

# USC Summer Programs

## **CORE-195: Ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Business, Politics & Technology**

**Location:** DMC 200

**Time:** Monday-Friday 9am-12pm and 1:30-3:30pm

**Lunch Break:** 12pm-1:30pm

**Instructor:** Anthony Nguyen

**Pronouns:** he/him

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 3:30-5:30pm outside [Wallis Annenberg Hall](#)

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**Teaching Assistant:** Laura Nicoară

**Pronouns:** she/her and they/them

**Office Hours:** Thursday 3:30-5:30pm outside Wallis Annenberg Hall

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**IT Help:** USC Provost Help Desk

**Website:** <https://it.provost.usc.edu/>

**Email:** [helpdesk@provost.usc.edu](mailto:helpdesk@provost.usc.edu)

### **Course Description**

The world has undergone a social and technological revolution in the 21st century. How should we live in this new world? We are employees, entrepreneurs, voters, scientists, caregivers, consumers, family members, and so on—and also human beings. It can be far from obvious what these roles morally demand of us amid rapid and unpredictable change.

In this course, we will investigate urgent moral issues using the methods of philosophical inquiry. Questions we will study include: When is an action morally permissible? Is eating meat permissible? When, if ever, is economic inequality just? How should we respond to unjust laws? To what extent, if any, may we prioritize our fellow citizens over people outside our national borders? What are the moral limits, if any, to what goods and services may be sold and purchased? What do businesses morally owe their employees, customers, and society at large? May we alter ourselves, our children, and humanity through genetic engineering? How much historically human work should be done by artificial intelligence and machines? How should we respond to the existence of unfairly biased algorithms?

This course will prepare students to be more reflective members of society, in addition to equipping them with skills in critical thinking, argumentation, and writing that are highly desirable in the academic, legal, and business world.

### Learning Objectives

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

- Identify major claims made when reading philosophical texts;
- Describe influential philosophical claims in normative ethics, political philosophy, business ethics, and the ethics of technology;
- Develop clear and well-reasoned arguments for these claims;
- Develop clear and well-reasoned objections to these claims; and
- Philosophically evaluate the arguments and objections to these claims.

### Components of Course Grade

Your final grade in the course will be determined by 4 components:

1. **Reading Quizzes:** These are multiple-choice, closed-note, and in-class pop quizzes assessing your understanding of assigned readings. There will be 8 given throughout the course. Your grade on this component will be determined by your performance on the 5 that you do best on. For example, you can receive a perfect score on this component of your grade if your answers to 5 quizzes are perfect, even if you do poorly on the other 3 quizzes. These quizzes will be given on *random* class meetings for which there is assigned reading. They will always be given within the first hour of a morning session. A quiz given on any day will cover some, perhaps all, readings assigned for that day. At most one quiz will be given in a single day. You may take a makeup quiz *only if* you have an excused absence for the class meeting in which that quiz is given; contact the instructor to determine when you will take a makeup quiz. Makeup quizzes will always differ from the quizzes originally given in class.
2. **Short Essays:** These are 400-500-word essays. The prompt for any short essay will be given at least 2 days before its deadline. 3 essay prompts will be provided over the course of the semester. You must complete all 3 short essays. You are permitted, but not required, to revise and resubmit exactly one short essay in light of your teaching assistant's comments. If you do so, your previous grade on that assignment will be replaced by the new one if it is higher. Revised short assignments must be submitted by July 6.
3. **Midterm Paper:** The midterm paper will be 1,500-1,800 words long. 5 paper prompts will be provided at least one week before the deadline. Your midterm paper must answer one of these prompts.
4. **Final Exam:** This closed-note, cumulative exam will consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer questions. Any material discussed in assigned readings or in class meetings may appear on this exam. You will have 2 hours to complete the exam. At least one week before the exam, a study guide and more details on exam format will be provided.

### Grade Breakdown

Assessment Tools	% of Final Grade	Deadlines and Exam Period
Reading Quizzes	20	N/A
Short Essays	30	6/23, 6/27, 7/1
Midterm Paper	20	7/8
Final Exam	30	10am-12pm on 7/14

### Grading Scale

Letter grades in this course will be determined using the following 100-point scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

### Assignment Submission Policy

Reading quizzes and the final exam will be completed in-person during class meetings. Short essays and the midterm paper are submitted using the course Blackboard.

### Grading Timeline

All assignments will be graded within 3 days of whichever is later: that assignment's deadline or date of submission or completion. For example, if you submit your midterm paper by the deadline of 7/8, it will be graded by the end of 7/11. Work submitted on Blackboard may be graded any time after the deadline for the relevant assignment. If you wish to submit a different version of your work on Blackboard after the deadline, you must notify your teaching assistant before the deadline. Otherwise, it might not be graded.

### Communication Timeline

The best ways to contact an instructor or teaching assistant about the course outside of class meetings are through their office hours or email. We will respond to emails within 2 days of receiving them.

### Attendance and Tardiness Policies

You are expected to attend the morning and afternoon sessions of class. Since there are only 17 days of class, regular attendance is crucial. Please contact the instructor if you require an excused absence for either, or both, of these sessions on any day. We are

required to report unexcused absences to the USC summer program. *After* a second unexcused absence, any further unexcused absence will result in a 5% grade decrease in your final grade for the course. Two late arrivals, to either morning or afternoon sessions, count as an unexcused absence. Being absent from either a morning or afternoon session without an excuse will count as an unexcused absence.

For example, having 4 unexcused absences will result in a 10% reduction in your final grade in the course; at most you could receive a 90% A- in the course, and that's if you get 100% on all graded work. One way to accrue 4 unexcused absences is by attending all morning and afternoon sessions but arriving late to 8 or 9 of them.

### **Policy on Late Work and Extensions**

There is no late penalty for submitting short essays or the midterm paper if they are *no more* than one day late. Work that is 2 or more days late will be penalized by 5% every day that it is more than just a day late. (Days of the weekend count too.) If you submit something 1 minute late, that counts as a day late. If it is 24 hours and 1 minute late, that counts as two days late. And so on. For example, if you submit your midterm paper 48 hours and 1 minute late, that counts as 3 days late. Then the highest possible grade that you could receive on your midterm assignment would be a 90% A-. No work on a short essay or midterm paper will be accepted if it is 5 or more days late *unless* an extension has been granted.

Extensions are possible on a case-by-case basis. For example, illness that hinders your ability to complete an assignment on time is a legitimate reason for requesting an extension. Extensions must be explicitly approved by the instructor or your assigned teaching assistant ideally, but not necessarily before, the original deadline. Please contact us as soon as is possible if you wish to request an extension.

### **Technology Policy**

You are permitted to use laptops and tablets in class, but only for taking notes, reviewing assigned readings, and participating in class activities. The instructor and teaching assistants reserve the right to forbid your use of electronic devices in class if you are using them for non-academic purposes, especially if your use of electronic devices disrupts the class.

### **AI Chatbot Policy**

You are permitted—though not encouraged—to use AI chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT) to help brainstorm ideas for your short essays and midterm paper. If you use AI, then you *must* explicitly state that you did so in your submitted work. Failing to cite AI whenever you quote or paraphrase its output constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is a serious offense and may result in your being required to leave the program. Note that AI chatbots often make up “facts,” misinterpret philosophers’ views, assert overly imprecise (e.g., hedged) claims, advance superficial and unpersuasive arguments, and cite nonexistent works. They are, at best, unreliable at producing work that meets this class’s academic standards of philosophical prose. Also, all short essays and midterm papers are submitted through Turnitin, which can detect AI-generated text. Finally, we also have access to AI chatbots and can see what they output in response to specific prompts. Do not use AI chatbots to do your work for you.

**Recommendations**

Carefully read the assigned readings! Even when philosophers write clearly, philosophy is hard and requires keen attention to detail. Having to read slowly and attentively is the norm, not the exception. Even then, rereading a philosophical text is often necessary to truly understand the arguments made in it. When reading a philosophical text, charitably interpret the author’s view(s) and argument(s)! In other words, for any assigned reading, attribute the most plausible view(s) and argument(s) to its author that are consistent with the text.

In your work, prioritize quality over quantity! For example, it is better to clearly state and carefully defend one argument for your conclusion than to briefly sketch and defend 3 independent arguments for that same conclusion. In your midterm paper, the longest assignment for the course, you *only* have a maximum of 1,800 words to review the relevant background material, argue for your conclusion, and reply to reasonable objections to your own conclusion or to your argument for it. It is difficult to perform all these tasks well in just 1,800 words. So, when you argue for a conclusion in your work for this class, we strongly recommend that you state only one argument and make it well.

Come to office hours if you have questions! During office hours, our job is to help you succeed in this course in a one-on-one setting. If you are unable to meet during office hours, please contact the person you’d like to meet to schedule an appointment.

**Course Schedule**

The readings assigned for a day must be done before class meets in the morning that day.

Week	Date	Class Topic	Assignment
	<b>Mon. June 19</b>	<b>Juneteenth: NO CLASS</b>	
<b>Week 1 Ethics</b> June 19- June 23	Tues. June 20	<b>Philosophical Reasoning and Cultural Relativism</b> What is philosophy? What distinguishes descriptive and normative claims? What are the standards of academic philosophical writing? What makes an argument (un)persuasive? What are some common informal fallacies? What is cultural relativism? What are the arguments for, and objections to, it?	<b>Reading</b> 1. Julia Driver, “The Challenge to Moral Universalism”
	Wed. June 21	<b>Utilitarianism and Kantian Deontology</b> What are utilitarianism and Kantian deontology? How do they differ? What are the arguments for, and objections to, these ethical theories?	<b>Readings</b> 1. Course Syllabus 2. Henry Sidgwick, “Utilitarianism” (excerpt) 3. James Fieser, “Kant’s Categorical Imperative”

	Thur. June 22	<p><b>Animal Ethics</b>          Can we permissibly eat meat? If so, under what conditions? If not, why not? Are we required to be vegetarian or vegan? What is moral status? Which non-human animals, if any, have moral status?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b>          1. Lori Gruen, “Eating Animals”          2. Timothy Hsiao, “In Defense of Eating Meat”</p>
	Fri. June 23	<p><b>Abortion</b>          Is abortion ever morally permissible? If so, under what conditions? If not, why not? Are there good reasons to legalize abortion even if it is morally impermissible? Why or why not?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b>          1. Judith Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”          2. Perry Hendricks, “Even if the Fetus is not a Person, Abortion is Immoral”          3. Katy Kozhimannil et al., “Abortion Access as a Racial Justice Issue”</p> <p><b>Short Essay #1 Due</b></p>
<p><b>Week 2          Political Philosophy</b>           June 26-          July 1</p>	Mon. June 26	<p><b>Economic Inequality and Distributive Justice</b>          What kinds of economic inequality, if any, are just? What is John Rawls’ original position? Does it provide a legitimate way to determine what justice requires? What is Rawls’ theory of justice as fairness? What are the arguments for, and objections to, this theory’s principles of justice?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b>          1. Liz Mineo, “Racial Wealth Gap May be a Key to Other Inequalities”          2. John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (excerpts)</p>
	Tues. June 27	<p><b>Legitimate Authority and (Un)civil Disobedience</b>          When, if ever, does a government have legitimate authority over us? When, if ever, do we have political obligations to obey the law? Should we resist unjust laws only in peaceful ways? Or can violently breaking the law sometimes be a justified response to social injustice?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b>          1. Anna Stilz, “Why Does the State Matter Morally?” (excerpt)          2. Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”          3. Malcolm X, “The Language of Violence”</p> <p><b>Short Essay #2 Due</b></p>
	Wed. June 28	<p><b>Global Justice</b>          Do we owe as much to foreigners as we do to our fellow citizens? What are the statist and cosmopolitan views on the scope of justice?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b>          1. Thomas Nagel, “The Problem of Global Justice” (excerpt)</p>

	Thur. June 29	<b>Field Trip to the Museum of Tolerance</b> What atrocities were committed in the Holocaust, and what moral and political lessons can we draw from this genocide?	No Assignments
	Fri. Jun 30	<b>Immigration and Criminal Punishment</b> What are the closed borders and open borders positions on immigration? How do they differ? What are the arguments for, and objections to, these positions? What are the retributivist and deterrence justifications for criminal punishment? Do unjust states have weaker authority to punish criminals than just states? If so, to what extent?	<b>Readings</b> 1. Christopher Freiman & Javier Hidalgo, “Liberalism or Immigration Restrictions, But Not Both” 2. Tommie Shelby, “Punishment” <b>Short Essay #3 Due Saturday, 7/1</b>
	<b>Mon. July 3 &amp; Tues. July 4</b>	<b>Independence Day Break: NO CLASS</b>	
<b>Week 3 Business Ethics</b>	Wed. July 5	<b>Commodification and the Limits of Markets</b> What is commodification? Why is it morally objectionable when it is? Are there limits on which goods or services may be sold or purchased? If so, what are they? If not, why not?	<b>Readings</b> 1. Herjeet Marway et al., “Commodification of Human Tissue” 2. Elizabeth Anderson, “Is Women’s Labor a Commodity?” (excerpt) 3. Jason Brennan & Peter Jaworski, “In Defense of Commodification” (excerpt)
July 3- July 7	Thurs. July 6	<b>Advertising and Autonomy</b> To what extent, if any, does advertising undermine autonomous decision-making? Are some forms of advertising more objectionable than others? When, and how, should advertisements be regulated?	<b>Readings</b> 1. Barbara Phillips, “In Defense of Advertising” 2. Hossein Emamalizadeh, “The Informative and Persuasive Functions of Advertising” 3. Alonso Villarán, “Irrational Advertising and Moral Autonomy”  <b>Revised Short Essays Due</b>

	Fri. July 7	<p><b>Meaningful Work</b> What is meaningful work? Is there a right to meaningful work? Do either employers or states have a duty to ensure meaningful work for employees? If so, why? If not, why not?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Catherine Bailey &amp; Adrian Madden, “What Makes Work Meaningful—Or Meaningless”</li> <li>2. Adina Schwartz, “Meaningful Work”</li> <li>3. Nien-Hê Hsieh, “Justice in Production” (excerpt)</li> </ol> <p><b>Midterm Paper Due Saturday, 7/8</b></p>
	Mon. July 10	<p><b>Automation, Employment, and Basic Income</b> In what ways might future developments in automated labor harm humans? What is universal basic income? Is universal basic income justified? Will future developments in automated labor further justify universal basic income?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coung Pham et al., “The Impact of Robotics and Automation on Working Conditions and Employment”</li> <li>2. Anca Gheaus, “Basic Income, Gender Justice and the Costs of Gender-Symmetrical Lifestyles”</li> <li>3. Juliana Bidadanure, “The Political Theory of Universal Basic Income”</li> </ol>
<p><b>Week 4 Ethics of Technology</b></p> <p>July 10- July 14</p>	Tues. July 11	<p><b>Genetic Enhancement</b> Are there moral differences between selecting against disease traits and selecting for increased intelligence, looks, and talent? Is it permissible—perhaps even obligatory—for parents to genetically engineer their children? If so, why? If not, why not?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Felipe Vizcarrondo, “Human Enhancement: The New Eugenics”</li> <li>2. Michael Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection”</li> <li>3. Frances Kamm, “Is There a Problem with Enhancement?”</li> <li>4. Julian Savulescu, “Genetic Interventions and the Ethics of Enhancement” (excerpt)</li> </ol>
	Wed. July 12	<p><b>AI Bias and Structural Injustice</b> In what ways are contemporary AI algorithms biased? How should we respond to AI bias? What is structural injustice? To what extent does AI bias exemplify structural injustice? Do we have duties to address such structural injustice? If so, what are they? If not, why not?</p>	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Melissa Heikkilä, “How it Feels to be Sexually Objectified by an AI”</li> <li>2. Ravi Parikh et al., “Addressing Bias in Artificial Intelligence in Health Care”</li> </ol>



			3. Ting-An Lin & Po-Hsuan Chen, “Artificial Intelligence in a Structurally Unjust Society”
Thur. July 13	<b>Deepfakes and Final Exam Review</b> What are deepfakes? What new moral challenges might the emergence of deepfakes pose to society? What are the morally appropriate ways for us, as individuals or jointly as a society, to respond to address the potential wrongs of deepfakes?		<b>Readings</b> 1. Mehhma Malhi, “The Harms and Benefits of Deepfakes” 2. Adrienne de Ruiter, “The Distinct Wrong of Deepfakes” (excerpt) 3. Regina Rini & Leah Cohen, “Deepfakes, Deep Harms”
Fri. July 14	<b>Final Exam</b>		No Assignments

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://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, <https://policy.usc.edu/research-and-scholarship-misconduct/>

**Support Systems**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call*

<https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*

<http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault>

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX - (213) 740-5086 – M-F 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM*

<https://eeotix.usc.edu/>

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. 24-hour reports (with the option to be anonymous), contact USC's Help & Hotline at (213) 740-2500 or (800) 348-7454 or [report.usc.edu](https://report.usc.edu)

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services – (213) 740-0776 – M-F 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM*

<https://osas.usc.edu/>

Provides the steps for students seeking accommodations and services, the University's documentation guidelines and general keys to success.

*Campus Support & Intervention (CSI) – (213) 740-0411 [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu)*

<https://campussupport.usc.edu/>

Connects members of the USC community with supports in achieving their academic, professional, and/or personal goals.

*Diversity at USC*

<https://diversity.usc.edu/>

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency Information - UPC: (213) 740-4321 – 24/7 on call*

<https://dps.usc.edu/>, <https://emergency.usc.edu/>

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-6000 –HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

<https://dps.usc.edu/>

Non-emergency assistance or information.