

Philosophy 103 Moral and Social Problems

Fall 2021

Professor Philip Cafaro
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Office: Eddy Hall 226
Office hours: MWF 11-11:50 & by appointment

Class meets MWF from 12:00 to 12:50 in Stadium room 1215

Course Description

Ethics is the discipline concerned with how people should live. Its main questions include:

- * What is a good life? How can I go about living it?
- * What is a good society and how can we go about creating it?
- * What are my rights? What are my responsibilities toward others? Do these vary from person to person, society to society, era to era?
- * What is virtue, or human excellence? Which personal traits are virtues and which are vices?
- * How are such ethical judgments justified—or are they mere expressions of personal or group preference, and nothing more?

Philosophers often pursue general theoretical answers to these questions. In contrast, Philosophy 103 explores them by focusing on particular ethical and political issues. The two main areas we will focus on in this class are racial and economic justice. Race-related topics we will explore include affirmative action, mass incarceration, reparations for past harms, discrimination in housing and job seeking, voting rights, police reform, diversity, and integration. Economic topics we will explore include a fair distribution of wealth, minimum wage laws, wealth caps, just taxation, individual responsibility versus social solidarity, and equality of opportunity versus equality of results.

Course Format and Requirements

Class meetings will mix lectures and discussion. Discussions work best when we listen hard to one another and try to build on, respond to, or challenge what our fellow participants have said. They work less well as a series of discrete personal expressions.

Lectures aim to introduce ideas and clarify issues. They are a help, not a substitute, for working through the readings on your own and discussing them with your fellow students. You should **read the assignments before coming to class** and come prepared to ask questions and discuss the issues.

The two and a half hours per week this class meets are an analog interlude in your digital lives. Please turn off and store all cell phones and computers for the duration of the class. Please bring a print copy of whatever book or essay we are scheduled to discuss that day. You should take notes by hand for future reference; if you have a learning disability that necessitates use of a computer for note taking that is fine.

Course Grading

Grades will be based on four five-page papers (20% each) with an opportunity to rewrite the first three and on class participation (the final 20%). Participation will be judged based on your grades on unannounced quizzes on the readings, on whether you complete class assignments, and on your contributions to class discussions. The papers are designed to test your ability to analyze issues, argue clearly for a definite conclusion, and write good—and to help you improve in these areas.

I expect you to come to class, but there is no need to send me an explanatory email or note if you miss one. Papers, assignments and quizzes will be excused or rescheduled only with a doctor's note or with official notification of participation in a CSU-approved extracurricular activity. **Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated, and may result in failing the course and/or suspension from the university.**

This class is not on Canvas. Check your CSU email regularly to receive pdfs of class readings. At any time, your current grade should be roughly calculable based on your grades to date. If you have questions about individual grades or your overall grade, see me after class or during office hours.

Required Texts

These six texts are inexpensive and they are required. You should purchase them now, before they disappear from the bookstore or you are caught short without them. We will also be reading articles and other material that I will provide as a pdf (marked "PDF" below) or that can be found on the Internet (marked "I" below).

- * Ta-Nahesis Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. Knopf Books.
- * Shelby Steele, *Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country*. Basic Books.
- * Martin Luther King, Jr., *Chaos or Community: Where Do We Go From Here?* Beacon Press.
- * Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. Picador Press.
- * Charles Koch, *Believe in People: Bottom-up Solutions for a Top-down World*. St. Martin's Press.
- * Gregg Krech, *Naikan: Gratitude, Grace, and the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection*. Stone Bridge Press.

Class readings

Note that assignments below are due at the start of the class for which they are assigned.

1st half of class: Racial Justice

First week

Monday, August 23 —no readings, handing out syllabus & previewing class—

Discrimination

Wednesday, August 25 Joshua Glasgow, The Meaning and Wrongness of Discrimination (PDF)

Friday, August 27 Portillo & Block, Anti-Discrimination Laws: Undermining Our Rights (I)
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10551-011-1120-6>

Assignment 1 Put Portillo & Block's main argument in standard form (specifying the conclusion and the key premises supporting them) and state whether you think it is convincing

Ta-Nehisi Coates book

Second week

Monday, August 30 *We Were Eight Years in Power*, pp.xii-82

Assignment 2 Describe what Coates think Bill Cosby gets wrong about black families, and whether you agree with him.

Wednesday, Sept 1 *We Were Eight Years in Power*, pp.85-147

Friday, Sept 3 *We Were Eight Years in Power*, pp.151-222 (“The Case for Reparations”)

Note: please finish the rest of *We Were Eight Years in Power* over the next few weeks, at your leisure, and begin reading Shelby Steele, *Shame*

Third week

Monday, September 6 —no class, Labor Day holiday—

Reparations

Wednesday, Sept 8 Alston & Block, Reparations, Once Again (I)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225329923_Reparations_Once_Again

Assignment 3 Put Alston & Block’s main argument in standard form (specifying the conclusion and the key premises supporting them) and state whether you think it is convincing

Friday, Sept 10 Leif Wenar, Reparations for the Future (I)
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55abfeaae4b0ba2b92833a23/t/55b574e0e4b0406477956a69/1437955296726/ReparationsForTheFuture.pdf>

Shelby Steele book

Fourth week

Monday, September 13 —no class, professor out of town—

Even though we have no class Monday, read *Shame* up through page 146 and consider the study questions provided.

Wednesday, Sept 15 *Shame*, pp.147-198

Friday, Sept 17 —no readings— **1st paper due**

Affirmative action

Fifth week

Monday, September 20 Kenneth Himma, Discrimination and Disidentification: The Fair-Start Defense of Affirmative Action (I) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1006401619357>

Assignment 4 Explain the fair-start defense of affirmative action according to Himma, and whether you agree with it or not.

Wednesday, Sept 22 Louis Pojman, The Case Against Affirmative Action (PDF)

Friday, Sept 24 Lawrence Blum, Affirmative action, diversity, and racial justice: Reflections from a diverse, non-elite university (I)
<https://educationjournal.web.illinois.edu/archive/index.php/pes/article/view/4872.pdf>

Law and Order

Sixth week

Monday, September 27 Jonathan Jacobs, Punishing Society: Incarceration, Coercive Corruption, and the Liberal Polity (PDF)

Wednesday, Sept 29 John Kleinig, Legitimate and Illegitimate Uses of Police Force (PDF)

Assignment 5 State Kleinig's most important suggestions for police reform and explain whether you think implementing them would lead to better or worse policing and better or worse police/civilian relations.

Friday, October 1 Avia Pasternak, Political Rioting: A Moral Assessment (PDF)

1st paper rewrites due

Martin Luther King book

Seventh week

Monday, October 4 *Where Do We Go From Here?* pp.ix-108

Wednesday, Oct 6 *Where Do We Go From Here?* pp.109-142

Friday, October 8 *Where Do We Go From Here?* pp.143-200

Assignment 6 Toward the end of the book, MLK sketches a vision of what he would like the U.S. to become. Have we moved in this direction since his death—or further away from it?

Eighth week

Monday, October 11 —no readings— **2nd paper due**

Integration

Wednesday, Oct 13 Martin Luther King, The Ethical Demands for Integration (I)
http://www.faculty.umb.edu/lawrence_blum/courses/318_11/readings/king_ethical_demands.pdf

& Sharon Stanley, Toward a reconciliation of integration and racial solidarity (I)
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057%2Fcpt.2013.13>

Friday, October 15 Amanda Roth, Ethical Progress as Problem-Resolving (I)
<https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/94455/jopp400.pdf?sequence=1>

& letter from William Short to Thomas Jefferson, February 27, 1798 (I)
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0098>

2nd half of class: Economic Justice

to be continued ...

Ninth week

Monday, October 18

Wednesday, Oct 20

Friday, October 22

Tenth week

Monday, October 25

Wednesday, Oct 27

Friday, October 29

Eleventh week

Monday, November 1

Wednesday, Nov 3

Friday, November 5

Twelfth week

Monday, November 8

Wednesday, Nov 10

Friday, November 12

Thirteenth week

Monday, November 15

Wednesday, Nov 17

Friday, November 19

Break week

November 22-26

Thanksgiving Break -- Don't forget to give thanks!

Fourteenth week

Monday, November 29

Wednesday, Dec 1

Friday, December 3

Fifteenth week

Monday, December 6

Wednesday, Dec 8

Friday, December 10

Finals week

December 13-17

4th Paper due at 5 p.m. December X in my office (Eddy 226)

Thanks for taking Phil 103! I hope it was a valuable experience. Best of luck in all future endeavors.