

HUMAN FLOURISHING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

PHIL 3052: MORAL PHILOSOPHY, SECTION 001, 3 CREDITS

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What is it to live a good life, and how do recent and future advances in technology present both challenges and opportunities for human flourishing? This course provides students with an overview of the main theories of welfare and an introduction to the ethics of technology in light of its relevance for human flourishing. The course also encourages students to reflect on their own values and plans for their lives in the context of the ubiquitous use and rapid development of technology. After a survey of ethical theories, we will discuss the main theories of welfare, including hedonism, desire satisfactionism, and the objective-list theory. We will then turn our attention to topics in the ethics of technology such as privacy, surveillance, and the use of algorithms, especially in the criminal justice system, as instruments of racial inequality. By the end of the course, students will be able to explain and evaluate the main ethical theories; explain and evaluate the the main theories of welfare; analyze whether and how particular technological advances will threaten or promote human flourishing; and devise practical strategies for improving the quality of their own lives in the context of a rapidly changing world.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

Topics in ethics and meta-ethics: egoism, consequentialism, deontology, moral relativism, virtue ethics, values, ethics and religion; naturalistic fallacy, truth and justification, realism and objectivity, motivation and practical reasoning, autonomy and game theory.

OFFICE HOURS

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

TEXTBOOK

There is no textbook for the course. The readings are provided free of charge via Moodle.

MEETING TIME AND LOCATION

We will meet most Tuesdays and Thursdays between January 13 and May 3 at 10:30 AM - 11:50 AM in Coates Hall, room 236. See the course calendar for a tentative schedule.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Extract, explain, and evaluate an argument.
2. Explain and evaluate the main positions with respect to each topic discussed in the course.
3. Apply ethical theories and concepts to practical problems in the ethics of technology.
4. Engage in respectful philosophical dialogue on controversial topics in the philosophy of well-being and the ethics of technology.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

The following list is a breakdown of how each student will be evaluated for final-grade calculations at the end of the term:

Attendance	10%
Response Papers	15%
Test #1	25%
Test #2	25%
Test #3	25%

GRADING SCALE

92.5% \geq A	72.5% – 76.4% C
89.5% – 92.4% A-	69.5% – 72.4% C-
86.5% – 89.4% B+	66.5% – 69.4% D+
82.5% – 86.4% B	62.5% – 66.4% D
79.5% – 82.4% B-	59.5% – 62.4% D-
76.5% – 79.4% C+	59.4% \leq F

1. *Attendance* - I will take attendance each class period. If you need to miss class for a legitimate, university-approved reason, email me in advance (if possible) and I will mark you as excused. I will disregard your first three unexcused absences, but each unexcused absence after that will negatively affect your grade. Your attendance is 10% of your final grade.
2. *Response Papers* - For 10 class meetings (see course calendar below), you are to write a short 500-word response paper on that day's readings. If multiple readings are assigned, you may choose to focus on a single reading or the set of readings as a whole. In your response papers, you must do three things: (i) ask a clarifying question, (ii) identify and summarize an argument of interest, and (iii) make a substantive point. Examples of substantive points include providing additional support for a key claim in the reading, explaining an objection to one of the author's claims, or highlighting interesting connections among texts. The substantive point need not be related to the argument of interest identified in (ii). Clearly label each section of the response paper to correspond to the three elements identified above. Submit each response paper via Moodle no later than 9:00 AM the day of the relevant class meeting. Your response papers are 15% of your final grade.
3. *Tests* - There are three tests. The last test will be administered during the final exam period, though the test will not be cumulative and it will not differ in difficulty level from the other two tests. Each test will include a true/false, multiple choice, short answer, and essay section. Each test is 25% of your grade.

LIFE WORTH LIVING FRAMEWORK

The development of this course was supported by generous funding from Yale's Center for Faith and Culture's Life Worth Living Fellowship. Life Worth Living courses are driven by four key principles:

- *Pursuit of existential meaning*: students will acquire the tools for the lifelong process of forming their own conception of the good life and related questions concerning human flourishing.
- *Commitment to truth-seeking pluralism*: students will be exposed to a diversity of philosophical perspectives concerning the good life and related issues.
- *First-person engagement*: students will be personally invested in the personal reflection journey required to shape their own commitments and values.
- *Participation in a community of practice*: students and instructors strive together in community to answer the course questions.

For more information regarding this pedagogical framework for reflecting on life's biggest questions, see Volf, Croasmun, and McAnnally-Linz's *Life Worth Living: A Guide to What Matters*.

COURSE POLICIES

COMMUNICATION

Email is our official mode of communication. Check your email daily for course updates.

MAKE-UP AND LATE WORK

If you need an extension for one of your papers or exams, email me at least 48 hours in advance to request an extension. If I do not hear from you and your work is late, I will reduce your grade for that assignment at a rate of 2.5% per calendar day. Don't let yourself fall too far behind. Reach out to me before the situation becomes unmanageable.

EXTRA CREDIT

There are no extra-credit opportunities in this class.

EXPECTATIONS

I expect that you will complete all assignments on time. I expect you to engage in polite and reasoned dialogue with me and your peers. I expect you to revise your papers before submitting

them. I expect you to be open-minded and resilient in the face of criticism. You can expect from me timely responses to all inquiries. You can expect me to evaluate your performance in a fair manner, consistent with scholarly standards of excellence. You can expect me to treat you with kindness and respect, but you can also expect me to press you to clarify your views and to provide reasons for your judgments.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Each member of our learning community should treat every other member with respect and dignity and never wrongfully discriminate on the basis of someone's race, gender, sex, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Please inform me of the name that you prefer to be called and your preferred pronouns. If someone else is speaking, raise your hand and wait to be called upon.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

If you need to miss class due to observing a religious holiday, please let me know as early as possible in the semester.

OTHER STATEMENTS

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is different from other disciplines. In philosophy, we aim to achieve maximum linguistic and conceptual clarity and argumentative rigor. As a result, we will move slowly and carefully through our topics as we discuss various viewpoints and the arguments for and against them. Sometimes I will ask you to repeat or to reformulate a question or comment so that the meaning of your words is clear. Sometimes you may have to formulate your question or comment several times to achieve the degree of clarity philosophers seek. I start from the assumption that what you have to say is important and interesting, so it does everyone a disservice if your question or comment is unclear.

WHAT DOES A PHILOSOPHER LOOK LIKE?

Like many disciplines in the academy, philosophy has historically been dominated by a certain demographic. Your mental image of a philosopher may be that of a bearded older white male in a tweed jacket. Stereotype threat is a psychological phenomenon that causes people to underperform in a discipline when they believe the stereotype that "people like them" aren't good at that discipline. However, telling students that there are no such group differences in performance in a class can defuse the anxiety that the stereotype creates and subsequently undermines those tendencies to underperform. The stereotype that only members of certain demographic groups can be good at

philosophy is false.

ON SEEMING SMART

Regardless of whether you've studied philosophy prior to this course, you might often find yourself feeling intimidated by the way philosophers write or talk. This might be because philosophy, like all disciplines, employs its own jargon and concepts that you either might not have encountered before or that you might have seen used differently. Jargon can be useful, but it can also be used to exclude people and make them feel like they don't have a place in the conversation. Don't feel that way. Don't be intimidated by me or by anyone else. If you don't know what a term means, ask for a definition. If you don't know how a concept is being used, ask for clarification.

UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS AND RESOURCES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

Plagiarism is the use of the ideas or words of others without proper attribution. It is the most serious academic infraction that one can commit. Accordingly, I will report you to the university and give you a failing grade for the assignment if you plagiarize. Plagiarism may even result in your failing the course. Typical cases of plagiarism involve a student copying a passage or parts of a passage from an internet source and including it in their own work without proper attribution. Other examples of academic dishonesty include providing or receiving unauthorized assistance. Ignorance of what counts as plagiarism is no excuse. When in doubt, cite your sources. In addition to academic integrity, each student at Louisiana State University is expected to adhere to the university's student code of conduct, the details of which are outlined here: <https://www.lsu.edu/saa/>.

STUDENT EFFORT AND DEFINITION OF 'CREDIT HOUR'

LSU's general policy states that for each credit hour, students should plan to spend at least two hours working on course-related activities outside of class (e.g., completing assigned readings, completing writing assignments, or studying for exams). Since this course is for three credit hours, you should expect to spend a minimum of six hours outside of class each week working on assignments for this course. For more information see: https://www.lsu.edu/policies/ps/ps_45.pdf.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES

Louisiana State University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a staff member in Disability Services so that such accommodations can

be considered. Students that receive accommodation letters should meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as soon as possible. For more information, see <https://lsu.edu/disability>.

CENTER FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Center for Academic Success offers free resources to help students increase their academic performance. Content-specific support includes tutoring, Supplemental Instruction (twice weekly, peer-led study sessions), and Shell Study Groups (informal study sessions facilitated by trained peer tutors). For help developing learning strategies, managing time, and increasing test performance, one-on-one Academic Coaching and strategy workshops help students plan their path toward academic success in all their classes. Visit the CAS website at <https://lsu.edu/cas> for more information.

COURSE CALENDAR

This schedule is subject to change at my discretion. Check your email regularly for updates.

INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC AND METHOD

TUESDAY, JANUARY 14

Topic: Syllabus review; critical thinking exercise

Required Reading: none

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, JANUARY 16

Topic: What is philosophy? What is ethics?

Required Reading: none

Assignments Due: none

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21

**No class due to inclement weather*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23

Topic: Cultural relativism and the divine command theory

Required Reading: James Rachels' "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"; excerpts from Michael Huemer's *Ethical Intuitionism* (pp. 54-60)

Assignments Due: Response Paper #1

PART I: ETHICAL THEORIES

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28

Topic: Utilitarianism

Required Reading: Excerpts from J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism* (chapter two)

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30

Topic: Utilitarianism (cont'd)

Required Reading: Excerpts from J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism* (chapter four)

Assignments Due: none

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

Topic: Kantianism

Required Reading: James Rachels' "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?"

Assignments Due: Response Paper #2

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Topic: Kantianism (cont'd)

Required Reading: James Rachels' "Kant and Respect for Persons"

Assignments Due: none

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11

Topic: Rossian deontology

Required Reading: Excerpts from W. D. Ross's *The Right and the Good* (pp. 16-24; 32-35)

Assignments Due: Response Paper #3

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Topic: Virtue ethics

Required Reading: Excerpts from Russ Shafer-Landau's *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (chapter 17)

Assignments Due: none

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

**Test #1*

PART II: WELL-BEING

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20

**No class meeting*

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Topic: Hedonism

Required Reading: Excerpts from Fred Feldman's *Pleasure and the Good Life* (sections 2.2, 3.1-3.3, 3.5)

Assignments Due: Response paper #4

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Topic: Hedonism (cont'd)

Required Reading: Excerpts from Fred Feldman's *Pleasure and the Good Life* (sections 4.1-4.4, 5.1-5.3)

Assignments Due: none

TUESDAY, MARCH 4

**No class meeting due to Mardi Gras*

THURSDAY, MARCH 6

**No class meeting due to Mardi Gras*

TUESDAY, MARCH 11

Topic: The desire theory

Required Reading: Chris Heathwood's "Desire-Fulfillment Theory"

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, MARCH 13

Topic: Objective-list theories

Required Reading: Guy Fletcher's "Objective List Theories"

Assignments Due: Response paper #5

TUESDAY, MARCH 18

**Test #2*

PART III: ETHICS OF TECHNOLOGY

THURSDAY, MARCH 20

Topic: Privacy and surveillance

Required Reading: Judith Jarvis Thomson's "The Right to Privacy"

Assignments Due: Response paper #6

TUESDAY, MARCH 25

Topic: Privacy and surveillance (cont'd)

Required Reading: Carissa Véliz's "Self-Presentation and Privacy Online"

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, MARCH 27

Topic: Privacy and surveillance (cont'd)

Required Reading: Excerpts from Sarah Brayne's *Predict and Surveil* (chapter three)

Assignments Due: Response paper #7

TUESDAY, APRIL 1

Spring Break

THURSDAY, APRIL 3

Spring Break

TUESDAY, APRIL 8

Topic: Autonomous weapons

Required Reading: Peter Asaro's "Autonomous Weapons and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence"

Assignments Due: Response paper #8

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

**No class meeting*

TUESDAY, APRIL 15

Topic: Online dating

Required Reading: Karim Nader's "Dating Through the Filters"

Assignments Due: Response paper #9

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

Topic: Creativity

Required Reading: Lindsay Brainard's "The Curious Case of Uncurious Creation"

Assignments Due:

TUESDAY, APRIL 22

Topic: Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers

Required Reading: C. Thi Nguyen's "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, APRIL 24

Topic: Gamification

Required Reading: C. Thi Nguyen's "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"

Assignments Due: Response paper #10

TUESDAY, APRIL 29

Topic: Racist algorithms

Required Reading: Excerpts from Ruha Benjamin's *Race After Technology*

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, MAY 1

Topic: Racist algorithms (cont'd)

Required Reading: Excerpts from Ruha Benjamin's *Race After Technology*

Assignments Due: none

THURSDAY, MAY 8

**Final exam/Test #3, 5:30PM - 7:30PM in our usual classroom.*