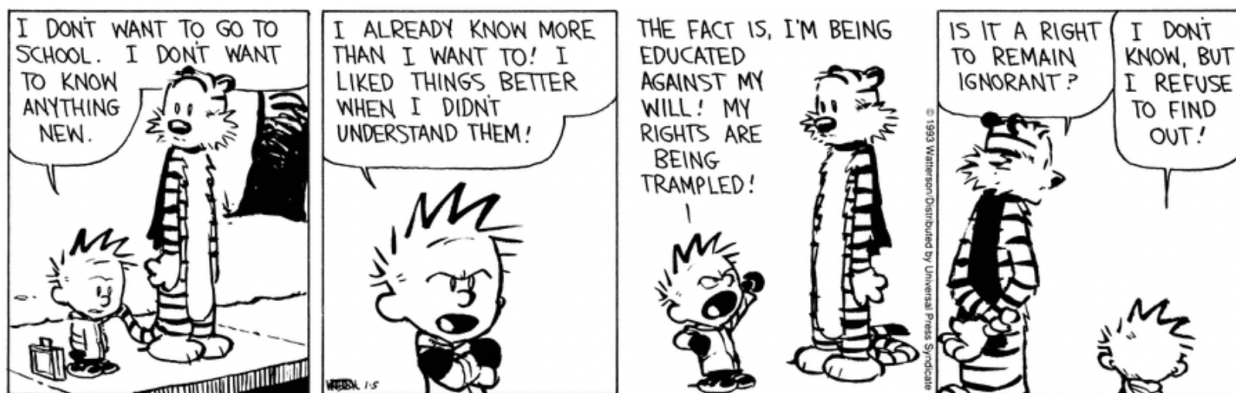


PHIL 202 – Ethics

Trimester 1, 2024 | Mondays & Wednesdays 15:10–17:00 | MYLT220

Office Hours: Mondays/Wednesdays 14:00–15:00 (or by appointment) in MY612

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The Course

This course is an examination of some major types of moral theory, exploring their structure and evaluating their plausibility. The focus will be on contemporary consequentialist theories and rights-based theories. Some of the course will approach these questions via an examination of concrete practical problems, such as whether citizens have the right to own a gun, and whether we should devote ourselves to reducing the risks of artificial intelligence. Our aim in class is to reconstruct these arguments and critically assess them. You will then be asked to engage with the philosophers we read by developing your own sustained arguments about the topics we have covered.

Assignments

For this course, you will take two tests, write two short essays (500 and 1,000 words, respectively), and write up to five very short papers (1-to-4 sentences). Here is how the grades for these assignments will be weighted:

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade	Due Date
Test 1	15	March 27
Essay 1	15	April 15
Test 2	25	May 29
Essay 2	25	June 7
Very Short Papers	20	See below

Essays

You will write two argumentative essays contesting the material that we have covered. Both essays will reconstruct an argument from one of the readings and then present and develop an original objection to that argument. We'll go over the details of how to write these essays later in the course.

Essay 1 must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on April 15. Essay 2 must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on June 7. If you need an extension, you must request one before the deadline and have a good reason for being granted an extension. Late submissions will be marked down 5% for each day that has elapsed since the deadline.

Very Short Papers

You will write up to five very short papers, starting with a one-sentence paper and potentially working your way up to a four-sentence paper. This series of assignments will use the *levels system*, which works as follows.

The Levels System

There are four levels, where your level determines the length of your next paper submission. If you are at Level 1, you will submit a one-sentence paper. If you are at Level 2, you will submit a two-sentence paper. If you are at Level 3 you will submit a three-sentence paper. And, if you are at Level 4, you will submit a four-sentence paper. Each paper will receive a grade out of 10.

Everyone starts out at Level 1. Each time you submit a high-quality paper—which is to say, the paper gets a grade of 8/10 or higher—then you move up to the next level. If your paper receives a grade lower than an 8/10, you will stay at your current level (meaning that your next submission will be the same length as the previous one). You can submit up to five short papers.

Your final grade for the assignment will be a function of (a) your earned points and (b) your level. Specifically: $[\text{your total points}] = [\text{the sum of your best four grades}] + [\text{your level}] \times 5$. You can earn up to 60 points, so the final grade is your total points divided by 60.

Here's an example of how this works:

Submission Number	Length	Grade	What Happens
1	1 sentence	9	Advance to Level 2
2	2 sentences	6	Remain at Level 2
3	2 sentences	10	Advance to Level 3
4	3 sentences	7	Remain at Level 3
5	3 sentences	8	Advance to Level 4

Your total points would then be the sum of your best four grades ($9 + 10 + 7 + 8 = 34$) plus your level (4) multiplied by five ($4 \times 5 = 20$). Thus, you would get a 54/60 on this assignment.

Topics for Very Short Papers

Each very short paper will critically discuss one of the assigned readings. You can choose which readings to discuss, but can only write one very short paper per assigned reading. (You can write an essay and a very short paper on the same reading).

For each reading, a one-sentence paper about that reading will present a major thesis from the reading and the author's reason for endorsing that thesis. A two-sentence paper will add an objection to the thesis/reason. A three-sentence paper will add a potential reply to that objection. And a four-sentence paper will add a critical assessment of that reply. See the "Very Short Papers" handout for more details.

Submitting your Papers

Each very short paper that you write must be submitted *prior to the start of the class that covers the reading it discusses*. Late submissions will not be counted. **All submissions should be sent in the body of an email to my Gmail account** (in the header of the syllabus). Additionally, you must submit at least two very short papers prior to the mid-trimester break. You will receive a 0/10 for each paper you do not submit, where these count toward the total number of very short papers you are permitted to write (5).

Plagiarism and ChatGPT

Everything that you turn in should be written by you without consulting any resources beyond the assigned readings and me. Assignments found to contain copied material will be subject to disciplinary action. The use of ChatGPT and other LLMs is particularly discouraged, as (a) it will keep you from practicing the skills you are trying to develop, (b) they produce tedious writing that's annoying to encounter when marking, and (c) they can be unreliable when it comes to doing the kind of reasoning that is crucial in philosophy essays (see below).



You

Monty Hall offers you the chance to choose from between two doors, door 1 and door 2. Behind one door is a car, and the other a goat, and Monty knows which is which but you don't. You choose door number 1. Before opening the door, Monty opens door number 2 to reveal a goat. He then offers you the chance to switch to door number 2 or keep your original choice. What is the optimal move?



ChatGPT

The scenario you've described is a variation of the famous Monty Hall problem, a probability puzzle based on a game show scenario. In the traditional Monty Hall problem, there are three doors, but in your version, there are only two doors, which changes the dynamics of the problem.

In the standard three-door version, it is always statistically advantageous to switch doors after Monty reveals a goat behind one of the unchosen doors. This is because initially, you have a 1/3 chance of picking the car and a 2/3 chance of picking a goat. When Monty, who knows where the car is, opens a door to reveal a goat, the probability of the car being behind the other unopened door goes up to 2/3 if you initially chose a goat (which you did with 2/3 probability).

However, in your two-door version, the situation is different. You initially choose one of the two doors, and then Monty, knowing what's behind them, opens the other door to reveal a goat. Since there are only two doors and Monty will always reveal a goat, the odds of the car being behind either door remain equal - 1/2.

In this two-door scenario, there is no statistical advantage to switching doors. The probability of the car being behind either door is the same, so the optimal move is simply a matter of personal preference. You can either stick with your original choice or switch to the other door, but your chances of winning the car are 50/50 either way.

PB

You

What is a four-letter animal that, when you reverse its letters, becomes the name of a plant?



ChatGPT

That's a clever riddle! The answer is "bear" and "brae."

PB

You

No it isn't. You have to reverse the letters.



ChatGPT

Ah, my bad! Let's try that again. The correct answer is "rats" and "star."

PB

You

Star isn't a plant



ChatGPT

Oops, my mistake again. How about "taco" and "coat"?

Democracy in the Classroom

In this course, students are given the final say regarding all matters that pertain to its content and the delivery of the material. You are free to propose any changes to the course that you would like (e.g., changing what we read), with a class vote then determining if those changes are adopted. Any proposed changes to the course must be announced one week prior to a vote to allow for adequate time for discussion. Anyone who wants to propose a change should email me before class so that I can announce it.

Readings

Consequentialism

February 28

J.J.C. Smart "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics"

March 4

Peter Singer "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

March 6

Hilary Greaves, William McAskill, and Elliott Thornley "The Moral Case for Long-Term Thinking"

March 11

Emma J. Curran "Longtermism, Aggregation, and Catastrophic Risk"

March 13

Peter Singer "Equality for Animals?"

March 18

Holly M. Smith "Alternatives"

March 20

Elinor Mason "Objectivism and Prospectivism About Rightness"

March 25

Richard Yetter Chappell "Deontic Pluralism and the Right Amount of Good"

March 27

TEST 1

(Mid-Trimester Break)

Theories of Rights

April 15

Judith Jarvis Thomson *The Realm of Rights*, ch. 1

April 17

Danny Frederick "Pro-Tanto Versus Absolute Rights"

April 22

Joseph Raz "The Nature of Rights"

April 24

Hillel Steiner *An Essay on Rights*, pp. 55-73

April 29

Renée Jorgensen "Moral Risk and Communicating Consent"

May 1

Hallie Liberto "Coercion, Consent, and the Mechanistic Question"

May 6

Allan Gibbard "Natural Property Rights"

May 8

Judith Jarvis Thomson "A Defense of Abortion"

May 13

David Sobel "Backing Away from Libertarian Self-Ownership"

May 15

Michael Huemer "Is There a Right to Own a Gun?"

May 20

Frances Kamm "Rights and Aggregation in a Pandemic"

May 22

Tom Regan "The Case for Animal Rights"

May 27

Daniel Corrigan "Human Rights and Rights of Nature"

May 29

TEST 2