

PHI 401: MAJORS SEMINAR: PROCREATION AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Spring 2022

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Office hours: by zoom appointment

DESCRIPTION:

We will discuss a number of controversial topics concerning the ethics of procreation and obligations concerning future generations. These topics include: Is it morally obligatory, or even morally permissible, to procreate? May the state intervene in procreation decisions? Are we morally obligated to adopt rather than have a genetically related child? Can someone be harmed, benefited, or wronged by being created? Can embryos or fetuses be harmed, and do they have rights? Is it permissible to select against disability? What effect does adding more people have on the value of the world? Is there any principle that determines the value of the world based on the number and quality of life of the individuals in that world? How should we take the interests of merely possible people into account in our deliberations?

Since this is a majors seminar, the course will largely be focused on the development of important philosophical skills, including the ability to extract an argument from a philosophical text and explain it in clear, jargon-free language, and the ability to sustain a line of argument over several pages. You will do a substantial amount of independent research, and will write a lengthy term paper that incorporates this research. Class participation will be emphasized, in the form of attendance, contributing to discussion, asking questions, and giving a class presentation.

CLASS MEETINGS: The format of the course is in person. Given the pandemic situation, we will need to remain open to the possibility that the format may change at some point, but as of now the plan is for every class to be held in person. We will follow all university safety requirements, which include wearing masks.

OFFICE HOURS: My office hours will be held by zoom. If you want to chat with me over zoom, just send me an email with a few possible times you can meet.

TEXTS: All required readings will be available on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **TERM PAPER.** You will write a substantial research paper, 12-15 pages, on some philosophical topic related to procreation and future generations. Topics must be approved by me. The term paper is worth 50 points. It is due **Tuesday, May 10 at noon**. More information on the term paper will be distributed later.
2. **SHORT PAPER.** You will write a short paper, less than 5 pages, on some topic we have discussed in class. The short paper is worth 20 points. It is due **Thursday, March 10 at noon**. More information on the short paper will be distributed later.
3. **CRITICAL SUMMARIES.** You will submit brief critical summaries of three recent articles or chapters you have found in your own research (*not* articles we are discussing in class) as you work on your term paper. For each article you read, you should submit a one-page critical summary in which you *very briefly* explain the main thesis or argument of the paper along with some question or criticism. Those summaries are due **Tuesday, April 12 at noon**. You get 10 points for completing this assignment.
3. **PRESENTATION.** During the last three weeks of the semester you will do a class presentation. The presentation may be on the topic of your term paper but that is not a requirement. The presentation is worth 10 points. More details will be provided later in the semester. If you want to do your presentation earlier in the semester, please let me know.
4. **QUESTIONS:** You are expected to do all the reading assignments and submit questions in the discussion forums on Blackboard every week. Questions should be based on the reading assignments. Since this is a seminar-style class, a significant amount of class time will be spent discussing these questions. Questions must be submitted by 11pm the day before the class when we discuss that reading. *Your question must be a philosophical question that engages with a main point or argument of the article in question.* You will get one point per question, for a maximum of 10 points. You may get credit for only one question per reading assignment, though of course you can ask as many questions as you want.
5. **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** You are expected to attend the class meetings and be ready to participate. How well the seminar goes will depend on how many students come to class and are prepared for discussion. It is also a sign of respect to your peers to come to class and hear their presentations. I do not take attendance or give participation grades.

GRADING SCHEME:

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	60-69
F	0-59

All fractions are rounded up.

POLICIES AND OTHER INFORMATION:

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

I am not going to police your phone or laptop behavior, but there is no reason you should be using your phone in class, and laptops should be used only for taking notes. It is better not to use your laptop during class since it will be likely to distract you from the discussion, but you are allowed to do it. Please arrive on time and do not leave early unless you let me know ahead of time. Please abide by all university policies regarding e.g. mask-wearing.

LATE PAPERS:

Papers submitted late are subject to a grade penalty. To avoid this penalty you must submit documentation of the medical or other reason for submitting your paper late.

USING CLASS MATERIALS:

Original class materials (handouts, assignments, tests, etc.) are the intellectual property of the course instructor. You may download these materials for your use in this class. However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., web sites, social media, other students) without permission. Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

It is your responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Syracuse University students are required to read an online summary of the University's

academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check- in on MySlice.

In this course, the *minimum* penalty for an academic integrity violation is a zero on the assignment or exam in question. A letter will also be sent to the dean of students. If you are not sure whether what you are doing constitutes a violation of academic integrity, please ask me immediately. Further guidance will be provided when essay topics are assigned.

The Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric establishes recommended guidelines for the determination of grade penalties by faculty and instructors, while also giving them discretion to select the grade penalty they believe most suitable, including course failure, regardless of violation level. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Syracuse University and I are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. You are invited to contact me or the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit [Center for Disability Resources](http://www.syr.edu/cdr). Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

CLASS SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT
Jan 25	Intro Stuff	
Jan 27	Is there a right to parenthood?	Hugh LaFollette, "Licensing Parents"
Feb 1		Sarah Conly, "The Right to Procreation"

Feb 3	Is procreation permissible?	David Benatar, "Why It Is Better Never to Come into Existence"
Feb 8		Tina Rulli, "Preferring a Genetically-Related Child"
Feb 10	Is abortion permissible?	Elizabeth Harman, "Creation Ethics"
Feb 15	The Non-Identity Problem	Derek Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> (excerpt)
Feb 17	Are we required to choose the best-off child?	Julian Savulescu and Guy Kahane, "The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life"
Feb 22		Elizabeth Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability"
Feb 24	NO CLASS (PROBABLY)	
Mar 1	Harming and benefiting by creating	Elizabeth Harman, "Can We Harm and Benefit in Creating?"
Mar 3	NO CLASS (PROBABLY)	
Mar 8		Jeff McMahan, "Asymmetries in the Morality of Causing People to Exist"
Mar 10	How many people should there be?	Toby Ord, "Overpopulation or Underpopulation?" SHORT PAPERS DUE.
Mar 15	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK	
Mar 17	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK	
Mar 22	Principles of Population Ethics	Derek Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> (excerpt)
Mar 24		Michael Huemer, "In Defense of Repugnance"
Mar 29		Caspar Hare, "Voices from Another World"
Mar 31	Justice for Future Generations	Anca Gheaus, "The Right to Parent and Duties Concerning Future Generations"
Apr 5		Alex Voorhoeve and Marc Fleurbaey, "Priority or Equality for Possible People?"
Apr 7		TBA

Apr 12		TBA. CRITICAL SUMMARIES DUE.
Apr 14		TBA.
Apr 19	PRESENTATIONS	
Apr 21	PRESENTATIONS	
Apr 26	PRESENTATIONS	
Apr 28	PRESENTATIONS	
May 3	PRESENTATIONS	
May 10	FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 12:00 NOON	