

## **Philosophy 105: Current Moral and Social Issues Syllabus (Updated 1/21/20)**

Spring 2020, Section 90 (Online)

Instructor: Chris Hauser (Email: [cmh313@philosophy.rutgers.edu](mailto:cmh313@philosophy.rutgers.edu); Phone: 847-525-9092).

Office Hours: There are no set office hours for this course; instead, I have left plenty of time in my schedule to arrange one-on-one meetings as needed. To schedule a one-on-one online chat or phone call where we can discuss any questions you have about the course content, policies, or assignments, email me at [cmh313@philosophy.rutgers.edu](mailto:cmh313@philosophy.rutgers.edu). In your email, please (a) let me know what you'd like to talk about and (b) suggest at least three times at which you could meet to talk.

### **§1. Course Overview**

This course will give students the opportunity to engage one another and contemporary authors in discussions about a series of hotly-debated current moral and social issues. This semester's topics include euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, abortion, the death penalty, obligations to the world's needy, pornography, drug criminalization, affirmative action, reparations for past injustices, marriage equality, and immigration. This class will require students to think critically about such current moral and social issues, articulate and defend their own points of view, articulate alternative points of view and the arguments given on behalf of those points of view, and to consider and respond to possible objections to others' points of view and their own points of view.

The class will provide students with the opportunity to not only develop their knowledge and ideas about the particular issues covered in the class but also to develop a general ability to conduct respectful and yet truth-seeking discussions with peers who disagree with them about controversial moral and social issues.

### **§2. Core Curriculum Requirement**

This course satisfies the following **Rutgers SAS core curriculum requirement**:

AHo – students will be able to examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

### **§3. Required Texts and Technology**

To complete this course, you will need the following:

1. **A copy of the course textbook.** The course textbook is *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, edited by Andrew I. Cohen and Christopher Heath Wellmann (Wiley Blackwell, 2014). ISBN: 9781118479391. Please make sure you get the **2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**. You can purchase it from the Rutgers Bookstore, from Amazon, or some other Online Vendor. *Scans of the textbook readings will be provided for the first three weeks to allow time for students to purchase their books. But please obtain a copy of the book as soon as possible. After the third week, I will no longer provide scans of the textbook readings.*
2. **Access to a personal computer with a web camera and microphone, as well as a private space to take the final exam on that computer.** Your final exam will be taken using ProctorTrack. ProctorTrack monitors you to make sure that you are not using any webpages, computer files, books, or other people while taking the final exam. The software is free and available through the course's Canvas website, but you will need to have access to a personal computer with a built-in or plug-in web-camera and a built-in or plug-in microphone. In order to take the test, you will also need to be able to use that personal computer in a private, well-lit space on the date of the exam. The Final Exam will take place on **Tuesday 5/12**.

Note: if for any reason you will not be able to take the Final Exam on the scheduled date (Tuesday May 12<sup>th</sup>) (e.g., you will be traveling on an airplane that day), I expect that you contact me about this no later than Tuesday February 4<sup>th</sup> (two weeks after the course begins). If you do not contact me by this date, I cannot guarantee that I can give you an alternative date to take the test.

## §4. How this Course Will Work

### §4.1 The Course Canvas Site

Everything in this course will run through the course's Canvas site. To access the course site, go to <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/> and login using the Red and White Buttons in the upper-righthand corner of your screen. You will need a Rutgers NetID or Email to login.

**At the start of the course, here are a few preparatory steps you should take.**

1. Ensure your email address is up to date, in your Canvas account Profile (see Updating Your Profile in [Course Tools](#)).
2. Configure your notifications settings, making sure to enable notifications of Announcements and Conferences (see Updating Your Profile in [Course Tools](#)). Course emails may wind up in your spam filter; if so, you can usually stop the problem by adding [rutgers.instructure.com](mailto:rutgers.instructure.com) to your email's whitelist or exceptions list.

If you do not yet have a Rutgers NetID/Email or have any trouble accessing the course site, please immediately do two things: (1) email me (to let me know) and (2) contact Canvas Help (Email: [help@canvas.rutgers.edu](mailto:help@canvas.rutgers.edu); Phone: 877-361-1134).

## §4.2 Course Activities

A typical week in the course will cover one Module. There are total of **12 Modules** in the course (2 out of the 14 weeks in the semester are dedicated to work on the course's essay assignments and have no Module associated with them; hence 12 Modules). A typical week/Module in the course (note: this does not include this first week/Module) will involve the following activities:

1. **(Sunday) First-Take Discussion Forum Post** – before completing the Module's readings, you are required to make a forum post in the "Module X First-Take Discussion Forum." You'll respond to a prompt which asks you to explain your position on the moral/social issue which is the focus of the module's readings.
2. **(Monday, Thursday) 2 Reading Assignments** – the first reading assignment is always due Monday night; the second reading assignment is always due Thursday night. (Technically, you aren't required to complete the first reading assignment until Thursday night. But I recommend that you complete it by Monday night if you plan to participate in the Monday night Conference – more on this below).
3. **(Thursday) Reading Response Forum Post** – after completing the Module's readings, you are required to make a forum post in the "Module X Reading Response Forum." You'll respond to a prompt asking you to write a paragraph addressing a question about the reading you just completed.
4. **(Saturday) Respond to a Peer's First-Take Discussion Forum Post** – finally, by Saturday night of each week, you are required to make a post in the "Module X Respond to a Peer's First-Take Discussion Forum Post" forum. Again, you'll be given a prompt with instructions on what to do in your post.
5. **OPTIONAL: (Monday, Thursday) Conferences** – typically, I will host a "Conference" each Monday night and each Thursday night from 9:30-10:30pm EST. These are opportunities to talk with your peers and me in *live time* about the readings and/or an upcoming major assignment (e.g., an essay assignment). I'll provide more information about these as we get to them. *Note: participation in Conferences is optional. I strongly encourage you to participate in as many Conferences as you can, but you are not required to do so. Typically, I will record Conferences and make them available to students who weren't able to attend.*

In addition to these weekly activities, the course will involve four other kinds of less frequent assignments, namely, (a) Four Reading Comprehension Quizzes, (b) Two Essay Preparation Exercises, (c) Two Essays, and (d) a Final Exam. I'll provide more details about all of these "larger" assignments as we get nearer to their due dates. (For the due dates of all assignments in the class, including these larger assignments, please see the Course Summary at the bottom of this page).

## §5: Grades and Grading Policies

### §5.1 Grade Breakdown:

10% of final grade	Forum Posts (for more on how I grade these, see §5.3 below)
10% of final grade	Four Reading Comprehension Quizzes
5% of final grade	Essay 1 Preparation Exercise
25% of final grade	Essay 1
5% of final grade	Essay 2 Preparation Exercise
25% of final grade	Essay 2
20% of final grade	Final Exam

### §5.2 How I will Grade Your Work (General Scale)

All grades for this course will be based on the following 40 point scale. Each letter grade has three numbers associated with it: a high, middle, and low version of that grade.

A	40, 39, 38	C	28, 27, 26
B+	37, 36, 35	D	25, 24, 23
B	34, 33, 32	F	<23
C+	31, 30, 29		

**Please note that because I use this 40pt scale, the summary of your overall grade displayed on Canvas will NOT BE ACCURATE. (The Canvas site treats every assignment as though it worth the same percentage of your overall grade and hence what Canvas reports as your overall grade will not be accurate). If you want to know your overall grade at any point in the class, just email me.**

### §5.3 Forum Posts Grading Policy

Apart from Modules 1 and 4, each Module includes three Forum Posts: (a) a First-Take post, (b) a Reading Response post, and (c) a Respond to a Peer's First-Take Forum Post post.

Unlike other assignments in the class, I will score Forum Posts primarily based on effort rather than mastery. What does that mean? As long as you complete the Forum Post on time and I judge it to be satisfactory, you will receive an A (38/40). If your post is very good, you'll receive a 40/40 instead of a 38/40. If I judge your post to be below satisfactory, you will instead receive a C+ (30/40). Again, I emphasize that late Forum Posts will not be accepted for credit.

Since the class is so large, I will not grade everyone's posts for each week/Module. Instead, for each week/Module, I will randomly select  $\sim\frac{1}{4}$  of the class and grade only those students' posts

for that week/Module. Over the course of the semester, each student will be selected 3 times, meaning that you will be graded on 9 of your Forum Posts (3 Modules x 3 posts/Module = 9) Your overall Forum Posts grade will be the average of the scores you receive on the posts for those three Modules. To ward against the unlucky chance that you get selected the one week when you did were pressed for time and did a poor job on one of your posts or missed one post, I will drop your lowest score before calculating your overall score. So, for example, let's say you score as follows: Module X: 38, 38, 38; Module Y: 38, 38, 30; and Module Z: 38, 38, 38. In this case, I would drop your 30 (your lowest score) and calculate your average score based on the remaining 8 posts, with the result being that your overall forum post grade would be 38 /40 (A).

### §5.3 Late Assignment Policy:

1. Late Forum Posts, Reading Comprehension Quizzes, and Essay Preparation Exercises will not be accepted. You will receive a 0 on any such assignment. (If the assignment is just a few minutes late, e.g., you turn in it at 12:04am instead of before 11:59pm, it will be up to my discretion whether to consider it late or not).
2. I will not accept a late Final Exam. Again, if for any reason you will not be able to take the Final Exam on the scheduled date (Tuesday May 12<sup>th</sup>) (e.g., you will be traveling on an airplane that day), I expect that you contact me about this no later than Tuesday February 4<sup>th</sup> (two weeks after the course begins). If you do not contact me by this date, I cannot guarantee that I can give you an alternative date to take the test.
3. Late Essays will be penalized as follows: I will subtract 1.5pts (using the aforementioned 40pt scale) for each day that the essay is late. For example, if you would have received a 35/40 (B+) but turned in the essay two days late, you would receive a 32/40 (B). If it were four days late, you would instead receive a 29/40 (C+). **In general, I strongly encourage you to complete the essays on time.**
4. Permission to turn in an assignment late will be granted only if you provide documentation/proof of the illness, family emergency, or other serious and unexpected occurrence preventing you from turning your work in on time. If the thing preventing you from turning in the assignment on time is something which you know about in advance, it is my expectation that you will contact me in advance to let me know about the conflict and ask permission to turn in the assignment late.

### §6.5 Submitting Assignments

All assignments should be submitted through Canvas, following the instructions associated with that assignment's page on Canvas. If you aren't sure how to submit an assignment or run into some trouble with Canvas, email the assignment to me. As long as you email it to me before the submission deadline, your assignment will not be considered late.

## **§6.6 Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Plagiarism**

It goes without saying that you should not cheat or plagiarize. I will not tolerate any such conduct and will not hesitate to report issues to Rutgers' Office for Academic Integrity. For Rutgers' academic integrity policies, see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>. I'm always happy to answer questions about this; you'll never get in trouble for asking a question. A general rule of thumb: if you are in doubt, just cite it.

Since this is an online course and some of you are in different time zones, there is no set time for the final exam (you can take it anytime on May 12<sup>th</sup>). You are expected to not share information about the test questions with other students. In addition to risking a serious academic sanction, such conduct would be extremely disrespectful and unfair to other students in the course.

## **§6.7 Turnitin Policy**

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Students who do not agree should contact me immediately.

## **§7 Tentative Course Schedule**

Week 1 (1/21-1/25): Moral Theory; Intro [MODULE 1]

Week 2 (1/26-2/1) Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide [MODULE 2]

Week 3 (2/2-2/8): Abortion I [MODULE 3]

Week 4 (2/9-2/15): Abortion II [MODULE 4]

Week 5 (2/16-2/22): The Death Penalty [MODULE 5]

Week 6 (2/23-2/29): First Essay Week

Week 7 (3/1-3/7): Affirmative Action [MODULE 6]

Week 8 (3/8-3/14): Reparations for Past Injustice [MODULE 7]

SPRING BREAK

Phil 105: Current Moral and Social Issues(Syllabus)  
Spring 2020, Section 90 (Online)

Week 9 (3/22-3/28): Same-Sex Marriage [MODULE 8]

Week 10 (3/29-4/4): Pornography [MODULE 9]

Week 11 (4/5-4/11): Drug Criminalization [MODULE 10]

Week 12 (4/12-4/18): Immigration [MODULE 11]

Week 13 (4/19-4/25): 2<sup>nd</sup> Essay Week

Week 14 (4/26-5/2): World Hunger [MODULE 12]

**Final Exam on Tuesday 5/12**