

Philosophy 238: Rights and Wrongs

Professor Behrends

Stevenson Hall 350 A

4:00 – 5:15, Monday and Wednesday

Course Description and Goals

Questions about ethics – about how we ought to behave – are some of the most challenging and fascinating questions with which we are confronted. Although there is widespread agreement on some matters in ethics, many contemporary ethical issues are hotly contested. Consider, for example, the following questions:

- If a terminally ill patient requests that her life be terminated in order to prevent further suffering, should we allow a doctor to act on her wishes? If euthanasia is ever acceptable, are some forms of euthanasia morally preferable to others?
- Are we morally obligated to relieve easily preventable suffering caused by poverty? Does it matter if we are responsible for the suffering? If we are obligated to aid, how much aid must we provide?
- To what extent should the welfare of animals be considered in our moral decision-making? When, if ever, is it permissible to eat animals? To perform medical experiments on them?

These are just some of the questions we'll be taking a look at throughout the semester. The first major goal of the course is to familiarize you with the philosophical positions concerning the issues we'll be examining: euthanasia, global poverty, abortion, licensing parents, and non-human animal welfare.

The course is also designed for students who have little or no background in studying philosophy. Another goal of the course, then, is to provide some introduction to philosophical reasoning generally, and further, to help you begin reasoning philosophically on your own. A note: the fact that the course is *introductory* does not guarantee that the course will be *easy*. Reading philosophical texts, writing philosophically, and discussing philosophical issues intelligently are all challenging tasks. I'll do my best to help you meet these challenges, and I hope that you'll do your best to that end as well.

Lastly, I also see this course as one that is well-suited to helping students develop certain communicative skills. To that end, the assignments and requirements for this course are intended to help develop the following abilities: critical reading and reasoning, academic writing and speaking, and the productive use of research tools. Like the second goal, the aim here is to help you to develop a *skill*, rather than to just *learn information*, so assignments associated with the second and third goals are less about getting you to digest material, and more about getting you to *practice* something.

Contact Information

E-mail: jmbehre@ilstu.edu

Office: 339 Stevenson Hall

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 10:00 – 11:00 (except on 1/5 and on the first Wednesday of each month thereafter), and by appointment

I'm usually quite quick to reply to e-mails. It's very rare that I will take longer than 24 hours to respond to an email, and it's usually much faster than that. Please understand, though, that I cannot *guarantee* very quick responses, so please adjust your expectations accordingly. You are of course welcome to email me with any questions or concerns you have, but you should be aware that I might respond by inviting you to set up a meeting to discuss the issue in person. Email is not well suited to philosophical discussion.

I know that my office hours will not be convenient for everyone. *Please* feel free to schedule appointments with me at different times if you'd like to come by.

Required Texts

All readings and material for the course will be made available on ReggieNet.

Course Requirements

The following requirements will determine your grade for the course:

Critical Assessments (45%)

You will be required to hand in five critical assessments, each worth 9% of your final grade. These assignments should be at least one page in length, and no more than two (double-spaced). You may not turn in a critical assessment of an article that we have already discussed in lecture. See the reading schedule below for more details about deadlines. For each assessment, you must do the following:

1. Identify one important thesis for which the author is arguing.
2. Reconstruct an argument that the author gives for the claim identified in 1.
 - a. The reconstructed argument must be valid.
3. Critically assess the argument.
 - a. To critically assess an argument is to say whether it is good or bad and why. Because the reconstructed argument must be valid, only the truth or falsity of the premises could make the argument good or bad. So, in this stage, you should attack a premise in the argument, defend a premise in the argument from a possible objection, or provide original positive support for one of the premises.
4. Email me your assessment as an attachment. Please use the following format in titling the attachment: "Last Name – Critical Assessment #" (So, if I were turning in my first assessment, I would title it "Behrends – Critical Assessment 1"). ***Critical assessments must be turned in no later than 11:00 a.m. on the day we are to discuss the relevant article.***

5. You should be prepared to discuss your critical assessment with the rest of the class, and to answer questions about it, if called upon to do so.

Because this kind of writing may be new to many of you, you are permitted to hand in one “practice” critical assessment. I will provide comments and feedback on the practice assessment, but it will not count toward your Critical Assessment grade. If you hand in a practice critical assessment, you must indicate to me that it is a practice assessment.

Critical Paper (20%)

A 5 – 7 page paper (double-spaced) in which you must do each of the following:

- a. Present and explain the main argument of an article discussed in class.
- b. Present and explain what you take to be the strongest objection or objections to that argument.
- c. Argue that the objections are either successful or unsuccessful.

A rough draft is due three weeks prior to the due date (see assignment schedule below). The critical assessments are partially designed to prepare you to write this longer paper, so you are permitted to expand any ideas from a critical assessment into your longer paper. You may write on any article assigned for the class, including those articles that we have not yet covered at the time the assignment is due. I will provide some prompts to serve as guides for how to proceed, but you will not be required to shape your paper in response to one of those prompts.

Formal Presentation (25%)

You are permitted to work alone or in groups of two. If working alone the presentation must be 10 minutes, if in a group of 2, the presentation must be 20 minutes (each student must speak for 10 minutes). Roughly, the purpose of the presentation is to do outside research and give a presentation about a “contemporary moral issue” not covered in this class, present at least two positions on that issue, and defend a position (possibly, though not necessarily, from among those covered in the earlier part of the presentation). I will discuss more specifics for this assignment in the future, as well as schedule days for each student to present.

Attendance and Participation (10%)

Missing more than three classes will result in a reduction for this part of your grade. Your participation in in-class discussions will affect this portion of your grade as well. We will talk in more detail during the early weeks of the term about what constitutes good participation in a class of this kind.

Grading Scale

Final grades will be determined according to the following scale:

A	90% - 100%
B	80% - 89%
C	70% - 79%

D	60% - 69%
F	<60%

Grades that fall between these divisions will be rounded up or down at my discretion. There will be no opportunity for extra credit.

Cheating of any kind, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated. If you are found to be in violation of the University's policies governing academic dishonesty, you will be penalized in accordance with University guidelines. For information concerning the University's policies concerning academic dishonesty, see Section V.B of the [Code of Student Conduct](#). See also <http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/students/get-help/crr/academic-dishonesty.shtml> and the relevant links contained therein.

Special Needs

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Disability Concerns at 350 Fell Hall, 309-438-5853, www.disabilityconcerns.ilstu.edu

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Weeks 1 and 2 (1/13 – 1/22): Course Introduction and Logic

1/13: No readings. I'll provide some handouts in class for the logic material.

1/15: No readings; logic continued

1/20: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, no class meeting

1/22: Vallentyne, "Consequentialism" and McNaughton and Rawling, "Deontology" **(you may NOT hand in critical assessments for these two readings)**

Weeks 3 and 4 (1/27 – 2/5): Euthanasia

1/27: Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"

1/29: Steinbock, "The Intentional Termination of Life"

2/3: Beauchamp, "Justifying Physician-Assisted Suicide"

2/5: Velleman, "Against the Right to Die"

You MUST submit exactly one critical assessment on one of these readings

Weeks 5 and 6 (2/10 – 2/19): Global Poverty

2/10: Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

2/12: Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics"

2/17: Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code"

2/19: Sen, "Property and Hunger"

You MUST submit exactly one critical assessment on one of these readings

Weeks 7 and 8 (2/24 – 3/5): Abortion

2/24: Noonan, "An Almost Absolute Value in History"

2/26: Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"

3/3: Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

3/5: Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

You MUST submit exactly one critical assessment on one of these readings

3/12 and 3/14: Spring Break, no class meetings

Weeks 9 and 10 (3/17 – 3/26): Licensing Parents

3/17: LaFollette, "Licensing Parents"

3/19: Frisch, "On Licentious Licensing"

3/24: TBD

3/26: TBD

You MUST submit exactly one critical assessment on either LaFollette or Frisch

Weeks 11 and 12 (3/31 – 4/9): Animal Welfare

3/31: Matheny, "Utilitarianism and Animals"

4/2: Regan, "Are Zoos Morally Defensible?"

4/7: Cohen, "Do Animals Have Rights?"

4/9: Curnutt, "A New Argument for Vegetarianism"

Rough Draft of Critical Paper due before class on 4/9

You MUST submit exactly one critical assessment on one of these readings

Week 13, 14, and 15 (4/14 – 4/30): Student Presentations

4/14: Presentations

4/16: Presentations

4/21: Presentations

4/23: Presentations

4/28: Presentations

4/30: Presentations

Final Draft of Critical Paper due before class on 4/30

Finals Week: Presentations Continued

Date TBD: Presentations