

GESM 120: Problems of Life and Death
Fall 2015

Classes: MW 5—6:20pm

Location: VKC 254

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10am – 12pm or by email appointment

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Course Description

Most of us believe that each person has a right to life, and that violating this right is one of the most serious forms of wrongdoing anyone can commit. But most of us also believe it is sometimes morally permissible to kill others. Are these two views consistent? Can we ever be justified in killing others? And if so, what does this tell us about the right to life? This course examines some of the central moral questions surrounding killing and saving people. These questions include:

- Is there is a moral difference between killing as opposed to letting die?
- Is there a moral difference between killing that is intended as opposed to merely foreseen?
- Under what conditions, if any, is it permissible to kill in self-defense?
- Do some people deserve to die?
- What, if anything, do we owe to the future people we might create?

Addressing these difficult and abstract moral questions helps us address more familiar and practical topics surrounding the ethics of killing and saving people. The course also covers these topics, which include:

- Killing in war
- Terrorism
- The death penalty
- Abortion
- Euthanasia and assisted suicide
- The ethics of international aid
- The ethics of creation
- Eating animals

The goal of the course is to help you think about these questions and topics with clarity and precision, and to enable you to use the methods of analytic philosophy to develop your own answers to these questions. The course will also introduce students to some of the central theories and concepts in normative ethics.

Required Texts

All the required texts will be posted on Blackboard.

Note that it is strictly forbidden to use and/or distribute these texts for any other purpose than reading for the class. Doing so would constitute a copyright violation.

Grading

First midterm paper:	1/3 of your provisional grade
Submission Date:	Friday September 25 th at 5pm
Second midterm paper:	1/3 of your provisional grade
Submission Date:	Friday October 30 th at 5pm
Final exam:	1/3 of your provisional grade
Date and Time:	Wednesday December 9 th 5pm-7pm

Each midterm paper must be 1,800-2,000 words in length. You are required to submit the essays via Blackboard. There will be a penalty of one letter grade increment for every day after the deadline an essay is submitted. So, for example, if you submit your paper one day late, and the paper is judged to be worth A, you will only receive an A- grade. If you submit the same paper two days late, it would receive a grade of B+, and so on. Note that submitting essays on the correct date but after the 5pm deadline counts as one day late.

Further details about the content of the essays will be provided in due course. Please see the University Catalogue or Grade Handbook for definitions of particular grades.

Your grades for these three essays constitute your *provisional* grade for the course. Your *final* grade can also be affected by your *preparation*, your *attendance*, and your class *participation*.

Preparation: Each Monday (excluding the first class) you must write approximately 250-300 words on the week's readings, which you must hand in to me (typed, not handwritten) at the beginning of class. You can choose to provide a brief summary of one part of the week's reading, or you can provide your own analysis or critique of some part of the weekly reading (e.g. explain why you think the author is mistaken about some point, or discuss some point that is puzzling you). I will not be grading these assignments, but they must be completed each week to a minimal standard. Students who fail to submit their weekly writing assignment (or hand in an assignment that fails to meet the minimum standard) more than twice will have their final grade *lowered by one grade increment*. So, for example, if your provisional grade was a B+, but you failed to submit your writing assignments three or more times, then your final grade would drop to a B. Successfully completing the weekly writing assignments is thus a way of *maintaining* your provisional grade. I require these weekly assignments to provide you with an extra incentive to keep up with the weekly readings and come prepared to class.

Attendance: Class attendance is mandatory. I reserve the right to lower your final grade if you are repeatedly absent without a valid and verifiable excuse.

Participation: The class will be partly discussion-based, and participation in class discussions is an important part of making the class a success. Students who regularly make excellent class contributions will, at the end of the course, have their overall grade increased by one letter grade increment. So, for example, if your provisional grade was a B+ but you regularly made excellent contributions to the class discussion, your final grade would be an A-. Note: *your performance in class discussion can only improve your final grade*—it cannot diminish your final grade.

Preparation for Class/Class Format

The format for each class will be a combination of a lecture and a discussion amongst all of us, and you are encouraged to ask questions both of me and of each other whenever something is puzzling, or whenever you feel an important point is being overlooked. The aim of the course is to have thoughtful and well-reasoned discussions about the issues, and the class will be more intellectually rewarding and more fun the more each person joins in the discussion. Participating in class discussions is also a small part of how you will be assessed. If you are particularly uncomfortable with public speaking, please come and speak to me and we will try and find a fair and reasonable way to assess your class participation.

You will be expected to come to class having done the required reading. When you prepare for class, it's important not simply to read the assigned material, but to read it carefully and critically. This may be the first time you have read philosophical work, and the style of writing and argument can take some getting used to. You will see from the syllabus that I have not assigned a great deal of reading each week measured in terms of the number of pages, but the material is sometimes dense and difficult: a lot of complicated arguments can be found in the space of just a few pages, and this means you may need to read the material more than once to gain a clear understanding of an author's argument. I strongly encourage you to make careful notes as you read. Of course different people have different methods of note-taking, but whatever your method, you should be taking notes in a way that will help you achieve the following aims:

- Gain a clear understanding of the author's main claims and the arguments the author uses to try and establish these claims. You have a clear understanding when you can accurately summarize the author's key claims and arguments in your own words.
- Identify any terms/claims/ideas that remain puzzling to you.
- Try to understand how the author's view might be challenged. This means you must read with a critical eye. Try to identify the weak points in an article or think of counterexamples to what the author is saying, or look for implications of their view that might seem unacceptable or inconsistent.
- Try to understand what the wider implications of the author's position might be—see how his/her view fits (or doesn't fit) with the views of other philosophers we are reading.

Policies on Disability, Academic Integrity, and Electronic Devices

Students who need to request accommodations based on a disability are required to register each semester with the Disability Services and Programs. In addition, a letter of verification to the instructors from the Disability Services and Programs is needed for the semester you are enrolled in this course. If you have any questions concerning this procedure, please contact the course instructor and Disability Services and Programs at (213) 740-0776, STU 301.

No form of plagiarism or other type of academic dishonesty will be tolerated, and **ignorance of the rules regarding plagiarism is no excuse**. If in any doubt about what constitutes plagiarism or any other question about academic integrity, please ask me. Do not assume the answer can be obtained from another source. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others,

the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/> Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

The use of tablets, laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices in class is prohibited. The use of these devices is distracting for other students, and studies have shown that students who take notes by hand tend to do better learning the material being discussed. Lecture slides will be made available via Blackboard. You should check Blackboard and your University email account regularly for information about the course.

Schedule of Classes: Topics and Readings

Week 1 (08/24)	Introduction (no readings)
Week 1 (08/26) Reading:	Normative Ethics at the Extremes T. Nagel, "War and Massacre," <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> (1972): 123-144.
Week 2 (08/31): Reading:	The Trolley Problem J.J. Thomson, "The Trolley Problem," in <i>Rights, Restitution, and Risk</i> , pp. 94-116.
Week 2 (09/02) Reading:	Killing versus Letting Die P. Foot, "Killing and Letting Die," in <i>Moral Dilemmas: and other topics in moral philosophy</i> , pp. 78-87.
Week 3 (09/07)	No Class (Labor Day)
Week 3 (09/09) Reading:	Killing versus Letting Die S. Kagan, "Difficult Cases," in <i>The Limits of Morality</i> , pp. 101-106

- Week 4 (09/14) The Doctrine of Double Effect
 Reading: W. Quinn, 'Actions, Intentions and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1989): 334-51.
- Week 4 (09/16) The Doctrine of Double Effect
 Reading: W. Quinn, 'Actions, Intentions and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1989): 334-51.
- Week 5 (09/21) Killing in Self-Defense
 Reading: J.J. Thomson, "Self-Defense," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1991): 283-298.
- Week 5 (09/23) Killing in Self-Defense
 Reading: J.J. Thomson, "Self-Defense," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1991): 298-310.
- Week 6 (09/28) War and Self-Defense
 Reading: H. Frowe, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction*, Ch. 2
- Week 6 (09/30) Going to War
 Reading: H. Frowe, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction*, Ch. 3
- Week 7 (10/05) The Moral Equality of Combatants
 Reading: M. Walzer, "The Moral Equality of Combatants," in *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 34-41
- Week 7 (10/07) The Morality Equality of Combatants
 Reading: J. McMahan, "On the Moral Equality of Combatants," *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2006): 377-393.
- Week 8 (10/12) The Death Penalty
 Reading: L. Pojman, "In Defense of the Death Penalty," in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 493-502.
- Week 8 (10/14) The Death Penalty
 Reading: J. Reiman, "Against the Death Penalty," in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 503-510.

- Week 9 (10/19) Abortion
Reading: J.J. Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1971): 47-66.
- Week 9 (10/21) Abortion
Reading: B. Brody, "Thomson on Abortion," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1972): 335-340.
- Week 10 (10/26) Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Reading: D. Velleman, "Against the Right to Die," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* (1992): 665-681.
- Week 10 (10/28) Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Reading: T. Beauchamp, "Justifying Physician-Assisted Suicide," in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 40-47.
- Week 11 (11/02) Saving the Greater Number
Reading: J. Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1977): 293-316.
- Week 11 (11/04) Saving the Greater Number
Reading: J. Taurek, 'Should the Numbers Count?' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1977): 293-316.
- Week 12 (11/09) Saving Distant People
Reading: P. Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1972): 229-243.
- Week 12 (11/11) Saving Distant People
Reading: J. Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code," in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 582-590.
- Week 13 (11/16) Future People
Reading: G. Kavka, "The Paradox of Future Individuals," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1982): 93-112.
- Week 13 (11/18) Future People
Reading: G. Kavka, "The Paradox of Future Individuals," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1982): 93-112.

- Week 14 (11/23) Eating Animals
Reading: P. Singer, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1980): 325-337.
- Week 14 (11/25) No Class (Thanksgiving)
- Week 15 (11/30) Eating Animals
Reading: J. McMahan, "Eating Animals the Nice Way," *Daedalus* (2008): 1-11.
- Week 15 (12/02) Review (no readings)