers" (155-74)

9/21: Worries about "Effective Altruism"

Srinivasan, "Stop the Robot Apocalypse"

9/23: Empowering those in need

O'Neill, "A Kantian Approach to World Hunger"

### **9/24: Paper 1 Due**

9/28: How Demanding are our Obligations to Others?

Wolf, "Moral Saints"

### III. NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

9/30: Animal Activism

Singer, *Animal Liberation*, Chapter 1 (pp. 1–23)

10/5: Do animals suffer?

Braithwaite, *Do Fish Feel Pain?*, Ch. 2 “What is Pain and Why does it Hurt” (pp. 25–45)

10/7: The Moral Significance of Being Human

Williams, “The Human Prejudice”

10/12: Humanity, Animals, Vermin and Fellow Creatures

Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People”

10/14: Kant on Animals

Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, Ch. 6 “Kant against the Animals, Part 1: The Indirect Duty View” (pp. 97–114)

10/19: Fall Break

10/21: A Contemporary Kantian account, Part I

Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, Ch. 8 “A Kantian Case for Our Obligations to Other Animals” (pp. 131–155)

10/26: A Contemporary Kantian account, Part II

No additional Reading

10/28: Individual and Collective Action

Kagan, *Do I Make A Difference?* (selections)

**10/29: Paper 2 Due, 5pm**

### IV. RACE AND RACISM

11/2: Double Consciousness

Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Selection

11/4: Is Racism a Feeling? A Belief?

Shelby, “Is Racism in the Heart?”

11/9: Racism as Ideology

Haslanger, “Racism, Ideology and Social Movements”

11/11: Racism and the Social Contract, Part I

Shelby, “Justice, Deviance and the Dark Ghetto”

11/13: Racism and the Social Contract, Part II

Shelby, “Justice, Deviance and the Dark Ghetto”

11/18: Race and Biology

Spencer, *What is Race* (selection)

11/23: A Social Constructivist View of Race

Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?"

11/25: Thanksgiving Break

11/30: Race and Gender

Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics"

11/2: Knowledge, Ignorance, and Race

Mills, "White Ignorance"

12/7: Reparations?

Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

12/9: Wrapping Up/Student's Choice

**12/11: Paper 3 Due, 5 pm**