

## PHL 204.1, .2: Ethical Problems in Contemporary Life



### Class meetings

§1: Monday-Wednesday- Friday 10:30-11:35, building 5, room 123

§2: Monday-Wednesday-Friday 11:45-12:50, building 5, room 123

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**Office hours, winter 2011:** Monday 4:00-5:00, Tuesday 10:30-12:00, Friday 1:15-2:00, and by appointment

**Blackboard login:** <https://blackboard.csupomona.edu/>

### Description

The ability to participate meaningfully in discussions of ethical questions is a valuable skill in a democratic society, regardless of a person's background, career plans, or academic major. Furthermore, most of us desire both to make sound ethical choices in our personal and professional lives. Our course will therefore aim to enhance these abilities through (a) critical engagement with a variety of theoretical traditions in philosophical ethics and (b) the critical investigation of several contemporary ethical controversies. After studying a little bit of logic and investigating a fairly familiar ethical controversy (abortion), we will then alternate between the study of controversies and the study of ethical theories.

These theoretical traditions include

- Cultural relativism
- Divine command theory
- Consequentialism (utilitarianism)
- Kantianism
- Virtue theory

Students will decide the controversies we will investigate, but some possibilities include:

- punishment and the death penalty
- gambling
- affirmative action
- censorship (pornography, violence in the media)
- war, terrorism and torture
- ethics in the family (parents' duties to children, children's duties to parents)
- duties to animals (experimentation, vegetarianism, etc.)
- environmental ethics (climate change, species protection, etc.)
- illegal drugs
- duties to the poor or hungry
- genetic engineering, human cloning
- gun control
- suicide, euthanasia, and assisted suicide
- topics in sexual ethics (marriage, adultery, sex and love, prostitution, homosexuality)

### Course learning objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Differentiate among several prominent ethical theories, including cultural relativism, divine command theory, consequentialism, Kantianism, and virtue theory, making reference to the key features that define these theories
2. Give reasoned arguments in favor or against these theories
3. Engage in reasoned inquiry and dialogue about controversial ethical issues, with said inquiry and dialogue informed by their knowledge of ethical theories
4. Think, speak, and write more carefully and critically about ethical questions

### Evaluation and requirements

Your grade will be calculated based on the following five components:

- [1] A *weekly quiz* will be provided on Blackboard each Friday, starting April 1. Each quiz will have a maximum score of 30 points and will be based on the assigned readings and in-class discussion. You may take each quiz only once. The quizzes are timed and will be available from Friday until the subsequent Monday at 10 a.m. These quizzes will constitute **25%** of your quarter grade, with points assigned as follows:

| Grade | Point range | Grade | Point range |
|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| A     | 255-300     | C     | 200-215     |
| A-    | 249-254     | C-    | 194-199     |
| B+    | 244-248     | D+    | 188-193     |
| B     | 227-243     | D     | 172-187     |
| B-    | 222-226     | D-    | 166-171     |
| C+    | 216-221     | F     | 0-165       |

- [2] *Three short writing assignments* (approximately 1,000 words each, or 3-5 double-spaced pages) will be required in this course.
- The first writing assignment will be distributed (via Blackboard) on Monday, April 4 and due in class Monday, April 18.
  - The second writing assignment will be distributed (via Blackboard) on Wednesday, April 30 and due in class Wednesday, May 4
  - The third writing assignment will be distributed (via Blackboard) on Monday May 9 and due in class on Monday, May 23.

Each of these assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis and constitute 5% of your quarter grade (making the writing assignments 15% of your quarter grade in total). You will not receive a letter grade for these assignments, but in order to pass, you must turn your assignment in on time, it must address one of the assigned topics, and there must be evidence that your work was a serious attempt to complete the assignment. In addition, I will provide group feedback based on a subset of the assignments turned in.

- [3] *Final writing project* This project has two parts:
- [a] When you turn in your third writing assignment on Monday, May 23, please do the following:
- Turn in only a 'blind' copy of your third assignment, a copy without your name but identified with your BroncoID number.
  - Turn in a 'blind' copy of your first and second assignments, copies without your name but identified with your BroncoID number
- On Wednesday, May 25, I will distribute to each of you a set of assignments from another student. I will try, to the extent possible, to give you a set of assignments that correspond to the topics on which you wrote your assignments. You are then required to anonymously review the assignments you received from another student (your three assignments will of course be anonymously reviewed by another student in the class). You are required to complete your reviews using the writing feedback form provided on Blackboard. The reviewed assignments are due in class Wednesday, June 1. This component of the final writing project is graded/pass fail and constitutes 5% of your quarter grade.
- [b] You will select one of the three short assignments you completed under requirement [a] to be turned in at the conclusion of the quarter. You may revise this assignment to whatever extent you wish. Your *revised writing assignment* is due to my office (building 1, room 331) by Friday, June 10, noon. This revised writing assignment constitutes 25% of your grade.

[4] A *mid-quarter self-evaluation* will be distributed by e-mail Wednesday, April 20 and due in class Monday, April 25. This self-evaluation will be graded on a pass/fail basis and constitute **5%** of your quarter grade.

[5] A *final exam*, to be held on

- §1: Wednesday, June 8, 9:10-11:10 am
- §2: Friday, June 10, 7:00-9:00 am

The final exam will constitute **25%** of your quarter grade.

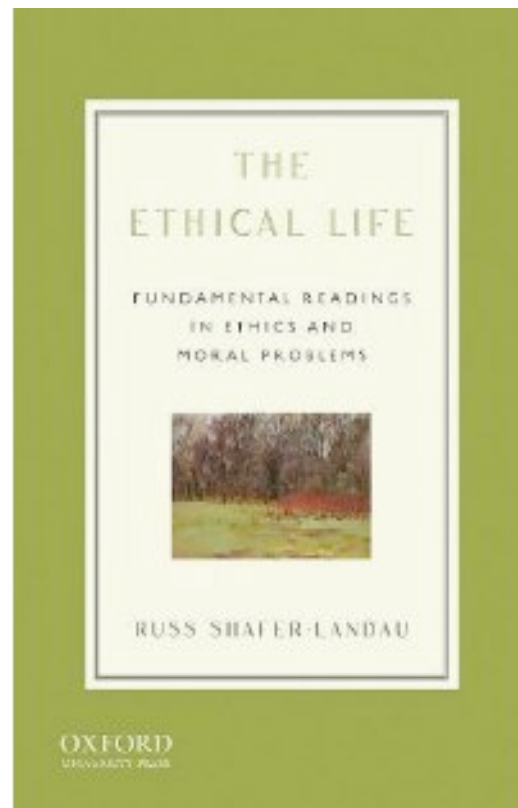
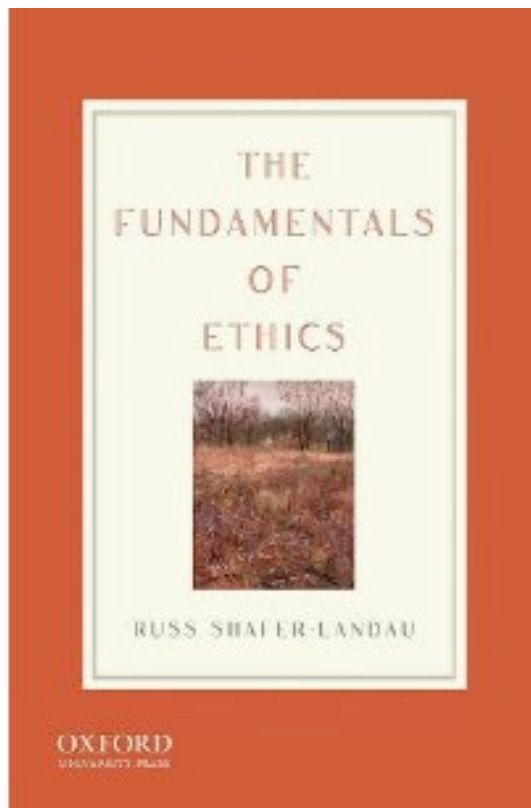
### Blackboard

We will be use Blackboard (<https://blackboard.csupomona.edu/>) in support of the in-class activities in this course. In order to use Blackboard, you will need to know your university Intranet ID and password. You should be checking the Blackboard site several times weekly for updates on course activities, etc.

### Texts

R. Shafer-Landau, The Fundamentals of Ethics (Oxford, 2009)

R. Shafer-Landau, The Ethical Life (Oxford, 2009)



- Other readings will be made available in class or through Blackboard.

**Varia**

- Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to Cal Poly policies.
- The copyright for these course materials is held by the instructor; any attempt to distribute or sell this material without instructor authorization is in violation of that copyright.
- If for any reason, you believe that it is appropriate for you to receive assistance due to physical handicap or learning disabilities, please contact me immediately.

**Topics and readings**

Since you will be helping to select the topics for the ‘controversies’ part of the course, the set of topics and readings below only covers the ‘theory’ portion of the course. Readings from Shafer-Landau’s The Fundamentals of Ethics are marked FE. Readings from Shafer-Landau’s The Ethical Life are marked EL. Readings from Blackboard are designed with Bb. You are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to the indicated meeting. The total reading load for this course is about 320 pages, or 32 pages weekly.

| DATE    | TOPIC(S)   | READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS   | TASKS  |
|---------|--|--|--|
| Mo 3/28 | Why we need philosophical ethics; Logic and reasoning overview     |  |  |
| We 3/30 | Reasoning and arguments; An introduction to the ethics of abortion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasoning primer (Bb)</li> <li>• FE 5-12</li> <li>• Weston, “Ethics as a learning experience” (Bb)</li> </ul>                     |  |
| Fr 4/1  | NO CLASS<br>Instructor at conference                               |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #1 available on Bb</li> </ul>  |
| Mo 4/4  | Ethical controversy #1: Abortion and personhood                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English, “Abortion and the concept of a person” (Bb)</li> <li>• Optional: Thomson, “A defense of abortion” (EL 266-77)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #1 available until 10 am</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> writing assignment available on Bb</li> </ul> |
| We 4/6  | Marquis on abortion  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marquis, “Why abortion is immoral” (EL 278-88)</li> </ul>   |  |
| Fr 4/8  | Ethical theory #1: Cultural relativism                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benedict, “A defense of ethical relativism” (Bb)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #2 available on Bb</li> </ul>  |
| Mo 4/11 | Cultural relativism: Arguments and implications                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prinz, “Morality is a culturally conditioned response” (Bb)</li> <li>• FE 276-78</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #2 available until 10 am</li> </ul>  |

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| We 4/13 | Writing writing workshop   | Please consult and read some of the items available in the Writing Resources folder on Blackboard.  |  |
| Fr 4/15 | Cultural relativism: Arguments and implications                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Midgley, "Trying out one's new sword" (EL 170-76))</li> <li>• Skim materials in folder on sex selection bias (Bb)</li> <li>• Optional: Mackie, "The subjectivity of values" (EL 152-60)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #3 available on Bb</li> </ul>  |
| Mo 4/18 | Ethical theory #2: Divine Command Theory                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mortimer, "Morality is based on God's commands" (Bb)</li> <li>• Genesis 22 selection (Abraham and Isaac) (Bb)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #3 available until 10 am</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> writing assignment due in class</li> </ul>        |
| We 4/20 | Objections to Divine Command Theory (Euthyphro dilemma)                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plato, <u>Euthyphro</u>, selections (Bb)</li> <li>• Arthur, "Morality without God" (Bb)</li> <li>• FE 58-70</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-evaluation distributed on Bb</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> writing assignment available on Bb</li> </ul> |
| Fr 4/22 | Ethical controversy #2   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings to be determined by controversies survey</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #4 available on Bb</li> </ul>  |
| Mo 4/25 | Ethical controversy #2   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings to be determined by controversies survey</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #4 available until 10 am</li> <li>• Self-evaluation due in class</li> </ul>                          |
| We 4/27 | Ethical theory #3: Consequentialism: An introduction (by way of Singer)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sandel, JusticeHarvard, episode 1, part 2 ["The case for cannibalism"] (link on Bb)</li> <li>• Singer, "The Singer solution to world poverty" (EL 200-207)</li> </ul>                              |  |
| Fr 4/29 | Defending consequentialism   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE 112-124</li> <li>• FE 144-154</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #5 available on Bb</li> </ul>  |
| Mo 5/2  | Objections to consequentialism: Justice, impartiality, and demandingness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE 125-143</li> <li>• LeGuin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (Bb)</li> <li>• Optional: Williams, "A critique of utilitarianism" (Bb)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #5 available until 10 am</li> </ul>  |

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| We 5/4  | Ethical theory #4: Kantianism            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE 144-154</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> writing assignment due in class</li> </ul>  |
| Fr 5/6  | Kant's Categorical Imperative, version 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL 70-79</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #6 available on Bb</li> </ul>   |
| Mo 5/9  | Kant's Categorical Imperative, version 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL 79-82</li> <li>• FE 158-165</li> <li>• Baron, selection from "Kantian ethics" (Bb)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #6 available until 10 am</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> writing assignment available on Bb</li> </ul>  |
| We 5/11 | Kantianism: Challenges and objections    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE 154-157, 165-175</li> </ul>   |   |
| Fr 5/13 | Ethical controversy #3                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings to be determined by controversies survey</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #7 available on Bb</li> </ul>   |
| Mo 5/16 | Ethical controversy #3                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings to be determined by controversies survey</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #7 available until 10 am</li> </ul>   |
| We 5/18 | Ethical theory #5: Virtue ethics         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayo, "Virtue and the moral life" (Bb)</li> <li>• FE 240-246</li> </ul>                          |   |
| Fr 5/20 | Aristotle's virtue ethics                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL 105-116</li> <li>• FE 246-49</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #8 available on Bb</li> </ul>   |
| Mo 5/23 | Objections to virtue ethics              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE 249-258</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #8 available until 10 am</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> writing assignment due in class (blind), with blind copies of 1<sup>st</sup> &amp; 2<sup>nd</sup> assignments</li> </ul> |
| We 5/25 | Rules and ideals in ethics               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frankena, "A critique of virtue-based morality" (Bb)</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignments distributed in class for review</li> </ul>   |
| Fr 5/27 | Ethical controversy #4                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings to be determined by controversies survey</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #9 available on Bb</li> </ul>   |
| Mo 5/30 | NO CLASS<br><i>Memorial Day</i>          |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #9 available until 10 am</li> </ul>   |
| We 6/1  | Ethical controversy #4                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings to be determined by controversies survey</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed assignments due in class</li> </ul>   |
| Fr 6/3  | Final exam review                        |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #10 available on Bb</li> <li>• Reviewed</li> </ul>  |

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|         |                |                      | assignments returned to authors   |
| Mo 6/6  |                |                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz #10 available until 10 am</li> </ul>  |
| We 6/8  |                |                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final exam, §1: 9:10-11:10 am, 5-123</li> </ul>  |
| Fr 6/10 | FINAL EXAM, §2 | 9:10-11:10 am, 5-107 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final exam, §2: 7:00-9:00 am, 5-123</li> <li>• Revised writing assignments due, noon, 1-331</li> </ul> |

### **Some free advice on how to succeed in PHL 204!**

Based on my own observations and feedback from students past, here is some advice on how to succeed in this class:

*Take every quiz.* They can only help your grade, for one, and even if you miss some questions, you get a good idea what you need to know and pay attention to.

*Read — seriously!* Read the material in this course carefully. In a quiet place. With full attention and some materials with which to take notes. Once we discuss a reading in class, consider reading it again.

*Pay extra attention to your revised writing.* Expectations for this assignment will be high. You have a long time to complete it, but devote yourself to making this writing as clear and convincing as it can be.

*Show up.* Yes, it's a 'duh.' But we'll be discussing a lot of arguments and ideas in class, and this is where a lot of the intellectual heavy lifting will take place.