

PHIL 472 Moral Philosophy
Fall 2020

Seminars: MW 2pm – 3:20pm
Location: Online via Zoom

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 9am-11am via Zoom (please email for appointment during these hours or for other appointment times)

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This is an advanced undergraduate seminar covering some recent debates in normative ethics. We will focus on four main questions:

- How, if at all, should we aggregate the claims or interests of different people when we cannot save all from harm?
- What moral theory or principles ought to govern our decisions concerning the permissibility of imposing risks of harm on others?
- Other things being equal, is it more difficult to justify intentionally imposing harm on others as opposed to harming others in ways that are not intended?
- Other things being equal, is it more difficult to justify harming others as a means to some end as opposed to harming others in ways that are not instrumentally useful?

We will consider some of the best recent work that addresses these, and related, questions. Students will be encouraged to develop a critical perspective on this recent literature, and to see how these debates relate to some wider issues in moral philosophy.

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 purpose other than reading for the class. Doing so would constitute a copyright violation.

Grading

Writing Assignments:	25% of provisional grade
Midterm paper:	25% of provisional grade
Final paper:	50% of provisional grade

Your grades on the weekly writing assignments, the midterm, and the final paper constitute your provisional grade for the course. Your final grade can also be affected by your participation and attendance. More on all this below.

You are required to submit **four short critical papers** (500 words approx.) over the course of the entire semester. You can choose which weeks you submit your assignments, so long as you submit a total of (and no more than) four short papers. These papers should provide a brief critique of some aspect of the required reading for that week. These papers must be submitted to me via email before the start of class on Monday of the relevant week. Each paper will be graded and the three papers together constitute 25% of your provisional grade.

The midterm paper must be 1,400-1,600 words in length. The final paper must be 2,900-3,100 words in length. You are required to submit both via Blackboard. There will be a penalty of one letter grade increment for every day after the deadline a paper is submitted. So, for example, if you submit your paper one day late, and the paper is judged to be worth an A, you will only receive an A- grade for the paper. If you submit the same paper two days late, it will receive a grade of B+, and so on. Note that a submission on the correct date but after the 5pm deadline will count as one day late.

The midterm paper is due **Friday Sept. 25th at 10am**

The final paper is due **Friday Nov. 20th at 10am**

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

Participation: Participation in class discussions is an important part of making the course a success. Students who regularly make excellent class contributions in class will, at the end of the course, have their overall grade increased by one letter grade increment. So, for example, if your provisional grade is a B+ but you regularly make excellent contributions to your discussion section, your final grade will be an A-. Note: your

performance in class discussion can only improve your final grade: it cannot diminish your final grade. Also, students who choose to participate in USC's Joint Educational Project and successfully complete that program will receive an increase of one letter grade increment. Note, however, that you can receive the one letter grade increment increase only once, either via excellent class participation or via successfully completing the JEP: you cannot receive two increases in your final grade.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. If you are absent from more than two classes without a valid and verifiable excuse your final grade will be lowered by one letter grade increment. If you are absent from more than four classes your final grade will be lowered by two increments.

Preparation for Class/Class Format

The format for the course is a combination of lectures and discussion, and you are encouraged to ask questions 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 course will be more intellectually rewarding the more each person joins in the discussion. Participating in class is also a small part of how you will be assessed (see above).

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. I strongly encourage you to make careful notes as you read.

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 your discussion section instructor or 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. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>. 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/>

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Part I: Aggregation

Week of Aug. 17th – Introduction and Should the Numbers Count?

- John Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"

Week of Aug. 24th – Contractualism and Saving the Greater Number

- T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, pp. 189-206, 229-241
- Michael Otsuka, "Scanlon and the Claims of the Many versus the One"

Week of Aug. 31st – Limited Aggregation

- Alex Voorhoeve, "How Should We Aggregate Competing Claims?"

Week of Sept. 7th – Limited Aggregation (Note: no class on Monday Sept. 7th Labor Day)

- Patrick Tomlin, "Limited Aggregation"

Part II: Risk Imposition

Week of Sept. 14th – Contractualism and Risk

- Johann Frick, "Contractualism and Social Risk"

Week of Sept. 21st – Against Contractualism

- Joe Horton, "Aggregation, Complaints, and Risk"

Week of Sept. 28th – Contractualism Rides Again?

- Kerah Gordon-Solmon, "Should Contractualists Decompose?"

Part III: Intentions and Double Effect

Week of Oct. 5th — The Trolley Problem

- J.J. Thomson, “The Trolley Problem”
- J.J. Thomson, “Turning the Trolley”

Week of Oct. 12th — The Doctrine of Double Effect

- Warren Quinn, “Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect”

Week of Oct. 19th — Intentions and Permissibility

- T.M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, Intro and ch. 1

Week of Oct. 26th — Intentions and Permissibility

- Jeff McMahan, “Intention, Permissibility, Terrorism, and War”

Part IV: The Means Principle

Week of Nov. 2nd — Moral Obstacles

- Gerhard Overland, “Moral Obstacles: An Alternative to the Doctrine of Double Effect”

Week of Nov. 9th — The Means Principle

- Ketan H. Ramakrishnan, “Treating People as Tools”