

Moral & Social Problems
Philosophy 103, MWF, 2-2:50pm, Eddy 200
CSU Syllabus – FALL 2023

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

Instructor: Josh Brekel (He/Him/His)

Office: Eddy 232

Email: josh.brekel@colostate.edu

Office Hours: 11am—Noon, Mondays & Wednesdays. Also available by appointment.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT (GTA) INFORMATION:

Instructor: Antonio (Tony) Aguilar (He/Him/His)

Office: Eddy 229

Email: Antonio.Aguilar@colostate.edu

Office Hours: 1-2pm Tuesdays & Thursday. Also available by appointment.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Lafollette, Hugh. *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 5th Edition.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course aims to analyze relevant moral and social problems in the service of introducing students to the academic study of philosophy. The course will begin with an overview of how philosophical methods can be used as tools for clear-thinking. Then, we will consider some popular ethical theories, which will provide students with the tools needed to contemplate the nature of key moral issues. Finally, we will apply philosophical methods and ethical theories to various moral and social problems, with the goal of understanding the nuances of the debates around those moral and social problems. It is my hope that careful analysis of these issues can provide students with the tools they need to consider the moral issues that arise in their lives.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will examine the details of various ethical issues, all of which are relevant to their lives (in some way). Furthermore, students will develop an understanding of the nature of the philosophical arguments in favor of various positions on those ethical issues. Study of academic philosophy cultivates other valuable skills as well. During every class session this semester, we will carefully examine philosophical arguments and texts. By engaging in close-reading of complex works, students will hone their ability to retain information and gain understanding via reading. Throughout the semester, students will also practice the craft of argumentative writing. Many of the course assignments give students the

opportunity to refine their ability to write in a clear, charitable, and persuasive manner. The three overarching goals of this course are to:

1. Improve student reading comprehension,
2. Improve student argumentative writing,
3. Demonstrate the value provided by close study of philosophy and philosophical ethics.

DIVERSITY & RESPECT OF OTHERS:

To provide the most benefit possible, philosophical inquiry requires diversity in perspectives. In this class, the perspective of each student matters, regardless of the student's race, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, ancestry, and religious or political views.

Not only is it your right to be passionate about the issues considered in this course, but it can be philosophically commendable to approach these issues with some degree of intensity. However, philosophical contemplation requires open-mindedness. As your instructor, part of my job is to put pressure on your opinions and help you consider the value in the opinions with which you disagree. By considering ways in which your long-held, passionate opinions (whatever those happen to be) might be mistaken, you will (hopefully) gain more respect for the gravity of the issues, the perspectives of others, as well as a better understanding of the ways to support your own views.

Not only will disagreements occur—they are welcome in this class. Keep your fellow *classmates* in mind and engage in disagreements in a respectful manner. You are welcome to fervently disagree with the opinions of others, but it is **never** acceptable to disrespect the *people* who hold those opinions. Remember: **RAMS TAKE CARE OF RAMS**. If something I or another student says offends you, then let me know so that we can work together to resolve the issue.

EXPECTATIONS:

Academic credits are expected to meet the federal credit hour definition of **2-3 hours** of work outside of class **for every hour** of time spent in class. Basic class expectations include the following:

- Come to class,
- Carefully read the listed readings **prior** to class,
- Be willing to engage in class discussion, and
- Complete listed assignments by the listed due dates.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Academic integrity is taken seriously in this course. It is expected that students will maintain a high standard of academic integrity—cheating will not be tolerated. This course will adhere to the CSU Academic Integrity Policy as found on the Student's Responsibilities page of the CSU General Catalog and in the Student Conduct Code. Unless written permission is given by the instructor, the use of

ChatGPT, Google Bard, or other Large-Language Models (LLM) is strictly prohibited and will be treated as academic misconduct. At an absolute minimum, instances of academic misconduct will result in a substantial grade penalty on the assignment. Often, academic misconduct is grounds for a failing grade in the course and a report to the Office of Student Resolution Center. Talk to the instructor if you have questions about academic integrity.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

The course assignments are described in the table below.

Category	Description	Final Grade Allocation
Skill-Building Assignments	Throughout the semester, there will be 5 low-stakes assignments designed to build your philosophical skills.	4% each, 20% total
Class Participation	<p>Each day, attendance will be taken via a sign-in sheet or a free-writing exercise. I do not require perfect attendance, but regular attendance is vital to class success. Signing the sign-up sheet and then immediately leaving class is a violation of academic integrity. I reserve the right to use unannounced (“pop”) reading quizzes to ensure consistent class participation.</p> <p>Frequent participation in philosophical inquiry can only improve this aspect of your course grade. Participation includes (but is not limited to): in-class discussion, philosophical discussions in office hours, or digital communication about non-administrative course topics.</p>	10%
Papers	<p>You will be required to write 2 short papers. The paper topics will be given out approximately two weeks before the paper’s due date. Paper topics focus on clear and accurate presentation of class readings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper #1 is worth 15% of your overall course grade. • Paper #2 is worth 20% of your course grade. <p><u>To pass the course, you MUST complete BOTH paper assignments; in other words, failure to submit a paper results in a failing grade.</u></p>	35%
Exams	<p>There will be one closed-book midterm exam which will count for 15% of your overall grade.</p> <p>There will be a closed-book, cumulative final exam. The final exam will test your understanding of the course material and your ability to connect that material to the larger story of the course. The final exam counts for 20% of your course grade.</p> <p>There is a chance that there will be small extra credit opportunities on the exam(s). All extra credit is up to the instructor’s discretion.</p> <p><u>To pass the course, you MUST take BOTH exams; failure to do so will result in a failing grade.</u></p>	35%

GRADING SCHEME:

On individual assignments, this course uses letter grades corresponding to the grading scheme below.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade	Percentage
A+	100 to 96.5	B/B-	68.49 to 65	D+	36.99 to 33.5
A+/A	96.49 to 93	B-	64.99 to 61.5	D+/D	33.49 to 30
A	92.99 to 89.5	B-/C+	61.49 to 58	D	29.99 to 26.5
A/A-	89.49 to 86	C+	57.99 to 54.5	D/D-	26.49 to 23
A-	85.99 to 82.5	C+/C	54.49 to 51	D-	22.99 to 19.5
A-/B+	82.49 to 79.0	C	50.99 to 47.5	F	19.49 to 0
B+	78.99 to 75.5	C/C-	47.49 to 44		
B+/B	75.49 to 72	C-	43.99 to 40.5		
B	71.99 to 68.5	C-/D+	40.49 to 37		

For the overall course grade, the instructor will calculate each student's average letter grade weighted by the assignments listed in Course Assignments section above. Then, the instructor will report the nearest allowed letter grade to the CSU Registrar's Office.

LATE-WORK POLICY:

Late work will be subject to penalty of **one letter grade step per day late** unless:

- The student provides official documentation (from the university) that explains why the assignment was turned in late.

There are **no exceptions** to this policy. This course uses a generous grading scheme and late policy in recognition of the difficulty of balancing college with other aspects of life. However, success in college requires a certain level of dedication and commitment from students. For those reasons, official documentation is the only way to avoid being penalized for late work.

If University-sanctioned extracurricular/co-curricular activities or religious holidays prevent a student from attending class, then it is the responsibility of that student to notify the instructor prior to the anticipated absence. Furthermore, it is the student's responsibility to take the initiative to make-up missed work in a timely fashion. In other words, let the instructor know about any absences or conflicts before they occur so that we can work together to find a solution.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

This is an extremely tentative plan for the semester. As the semester proceeds, it may become necessary to check Canvas for updates to the reading schedule. If you have questions about the reading schedule, then ask those questions in class, office hours, or via email. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that

they are staying up-to-date with the course readings and assignments. Anthology readings are purple, Canvas readings are red.

Week	Date	Class Meeting	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due
1	8/21/23	1	Syllabus		
	8/23/23	2	The Nature (and Danger?) of Philosophy	Schur, "Introduction" from <i>How to Be Perfect</i> (Canvas)	
	8/25/23	3	The Nature (and Danger?) of Philosophy		
2	8/28/23	4	Reading Workshop	Kaplan, "How to Read Philosophy" (Video, Canvas)	
	8/30/23	5	Moral Skepticism	Morrow, "Chapter 9: Skepticism, Subjectivism, and Relativism" from <i>Moral Reasoning</i> (Canvas)	
	9/1/23	6	Moral Skepticism		SBA#1 (Reading)
3	9/4/23	Labor Day; no class			
	9/6/23	7	Divine Command Theory	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (Canvas)	
	9/8/23	8	Writing Workshop		
4	9/11/23	9	Consequentialism	Shaw, "Consequentialism" (A#1)	
	9/13/23	10	Consequentialism	Schur, <i>How to Be Perfect</i> , pages 48-51 (Canvas)	SBA#2 (Writing)
	9/15/23	11	Deontology	McNaughton and Rawling, "Deontology" (A#2)	
5	9/18/23	12	Virtue Ethics	Schur, <i>How to Be Perfect</i> , Chapter 1 (Canvas)	
	9/20/23	13	Virtue Ethics	Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory" (A#4)	
	9/22/23	14	Theory Review		Paper#1

6	9/25/23	15	Death Penalty	Pojman, "In Defense of the Death Penalty" (A#51)	
	9/27/23	16	Death Penalty	Reiman, "Against the Death Penalty" (A#52)	
	9/29/23	17	Death Penalty	Metz, "African Values and Capital Punishment" (Canvas)	
7	10/2/23	18	Death Penalty		
	10/4/23	19	Catch-Up Day		
	10/6/23	20	Midterm		Midterm
8	10/9/23	21	Free Speech	Arthur, "Sticks and Stones" (#35)	
	10/11/23	22	Free Speech	Altman, "Speech Codes and Expressive Harm" (A#36)	
	10/13/23	23	Free Speech		
9	10/16/23	24	Euthanasia	Beauchamp, "Justifying Physician-Assisted Deaths" (A#5)	
	10/18/23	25	Euthanasia	Velleman, "Against the Right to Die" (A#6)	
	10/20/23	26	Euthanasia	Hardwig, "Dying at the Right Time: Reflections on (Un)assisted Suicide" (A#8)	
10	10/23/23	27	Euthanasia		
	10/25/23	28	Abortion	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (A#10)	SBA#3 (Reading)
	10/27/23	29	Abortion	Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion is Wrong" (A#12)	
11	10/30/23	30	Abortion	Little, "The Moral Permissibility of Abortion" (A#13)	

	11/1/23	31	Abortion		
	11/3/23	32	Catch-Up Day		
12	11/6/23	33	Writing Workshop		
	11/8/23	34	Animals	Singer, "All Animals Are Equal" (A#15)	SBA#4 (Writing)
	11/10/23	35	Animals	Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" (A#17)	
13	11/13/23	36	Environment	Rolston, "Animal Welfare and Environmental Ethics" (Canvas)	
	11/15/23	37	Environment	Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Moral Corruption" (A#26)	
	11/17/23	38	Animals & Environment		Paper#2
14	11/20/23	Thanksgiving break; no class			
	11/22/23				
	11/24/23				
15	11/27/23	39	Environment		
	11/29/23	40	Poverty	Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (A#61)	
	12/1/23	41	Poverty	Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" (A#62)	
16	12/4/23	42	Poverty	Woollard, "Saving Strangers: What Does Morality Demand?" (Canvas)	SBA#5 (Reflection)
	12/6/23	43	Poverty		
	12/8/23	44	Review		
17	12/14/23	45	Final Exam	11:50am-1:50pm	Final Exam

NOTE:

COURSE CONTENT NOTE: CSU's Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Stalking, and Retaliation policy designates faculty and employees of the University as "Responsible Employees." This designation is consistent with federal law and guidance, and requires faculty to report information regarding students who may have experienced any form of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking or retaliation. This includes information shared with faculty in person, electronic communications or in class assignments. As "Responsible Employees," faculty may refer students to campus resources (see below), together with informing the Office of Support and Safety Assessment to help ensure student safety and welfare. Information regarding sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking and retaliation is treated with the greatest degree of confidentiality possible while also ensuring student and campus safety.

Any student who may be the victim of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking or retaliation is encouraged to report to CSU through one or more of the following resources:

- Emergency Response 911
- Deputy Title IX Coordinator/Office of Support and Safety Assessment (970) 491-1350
- Colorado State University Police Department (non-emergency) (970) 491-6425

For counseling support and assistance, please see the CSU Health Network, which includes a variety of counseling services that can be accessed at: <http://www.health.colostate.edu/>. And, the Sexual Assault Victim Assistance Team is a confidential student resource that does not have a reporting requirement and that can be of great help to students who have experienced sexual assault. The web address is <https://wgac.colostate.edu/support/sexual-assault/>.

GT-PATHWAYS INFORMATION:

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education has approved PHIL103 for inclusion in the Guaranteed Transfer (GT) Pathways program in the GT-AH3 category. For transferring students, successful completion with a minimum C– grade guarantees transfer and application of credit in this GT Pathways category. For more information on the GT Pathways program, go to <http://highered.colorado.gov/academics/transfers/gtpathways/curriculum.html>.

To this end, it is expected that students will be able to:

Respond analytically and critically to ways of thinking, by addressing one or more of the following:

1. Logic
2. Ethics
3. The different questions dealt with by leading philosophers and/or theologians and their positions on those questions.

And

Explain an Issue

- a. Use information to describe a problem or issue and/or articulate a question related to the topic.

Utilize Context

1. Evaluate the relevance of context when presenting a position.
2. Identify the assumptions.
3. Analyze one's own and others' assumptions.

Understand Implications and Make Conclusions

- a. Establish a conclusion that is tied to the range of information presented.