

CORE 195- Ethics in the 21st Century: Business, Politics & Technology

Units: 3 units

Summer 2022 (June 21-July 15): Monday - Friday from 9am- 3:30pm daily

- **Modified schedule for Monday, June 20:** 11am to 4pm; lunch break from 12:30 to 2 pm

Lunch Break: 12pm-1:30pm

Location: CPA 252 (Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow Center for International and Public Affairs, might be labeled “VKC” on university maps)

Instructor

Name: Charlotte Figueroa

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:30pm-4:30 pm in MHP courtyard or by appointment

Instructor

Name: Laura Siscoe

Email: gurskey@usc.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 7pm-8pm on Zoom (with the exception of the first week of class)

Here is the Zoom link to my weekly office hours— <https://usc.zoom.us/j/94227115283>

Teaching Assistant

Name: Matt Wiseman

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[Change account](#)

Office Hours: Fridays 3:30pm-4:30pm in MHP courtyard or by appointment

Overview

The world has undergone a social and technological revolution in the 21st century. How ought we live in this new world? We are employees, entrepreneurs, voters, scientists, caregivers, consumers, family members, and so on — and also human beings. It can be far from obvious what these roles morally demand of us amid rapid and unpredictable change.

In this course, we will consider urgent moral questions using traditional methods of philosophical inquiry. Questions we will study include: What do businesses morally owe their employees, shareholders, customers, competitors, and society at large? To what extent may we prioritize our fellow citizens over people outside our national borders? How should we address socioeconomic inequality? What obligations do doctors have to their patients, and what should they do when resources are limited? May we alter ourselves, our children, and humanity through genetic engineering? How much historically human work should be done by artificial intelligences and other machines? Is growing meat in labs a good alternative to factory farming? What duties do we have to future generations regarding resource conservation?

This course will prepare students to be more reflective (and, we hope, more ethical) members of society, in addition to equipping them with skills in critical thinking, argumentation, and writing that are highly sought after in the academic, legal, and business world.

Highlights

- Participate in structured and respectful debates in which students articulate and defend positions of their own, while considering and responding to objections
- Engage with influential philosophical texts, documentary films, and news media
- Develop university-level argumentative essays
- Morally assess governmental and business policy decisions

Topics of Study

- Critical thinking and logic
- Ethical theories
- Business ethics
- Political philosophy
- Ethics of technology

Assignments

Perusall (35% of grade): Perusall is an online tool that is designed to help you closely read and understand the assigned texts. You can access Perusall under the “assignments” tab on the course’s Blackboard page. Then click on the “assignments” tab within the Perusall system in order to access the assigned texts and to leave comments, highlights, etc. Perusall generates your grade automatically based on the level of your engagement with the text and with the comments/questions of your peers. Your lowest Perusall score will be dropped. If you don’t understand why you are earning the Perusall scores that you are, please don’t hesitate to reach out to one of the instructors or the TA.

Midterm Paper (20% of grade): The midterm paper will be an argumentative essay on a topic from the first half of the course. A list of possible essay prompts to choose from, as well as guidance in how to write such an essay, will be provided during week 1. Papers should be 3-4 pages in length (not including the reference list), double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font. The paper should be submitted as a PDF through Turnitin on Blackboard by **5pm on Sunday July 3rd**.

Final Paper (30% of grade): The final paper will also be a (slightly longer) argumentative essay, covering a topic from the second half of the course. Prompts will be provided at the beginning of week 3. Papers should be 5-6 pages in length (again, not including the reference list), double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font. They should be submitted as a PDF through Turnitin on Blackboard by **5pm on Sunday July 17th**.

Participation (15% of grade): Consistent participation is a vital part of the course experience. Frequent participation in class discussion, small group activities, in-class exercises, etc. is mandatory. Your participation grade will be left up to the discretion of the TA and instructors. If you have any more specific questions about the status of your participation grade, please reach out to one of us.

Grading scale:

A: 94- 100; A-: 90- 93

B+: 87- 89; B: 84- 87; B-: 80- 83

C+: 77- 79; C: 74- 77; C-: 70- 73

D+: 67- 69; D: 64- 67; D-: 60- 63 (F: <60)

Week	Date	Class Topic	Assignments
Week 1- Intro to Phil and Ethical Theory June 20- June 24	Mon. June 20	Introductions, course policies, and initial discussion. What is philosophy? Why study it? Why do it? What are arguments? What are different types of arguments? What makes arguments good or bad? What are validity and soundness, and how can you check for them?	None
	Tues. June 21	Introduction to moral philosophy. What is a moral theory? What are the aims of ethical philosophy? What is applied versus normative ethics?	Read: chapter 3 of “Living Ethics” (pp. 24-35), J. L. Mackie’s “The Subjectivity of Values”
	Wed. June 22	Consequentialism. What is consequentialism? What is utilitarianism? Is pleasure the only fundamental value? Ought we to focus on evaluating the morality of acts, or of rules? What objections do consequentialist theories face?	Read: Shafer-Landau, “Consequentialism”
	Thur. June 23	Kantianism and deontology. What is Kantian ethics? How does it differ from consequentialism? Are any of Kant’s formulations of the ‘categorical imperative’ defensible? What are the core features of deontological moral theories?	Read: Shafer-Landau, “Kantian Ethics”
	Fri. June 24	Virtue ethics. What is the role of virtues and vices? How should we approach moral character versus actions/intentions? What is the appropriate approach to moral education?	Read: Selections from Aristotle’s <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>

<p>Week 2- Political and Econ Ethics</p> <p>June 27- July 1</p>	<p>Mon. June 27</p>	<p>Ethics of economic inequality. Is economic inequality always morally bad? Can it ever be justified? How could it be? Should we prefer equality of outcome, or equality of opportunity? If the latter, what sort of equality of opportunity should we strive for?</p>	<p>Read: Shafer-Landau, “Economic justice and economic inequality”</p>
	<p>Tues. June 28</p>	<p>Philosophy of work day 1. How should we define “work”? How is work different from leisure? Is work intrinsically good or bad? Is the nature of work in our current society good or bad?</p>	<p>Read: Gutting, “What Work Is Really For”</p> <p>Blaschko, “Does Work Suck?” and watch embedded videos</p>
	<p>Wed. June 29</p>	<p>Philosophy of work day 2. How do you apply your ethical commitments to your career? What does it mean to do meaningful work? What does it mean to have a successful career? Are there some jobs that no one should ever do? Are there some things that should never be for sale? What is <i>your</i> philosophy of work?</p>	<p>Read: This article on “finding your dream job.”</p> <p>This article on “the definition of social impact.”</p> <p>And this article on “career fit.”</p>
	<p>Thur. June 30</p>	<p>Historical injustice and the ethics of reparations. How should we combat oppression? What moral restrictions, if any, are there on protesting and civil disobedience in light of oppression and current injustices? Are reparations for slavery and other past injustices morally required? If so, what form should they take? How do we determine which groups ought to compensate and be compensated?</p>	<p>Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”</p>
	<p>Friday July 1</p>	<p>Ethics of violence and civil disobedience. Is violence ever morally justified? What is just war theory? What conduct is permissible in war? Is there a moral difference between foreseeing and intending harm to someone? In what circumstances can it be ethical to break the law? Are we ever morally obligated to break a law?</p>	<p>Read: Martin Luther King’s “Letter From a Birmingham Jail”</p>

<p>Week 3 Tech Ethics</p> <p>July 5-July 8</p>	Holiday	-----	-----
	Tues. July 5	<p>Intro to Philosophy of Technology and Mind</p> <p>What makes tech ethics distinct from other fields in ethics? What are some of the fundamental questions being explored in tech ethics? Why is tech ethics important? What constitutes a mind and how does this affect the ethics of AI?</p>	<p>Read: Jonas, "Technology as a Subject for Ethics"</p> <p>The Google engineer who thinks the company's AI has come to life</p>
	Wed. July 6	<p>Ethics of A.I.</p> <p>What is algorithmic bias? How can it be reduced? How should we program A.I. like autonomous vehicles to act morally? Do A.I. have moral rights? Should A.I. be granted legal rights? What new ethical challenges are posed by the prospect of developing superintelligence?</p>	<p>Read: Bostrom and Yudkowsky, "The ethics of artificial intelligence"</p>
	Thur. July 7	<p>Abortion and Genetic Engineering.</p> <p>Is abortion morally permissible? How do new technologies affect the ethics of abortion? Is it permissible, or even required, to genetically engineer our children? Are there moral differences between selecting against disease traits and selecting for increased intelligence, looks, and talent?</p>	<p>Read: Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children"; Michael Sandel, "The case against perfection" (selections)</p> <p>Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"</p>
	Fri. July 8	<p>Social Media and Free Speech.</p> <p>How does fake news affect political discourse and policymaking? What restrictions on freedom of speech on the Internet are morally permissible? What is the moral significance of increased political polarization? What is attentional autonomy, and do companies have a duty to respect it?</p>	<p>Read: Ch. 2 of Mill's On Liberty</p>

Week 4 Animal and Enviro Ethics July 11- July 15	Mon. July 11	Class field trip to Laguna Beach.	
	Tues. July 12	Animal ethics day 1. For what can we permissibly use nonhuman animals? Would the consumption of meat be permissible in the absence of factory farming? Are we required to be vegetarian or vegan?	Read: Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases"
	Wed. July 13	Animal ethics day 2. What lengths are human beings morally required to go to in order to conserve animal species? Are zoos or pet-owning morally permissible? Is animal testing ever morally permissible?	Read: Karen S. Emmerman, "Moral Arguments against Zoos"
	Thur. July 14	Ethics of Climate Change and Future People. In the wake of climate change, what do we owe to our fellow human beings? What should we do as individuals, and as political communities? What is the non-identity problem? What, if any, moral constraints are there on the creation of future people? What, if anything, do we owe to people who do not yet exist? How should we weigh long-term risks against short-term ones? In what ways do questions about the future of humanity reveal the limitations of the standard moral theories?	Read: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not <i>My</i> Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations"
	Fri. July 15	Environmental ethics day 2 and concluding discussion. What, if anything, is morally wrong about the destruction of the natural environment? Do we have a duty or some other kind of ethical obligation to preserve the environment?	Read: Thomas Hill, Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments"

Course Policies

Late submission policy: Late submissions will receive a 10% reduction in grade (e.g., from an A- to a B-) for each day that they are late. Late submissions will not be accepted after 72 hours.

Plagiarism policy: Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Any cases of plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the assignment and will be reported to the USC summer program.

Attendance policies: Students are expected to attend the AM and PM sessions of class regularly. Please contact an instructor if you require an excused absence for both or either of these sessions. Unexcused absences will be reported to the USC summer program. After a second absence, any absence will result in a 10% grade decrease of your final grade. Two late arrivals count as an absence.

Technology policy: Please refrain from using any technology other than laptops or tablets during class times. If you need to use your phone or other electronic device, please step outside of the classroom or wait for a break. If you require a particular technology for accessibility purposes, please let a member of the instructional staff know.

Campus Support

USC Emergency Information. Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. <https://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety. UPC: (213) 740-4321 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to the USC community. <https://dps.usc.edu>