

Current Moral and Social Issues

Fall, 2020 / 01:730:105:03 (Index 06787) / MW 7:40-9:00 p.m., online, using Webex
(<https://rutgers.webex.com/meet/tripmcc>)

Available in Sakai (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>)

Instructor: Trip McCrossin

Email: tripmcc@philosophy.rutgers.edu (checked typically once a day, except in extraordinary circumstances; supplemented by a “General Q&A” topic in Forums in Sakai)

Office hours: Also online, using Webex, at the above address; please see “Announcements” in Sakai for availability; by arrangement

1. Overview:

... how we think is not just mildly interesting, not just a subject of intellectual debate, but a matter of life and death. — Howard Zinn (*Passionate Declarations*)

We face today a dizzying array of morally controversial social issues: how may we most reasonably, individually or together, express ourselves, protect ourselves, bring kids into the world, leave it ourselves, punish even to the point of execution, wage war even at the expense of the innocent, enjoy affluence not enjoyed by others, and which may threaten our shared environment, to choose only the most conspicuous ones. Our goal will be to develop a systematic approach to these and related issues in response to the common concern they reflect: how best do we balance individual rights and the common good, not only lawfully, but in a *morally-grounded* lawful manner? In this spirit, we’ll imagine ourselves as, “Current Social *as* Moral Issues.”

As such, we’ll actively resist three common pitfalls (i) in addressing current social issues, we may conflate what is or isn’t moral with what is or isn’t legal, hindering us in both arenas; (ii) distinguishing them, still we may neglect the foundation role of the former questions play relative to the latter; (iii) recognizing this, still we may address them in isolation, issue by issue, rather than as coalescing into overlapping discursive arcs; (iv) we tend to neglect the richness of popular culture, as it addresses, intentionally or otherwise, with varying degrees of subtlety, a wide variety of issues. To this effect, in-class work, and so preparation therefor, will proceed at the intersection of manageable selections of watershed or otherwise provocative (v) philosophical perspectives (in the abortion and euthanasia debates, for example, Judith Thomson’s “A Defense of Abortion,” Philippa Foot’s “Euthanasia,” and Ronald Dworkin et al.’s “Physician-assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief”), (vi) legal rulings (in the abortion and euthanasia debates again, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and *Washington v. Glucksberg*), and (vii) popular culture (still in the abortion and euthanasia debates, say, *Juno* and *Whose Life is it Anyway?*)

We’ll be *as participatory as possible*, based on the idea that philosophy is best done this way, generally speaking. In addition, participants should anticipate a series of mandatory assessments, in-class or on-line, and an optional extra-credit writing opportunity.

2. Expectations:

The most important expectation is your *active attendance*, as discussed in our class policies, included below.

Your course grade will correspond, as described in section four of our policies, to the average of (i) the average grade resulting from periodic quizzes, announced or unannounced, in-class or take-home, if administered, regarding material at hand, (ii) a writing assignment, if announced, (iii) a final exam, if announced and administered, during our scheduled exam period, with (iv) active attendance and other extra-credit opportunities, if announced, functioning as our policies describe.

The general goal of (i) is to provide periodic snapshots of comprehension of the material at hand, and to focus attention in the process on particularly important aspects of the material. The general goal of (ii) and (iii) is to provide more comprehensive snapshots, broader in focus, and to provide opportunities for creative problem-solving on the basis of ongoing readings and discussions.

Assignment guidelines, schedules, deadlines and such will be discussed in class, and posted accordingly in our course management system.

3. Grading policies: See class policies below.

4. Syllabus (subject to amendment):

Meeting dates	Weekly plans — readings and viewings, recommended and required, available in or via our course management system
09.02	Welcome, introductions, overview, etc.
09.08 / 09.09*	A general sense of how we'll approach "applied" ethics
09.14 / 09.16	Patients' rights, in general
09.21 / 09.23	Continued; need and affluence
09.28 / 09.30	Patients' right in particular: abortion and euthanasia
10.05 / 10.07	Continued
10.12 / 10.14	Gun regulation and capital punishment
10.19 / 10.21	Continued
10.26 / 10.28	Freedom of expression and the right to privacy
11.02 / 11.04	Continued
11.09 / 11.11	Warfare
11.16 / 11.18	Continued
11.23*	Continued
11.30 / 12.02	Environmentalism generally, the climate crisis in particular
12.07 / 12.09	Continued

	The last day of classes is Thursday, December 10; reading days are Friday, December 11 and Monday, December 14; final exam period is Tuesday, December 15, through Tuesday, December 22; final exam period, Friday, December 18, 8:00-11:00 a.m.
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* Labor Day is on Monday, September 7. Fall recess begins on Thursday, November 26 and ends the following Sunday. “Change of designation days: Tuesday, September 8 (Monday Classes), Wednesday, November 25 (Friday Classes).” (<https://scheduling.rutgers.edu/scheduling/academic-calendar>)

5. Student Wellness Services

(a) *Just In Case Web App*

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smart phone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

(b) *Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)*

848-932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ rhscaps.rutgers.edu

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students’ efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

(c) *Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)*

848-932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / vpva.rutgers.edu

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 8489321181.

(d) *Disability Services*

848-445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentationguidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus’s disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registrationform>.

(e) *Scarlet Listeners*

732-247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com>

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

6. Class Policies

<http://rci.rutgers.edu/~tripmcc/phil/policies-mccrossin.pdf>

The following policies are designed to help us to work together as a class as smoothly and productively as possible.

1. Classroom dynamics
2. Office hours
3. Assignment guidelines
4. Assignment and course grades
5. Students with disabilities
6. Amendments to these policies

1. Classroom dynamics

(a) *Active attendance.* Classes that are not labelled “independent study” are in fact *not* independent studies. They’re not just a bunch of folks in a room “doing their own thing.” Rather, they’re what you might call *dependent* studies, or better yet *interdependent* studies. A class is a kind of *temporary community*, that is, those included coming together for a limited period of time, and so with a sort of built-in urgency, to address a certain set of issues, in order to come to as much of a consensus as possible as to how best to respond to them. *Without your active attendance much less can happen that will be engaging and ultimately enlightening to us all.* However shy or otherwise reluctant you may be, in other words, whatever your preferences may be to the contrary, *you must participate in meaningful and regular ways in our in-class discussions over the course of our time together.* There are two principal reasons for this.

On the one hand, from a purely self-interested point of view, because you can reasonably anticipate finding the material we will address challenging to one degree or another, you simply owe it to yourself to put yourself in the way of better comprehension and so better performance by putting yourself in the way of additional conversation.

On the other hand, and equally importantly, even if you may not feel in need of assistance yourself, your participation will very likely assist your classmates, and to withhold such assistance is, simply put, *a significant moral failing.* By way of example, say we’re walking along, maybe minding our own business, and, lo and behold, we come upon someone in some sort of distress. Most, if not all of us want to be the sort of person who comes to their assistance, in some meaningful way, to be a “good Samaritan” that is, confident that if we choose not to help them, for whatever reason, we’ll think the worse of ourselves ultimately. We may not be obligated to help, strictly speaking, but we’re simply schmucks if we don’t. As classmates, our role in one another’s academic lives is not so different. The material we will address is challenging to most, if not all of us, and if you fail to participate in discussing it, you fail to come to the assistance of those who may be struggling with it. To choose not to participate, then, and so choose not to put yourself in the way of helping your classmates is more than just a failure to satisfy your reasonable self-interest, in other words, it is, again, an *significant moral failing.*

Finally, the idea of taking a class can be reasonably understood as the idea of becoming competent or conversant in the “language” of the subject matter in question. Just as in more conventional “language classes” (Spanish, French, German, and so on), you’re unlikely to become properly competent or conversant if you only listen to others, without making an effort to practice it “out loud.”

(b) *Reporting unavoidable absences.* In addition to the above common-sense pedagogical reasons for attending class except in verifiably extraordinary circumstances, *it is simply university policy that you and your classmates are expected to attend all of your classes.* If you are *compelled by such circumstances* to miss this or that class, however, you are *required* to use the university’s on-line *Self-Reporting Absence Application* to report the date and reason for your absence, available at the following address.

<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra>

A notification is automatically sent to me by email, including the reason for your absence. Except in extraordinary circumstances, please refrain from notifying me with personal email.

Needless to say, *this self-reporting mechanism is governed by the University Code of Student Conduct*, available at the following address.

<http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu>

If you are not familiar with this essential policy, please familiarize yourself with it at your earliest opportunity.

Our policy for missed classes and missed exams and other exercises will be as follows.

In-class discussion cannot, given the nature of the activity, be replicated after the fact, but you may nevertheless find it useful to seek out notes that one or another of your classmates may have taken, which may help give you a sense of what we discussed in your absence. You are in any case, responsible for all reviewing and internalizing all the material identified as required in the syllabus that we addressed in your absence.

If you are compelled to miss a scheduled exercise by verifiably extraordinary circumstances, reported as described above, be it in in-class or take-home format, you will have until the next class meeting to complete a make-up assignment that I will set for you, unless otherwise arranged. As you will have at least the advantage of additional time to prepare, and perhaps the additional advantage of completing the exercise in a take-home as opposed to in-class format, your make-up work will have to account for this in some way, in fairness to your classmates who completed the work as scheduled, and the likely way in which this will be accounted for is by having your make-up work be to some degree more difficult. It is clearly to your advantage, then, to make every effort to complete assignments as scheduled.

(c) *Preparing to actively attend.* You’ll be able to do so far more usefully, to yourself and your classmates, if you review as thoroughly as possible at least the “required” material we’re scheduled to discuss *before* we do so. It’s perfectly reasonable to want to wait to do so until *after* we discuss it, in the hope that our discussion will make it more quickly and easily comprehensible. While this may be easier on you, individually, it will be harder on *us*, collectively, as we will benefit that much less from the wisdom you will bring to discussion. Your comprehension of the material will also be better assisted by discussion if you’re read in advance the material discussed. In any case, *you are ultimately responsible for reading and comprehending all “required” reading, whether and to whatever degree we review it together in*

class, and for being prepared to answer reasonable questions about it in class in oral or written form.

(d) *Avoiding unnecessary distractions.* In order to encourage active attendance, we will want to avoid certain unnecessary distractions.

(i) *No extraneous activity* — Please also refraining from doing other course work or unrelated activities during class, because it can be just as distracting, to you of course, but also to those around you. To those of you who may be may feel relatively expert at pursuing the above sorts of activities inconspicuously, let me say only that I imagine myself to be relatively expert as well at discerning them nevertheless.

(ii) *No electronics, in general* — I understand that we all value generally our various electronic paraphernalia, and in some cases they may act as learning aids. They can also be very distracting, to you and to those around you. *Laptops, phones, recording devices, and similar electronic paraphernalia should remain off your desks, out of your laps, and generally safely stowed away and out of view.*

If you anticipate receiving an important communication during class, you are welcome to step out temporarily, and to alert me in advance to the possibility.

(iii) *No electronics, in particular: no note taking using laptops or other devices including keyboards* — Some of you may prefer to take in-class notes using your laptop. On the one hand, thanks to RUWireless, laptops represent an undesirable temptation to engage in academic and popular-culture distractions. On the other hand, typing may represent a noisy distraction to those in proximity. Finally, there is growing evidence that that *longhand* note taking is considerable preferable. As Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer suggest in the abstract to their “The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking” (*Psychological Science*, April, 2014),

“The present research suggests that even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing. In three studies, we found that students who took notes on laptops performed worse on conceptual questions than students who took notes longhand. We show that whereas taking more notes can be beneficial, laptop note takers’ tendency to transcribe lectures verbatim rather than processing information and reframing it in their own words is detrimental to learning.”

We will take this research to be equally applicable to other sorts of keyboards, such as those available to tablet and smartphone users. In my opinion, software is not yet available that makes longhand note taking on tablets sufficient user-friendly to be worth using.

Exceptions will of course be made in cases of students’ disabilities that may require their use, on the basis of appropriate documentation from the Office of Disabilities (see below for details).

(iv) *No electronics, in particular: no recording of class proceedings* — Not everyone likes to be recorded, and so, in order not to discourage active participation, we will observe the University Senate’s January 28, 2012 recommendations regarding “Student Recording,” the first provision is as follows:

“The University should prohibit the audio-visual recording, transmission, or distribution of classroom lectures and discussions unless expressed written permission (on syllabi, course sites, or by signed form, for example) from the class instructor has been obtained and all

students in the class as well as guest speakers have been informed that audio/video recording may occur.”

The Senates recommendations in their entirety are available at the following address.

<https://oirt.rutgers.edu/lecture-recording>

(v) *No electronics, in particular: one exception* — Tablets, while not useful for note taking, may be useful to make available readings that would otherwise be brought to class in paper form. Such tablet use is allowable, as long as tablets are used only in the front row of class, or, as need be, the front rows. Tablets must also be kept flat on desks, and otherwise clearly not being used in other ways, consistently with the exception not to be extended to laptops.

(vi) *Consequences of ignoring (i)-(iv)* — If you’re tempted to risk ignoring these policies, please be aware in advance that you risk being called out in class, resulting in not only embarrassment but disruption of class proceedings, or outside of class, also embarrassing one imagines, and in any case, whether you’re called out or not, that you risk your course grade suffering as a result.

(e) Finally, because unnecessary formality and authority is best avoided, *please use always just my first name.*

2. Office hours and communication

You may reach me at trip@mccrossin.org. I will respond as promptly as I’m able. Please feel free to speak with me before or after class. Regular and impromptu office hours will be posted to “Announcements” in Sakai, and forwarded automatically by email. Please be sure to check regularly whatever email address the university has on file for you, or forward it to whatever address you check more regularly.

3. Assignment guidelines

(a) *Please adhere thoroughly to all course policies*, here and as may be included in in-class or electronic communication, *and to university policies, including the university’s Policy on Academic Integrity*, which may be found at the above address.

<http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu>

If you are not already familiar with this policy, please familiarize yourself with it at your earliest opportunity.

The Policy defines plagiarism as the representation of the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic work. Intentionally committing plagiarism is a serious offense with severe consequences. Instructors are required to report students who intentionally violate this policy to the department chairperson and to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. The most common forms of plagiarism are:

- Quoting directly or paraphrasing without acknowledging the source (this includes copying or paraphrasing material from a web site without providing a proper citation for the site)
- Presenting the work of another as one’s own
- Plagiarizing major portions of a written assignment
- Submitting purchased materials such as term papers

If you are in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism, and thus what to avoid, please consult the above link, and in particular the links there to “Student Resources” and “Multimedia Resources.”

The Policy establishes levels of violations and recommends sanctions. Depending upon the severity of the case and the level of the violation, the sanctions for these violations include: a failing grade for the assignment, failure in the course, mandatory participation in a series of non-credit academic integrity workshops, academic probation, and/or suspension.

All written work not completed and submitted in class, will be submitted on-line, under the “Assignments” link in Sakai, and in the process will be filtered through Turnitin.com, resulting in an “Originality Report,” with a percentage-based “Similarity Index,” relative to internet sources, publications, and student papers from Rutgers and across the country. Because I am emotionally invested in your success, and so am unlikely to be able to remain entirely objective if and when suspicions of plagiarism arise, and so am likely be overly inclined to “cut deals” that may be helpful to you in the short run, but harmful in the long run, *any Turnitin Originality Report indicating significant suspicion of plagiarism* I will forward automatically, without warning or prior discussion, to the “relevant powers that be” in the university, from whom the authors will hear subsequently, and with whom they will have to deal ultimately, with the possible outcome being the array of consequences laid out in the Policy on Academic Integrity, including the above ones. Again, if you have not already done so, you should read and internalize as thoroughly as possible the Policy on Academic Integrity.

(b) *Please also adhere, as thoroughly as you’re able, to conventional compositional standards.* In doing so, you will help to ensure that your reader grasps properly what you’re attempting to communicate. If you want or need assistance in this, please feel free to reach out to me, of course, but please also remember that we’ve the good fortune to have Writing Centers at our disposal in both Newark and New Brunswick. More information is available at the following addresses respectively.

<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~nwc>

<http://wp.rutgers.edu/tutoring/writingcenters>

There are a number of on-line resources that may also prove useful, some of which available at this address:

<http://rci.rutgers.edu/~tripmcc/phil/writingguidelines.pdf>

(c) *Final exams* will be administered according to university policy. During the fall and spring semesters, pending announcements to the contrary, *final exams will be administered during our assigned exam period*, according to the university’s exam schedule.

<http://finalexams.rutgers.edu>

<http://scheduling.newark.rutgers.edu/finalexamsched.php>

During the winter and summer sessions, final exams in an in-class format will occur during our last scheduled class, those in a take-home format due by the end of that night unless otherwise announced.

(d) *Exercises not final exams* should be completed by deadlines and according to instructions included therein, and in related electronic and in-class announcements.

(e) *All written work* must include at least your first and last names, in the upper right-hand corner of each page, each of which should also be numbered, in such a way as to indicate where in a series of pages it falls (“1/5,” “2 of 7,” or some such).

(f) *All written work done outside of class to be submitted electronically must be (i) appropriately formatted*—including your full name, but *not* your student ID, the date of submission, and a

descriptive title; margins that are one inch all around; twelve-point time-roman font; and citations included parenthetically or in footnotes, and in an end-of-text bibliography—and (ii) *appropriately submitted*—only in “Portable Document Format” (a file with a “.pdf” suffix), and only using the dedicated link in “Assignments” in Sakai (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>). *If you format or submit improperly, you risk my not being able to review them, and seeing your overall grade suffer as a result.*

(g) I am more than happy to meet and work with you as you develop your written work, in general and in detail. Because I cannot feasibly offer to all across the board the possibility of reviewing draft material, however, I must decline in advance to do so, except under extraordinary circumstances. This does not preclude “talking through” in person what you’ve written at different stages of the process.

(h) If you come to anticipate, for some presumably compelling reason, being unable to make an assignment deadline, or in the case of end-of-term assignments come to anticipate appealing for a temporary grade to give you addition time to complete the process, please reach out in this respect as soon as possible.

4. Assignment and course grades

(a) Rutgers describes the grades of “A,” “B+,” “B,” “C,” “D,” and “F” as representing performances that are “Outstanding,” “Excellent,” “Good,” “Satisfactory,” “Poor,” and “Failing” respectively. Assignment and course grades will reflect these descriptions.

(b) Reviewing of each of your assignments will begin with the assumption that you’ve done at least a basically “good job,” and thus have earned a B, in numerical terms 80 percent of full credit. A better performance will earn you additional percentage points, a more mediocre performance fewer points, typically in increments of five points. Generally speaking, understanding the meaning of letter grades as above, a 90 or above may be understood to reflect an A performance, 85-89% a B+ performance, 80-84% to a B performance, and so on.

(c) Substantive commentary will typically take the form of an answer key, which I will distribute electronically at a reasonable interval after I’ve received and graded all pending work. Please compare your work to the corresponding answer key and reach out to me with any questions of concerns you may have with my evaluation.

(d) Your course grade will be the letter grade determined by (i) the numerical average of your various graded assignments, as enumerated in “Expectations” in the syllabus, (ii) extra-credit work where available and relevant (see below), and (iii) a generous interpretation of historical distribution of letter grades in the Arts and Sciences at Rutgers, available at the following address.

<http://nbregistrar.rutgers.edu/facstaff/pdf/report45.pdf>

(e) Extra-credit work will not be graded numerically, and so will not influence your grade directly as such. Under the right circumstances, however, it may influence it indirectly. That is *if* your extra-credit work is done well, *and if* your graded assignments put you on the cusp numerically of a higher overall letter grade (if, for example, your overall numerical grade is an 89 percent of full credit, and an A at Rutgers is typically earned by folks with 90 percent and above), then extra-credit work *may* under these circumstances help to boost your letter grade to the next available one (from a C to a C+, for example, a C+ to a B, a B to a B+, or, though less typically, from a B+ to an A). If you are not on the cusp of a higher letter grade (you’ve an 85 overall, for example, rather than an 89), then your extra-credit work is less likely, if likely at all

to allow for the desired boost, though coupled with *regularly active* participation in class discussions, the two may do the trick. *Likewise*, if your participation has *not* been regularly active, then your extra-credit work is again *unlikely* to allow for the desired boost, however close you are to the cusp. You may submit extra-credit work more than once if you like, but should beware of the “done well” requirement above. If the quality of your individual submissions appears to suffer for the sake multiple submissions, that is, then together they will count much less, if at all. Before you multiply your submissions, then, you should take care to be sure that on each individual occasion you’ve done as good and comprehensive a job as can reasonably be expected. It’s far better, in other words, here and in general, to sacrifice quantity for quality, than quality for quantity.

(f) Sub-standard attendance, understood in terms of the standard set in 1.a above, may result in grade reduction.

(g) Assignment and course grades will be posted to the “gradebook” in our course management system. Course grades will be posted ultimately to the “Rosters and Electronic Grading Information System” (REGIS).

5. Students with disabilities

Rutgers abides by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008, and Sections 504 and 508 in particular, which mandate reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities and the accessibility of online information. If you have a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please reach out to me as soon as possible, so that I can provide or facilitate in providing accommodations you may need. To this effect, if you have not already done so, please register with the Office of Disability Services, the designated office on campus to provide services and administer exams with accommodations for students with disabilities. Office addresses on our different campuses, phone numbers and email addresses, and other sorts of information can be found at the following address.

<http://disabilityservices-uw.rutgers.edu>

6. These guidelines may be amended by on-line or in-class announcements

Needless to say, then, you should *come to class* and *review carefully all electronic announcements* and *bring to class* whatever questions or concerns you may have. If you miss the occasional class, however, presumably for legitimate reasons, you needn’t reach out to me to learn of what announcements you may have missed, as important announcements will be reiterated in electronically.