Poli 27: Ethics and Society I

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Class Meetings:	Mon. & Wed. 10:00-11:00	**Office Hours:**	Thurs 10:00 - 10:50

Course Description

All students will eventually confront moral problems with social, political, or legal dimensions in their roles as citizens, scholars, professionals, parents, members of their communities, and as human beings with responsibilities to other nations and peoples. Warren College designed Ethics and Society, PHIL or POLI 27 and PHIL or POLI 28, to help students learn how to make moral decisions, engage in moral reasoning, and understand the positions of others in the great moral conflicts of our time.

Generals, politicians, executives, and judges often make decisions for many other people that can have widespread ramifications. The Ethics and Society courses demand that students examine essential moral and ethical questions.

- Should we go to war in order to protect our national security or the security of an ally? If so, how should the war be conducted?

- Should we build factories in third world countries that employ people who thereby acquire the means to sustain themselves, if we do so by exploiting them, or by polluting their air, water, and land?

- Do individual persons have the right to decide whether to end their lives without interference from the state?

These questions, and others like them, are not merely academic—they are very real. Democracy works only when citizens have sufficient knowledge and understanding of moral theory and practice to make decisions that have a significant impact on the lives of others. Warren College is dedicated to the ideal of informed, engaged, morally sensitive citizenship, and considers Ethics and Society to be a principal means of achieving this ideal.

PHIL 27 or POLI 27 provides an overarching view of these issues and PHIL 28 or POLI 28 focuses on one (or more) topics in detail. In these courses, students will learn how to write, think, and speak about these issues.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course are expected to be able to do the following:

- To understand the content of prominent moral theories.

- To construct novel, rigorous arguments for and against those theories.

- To apply these moral principles to pressing dilemmas within our society.

- To formulate clear, articulate arguments about this topic in written work

Overview

This course begins with an overview of normative theory. In the first week, we discuss theories of welfare—what makes a life go well, and what makes it go poorly. The three proposals we address are that a good life has certain experiences (often, maximizing the amount of pleasure and minimizing the amount of pain), that a good life is one where the person gets what they desire, and that there is an objective list of criteria that make a life good. In the second week, we turn to discussions of distributive welfare. In particular, we will discuss how equality impacts how good or bad a situation is. We will begin by discussing the current state of inequality within the world, before turning to philosophical puzzles about how to define what inequality consists of. In the third week, we will address two leading theories of how we ought to act: consequentialism and deontology. While the consequentialist maintains that we always ought to act in a way that has the best consequences, the deontologist believes that there are specific rules that we ought to follow— regardless of what the consequences of following those rules might be.

In the second section of this course, we turn from general principles to applied ones. We begin by discussing the effective altruism movement, which is defined by the idea that we ought to put our charitable donations to their best use—and that we ought to rely on scientific evidence to figure out what that best use is. We will then discuss critiques of the effective altruism movement: that it ignores the political situation it is carried out in, and that it is self-undermining. The next topic is global warming. We will first examine the scientific consensus on how humans have impacted the climate, and then discuss what (if any) obligations man-made climate change generates. The last topic within this section is artificial intelligence. We will investigate whether the development of artificial intelligence is imminent, whether the threat of it is overblown, and what kinds of obligations exist in developing this type of intelligence.

In the final section, we discuss political philosophy. We start with Plato's attempt to construct an ideal society, Aristotle's criticism of what that society consists of, and what lessons these discussions have for politics today. We will then investigate Hobbes' and Locke's debate over the foundations of human rights, as well as the obligations states and citizens have to one another. In addition, we will discuss whether (and how) a Hobbsian worldview affects contemporary political opinions. Following that, we will discuss democratic and communist societies, and the justifications for each form of government. We will end the course by discussing theories of justice. In particular, we will discuss the debate between John Rawls and Robert Nozick about what a just society consists of.

Expectations and Evaluations

Students are expected to attend lectures, to actively participate in discussions, and to complete reading assignments before class. Students will be graded on the basis of two papers, a final exam, and participation. The breakdown of grades is as follows:

First Paper	20%
Second Paper	20%
Final Exam	35%
Participation	25%

Both papers will be 6–8 pages in length (double spaced) and based on topics distributed to the class. The prompt for the first paper will be handed out on January 25$^{\text{th}}$, and is due February 1$^{\text{st}}$. The prompt for the second paper will be handed out on February 17$^{\text{th}}$ and is due on February 24$^{\text{th}}$. The final examination is an open note take-home and will contain factual information about the readings and lectures, and ask you to reflect on its impact on different moral dilemmas.

Participation is based on several factors. Students are encouraged to participate in zoom sections with their classmates to discuss the class material. Students who are unable to participate in person have an asynchronous option to participate in an online discussion forum instead. Remember that although active contribution involves making your own voice heard, it also involves listening to your peers.

Students will *not* be evaluated based on their political opinions. The course will present and examine a wide variety of political views—some of which you may agree with, and many of which you will not. Students from all backgrounds—democrat, republican, independent, undecided (or anything else) are welcome, and all will be respected. This course asks only that you examine the arguments for political views rigorously, not that you hold any particular political position.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to conduct yourself with honor and integrity throughout this course. UCSD's policy on academic honesty is the following:

"Integrity of scholarship, otherwise referred to as academic integrity, is essential for an academic community, including UC San Diego. Academic integrity is built on a foundation of honest, responsible, fair and trustworthy scholarly activity. Without it, the degrees we confer, the research we conduct, and our reputation all diminish in value.

Thus, the University expects that both faculty and students will adhere to its standards of academic integrity. The UC San Diego Policy on Integrity of Scholarship (herein the "Policy") states the general rules associated with student integrity of scholarship. The Procedures for Resolving Alleged Violations of the Policy (herein the "Procedures") are found at https://senate.ucsd.edu/media/389895/procedures-for-resolving-alleged-ai-violations.pdf and authorized by the San Diego Division of the Academic Senate's Educational Policy Committee."

Academic honesty involves adequately citing the sources you rely upon, not stealing other students' exams or papers, not cheating on exams, and not plagiarizing any work. Anyone who is found to be dishonest will automatically fail the class and be reported to the UCSD Academic Integrity Office. If you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty, contact me or your teaching assistant BEFORE submitting your work.

Reading Schedule

Normative Ethics
Welfare
Question: What makes a life go well, and what makes a life go poorly?

01/04/21	None
01/06/21	The Experience Machine Robert Nozick
Recommended*	Watch *The Matrix*

Equality
Question: What does (in)equality consist of, and (how) does it matter?

01/11/21	U.N. Warns That Global Inequality is Destabilizing the World's Democracies	Christopher Ingraham
01/13/21	Inequality	Larry Temkin
Recommended*	Our Invisible Rich	Paul Krugman

Consequentialism and Deontology
Question: What makes an action morally right?

01/18/21	**Martin Luther King Day—No Class**	
01/20/21	Utilitarianism: Chapter 2	John Stuart Mill
01/25/21	The Trolley Problem	Judith Thomson
Recommended*	The Trolley Problem & Self-Driving Cars	Benjamin Dierker

Applied Ethics

Effective Altruism
Question: How much do we owe each other? Is there a particular way charitable donations ought to be made?

01/27/21	Famine, Affluence and Morality	Peter Singer
02/01/21	Effective Altruism's Political Blind Spot	Emily Clough
Recommended*	If Oxfam Ran the World	Martha Nussbaum

Global Warming
How is humanity impacting the global climate, and what obligations does this impact generate?

02/03/21	The State of the Global Climate	W.M.O.
02/08/21	Treaty Norms and Climate Change Mitigation	Darrel Moellendorf
Recommended*	Watch *An Inconvenient Truth*	

Artificial Intelligence
Question: Is the development of artificial intelligence immanent? What obligations are there to AI, and are there dangers that could be avoided?

02/10/21	The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis	David Chalmers
02/15/21	**President's Day—No Class**	
02/17/21	Towards an Ethics of Artificial Intelligence	Audrey Azoulay
Recommended*	Watch *I, Robot*	

Political Philosophy

Plato and Hobbes

Question: How can the history of political philosophy inform our view of societies today?

02/22/21	The Republic: Books 2	Plato
02/24/21	The Leviathan: Chapters 13-14	Thomas Hobbes
Recommended*	Watch *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Wont Go Away*	

Communism and Democracy

Question: What is communism, and how does it differ from democracy?

03/01/21	The Manifesto of the Communist Party	Karl Marx
03/03/21	Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value	Elizabeth Anderson
Recommended*	I Was Once a Socialist. Then I Saw How it Worked	David Brooks

Rawls and Nozick

Question: What does justice consist of, and do states have an obligation to be just?

03/08/21	A Theory of Justice: Chapter 1	John Rawls
03/10/21	Anarchy, State and Utopia: Chapter 7	Robert Nozick
Recommended*	Watch *Rawls vs. Nozick*	