

PHIL 131: MORALITY & CONSCIENCE

Instructor: Anne Jeffrey
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Office Hours: T 12-1 pm
M-R 1-3:30 pm; Car Barn 302

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Lately, the notion of “conscience” has taken center stage in political debates about abortion, contraception, euthanasia, same sex marriage, and military service. But what is conscience? How is it formed? And what role does it play in the ethical life? Our convictions about the connection between morality and conscience may undergird many of the political judgments we make about allowing people to live according to conscience, or in some cases preventing individuals from living according to conscience. So they are questions well worth our time.

In this course, we’ll read texts dating back to ancient Greece to get competing accounts of what conscience is, how it is formed, and why it matters on the table. We’ll use philosophical tools to evaluate and adjudicate between these accounts, and we’ll work on applying them to tough issues in healthcare, war, religious liberty, and education. The primary goal of the course is to provide a space for you to think carefully together about the nature and moral significance of conscience.

The course requirements are designed to cultivate your ability to do close reading, understand philosophical arguments, reason well with one another, and craft your own philosophical arguments.

REQUIRED READINGS

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009).
Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard and the library reserve.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Short Paper Assignments. Throughout the course of the semester, each student will write 2 short papers of no more than 2 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced, 1 inch margins).

For each short paper, you will be asked to:

(1) identify a philosophical argument in one of the assigned readings for that week, (2) write out the argument in stepwise form, (3) carefully explain the argument in your own words, identifying the philosopher’s assumptions and the precise conclusion, and (4) offer a brief assessment of the argument. An excellent paper will briefly engage with the argument either by noting the implications of the argument, or a weakness of or potential objection to the argument.

Short papers must be turned in by class on the day for which the reading discussed in the paper is assigned. (For instance, if you write on an article assigned for 6/10, then you must hand in your paper before class on 6/10).

Class Participation. One of the goals of the course is to develop the ability to reason well together. For us to accomplish this goal, everyone's voice needs to be heard. You'll be expected to have read carefully for class so you can offer your own understanding of the readings aloud. You'll also be expected to listen to others, appreciate their unique insights, and engage with them in discussion. Excellent class participation does not just mean speaking up often. It consists in thoughtful and respectful engagement with others in discussion and being prepared to offer your own reasoned views about the text.

Final. A final paper The paper must be 4-6 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced) in length. Students are to turn in a hard copy on the last day of class **5/2**.

Assessment. The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Short papers	40%	*each paper weighing 20%
Participation	20%	
Final Paper	40%	

POLICIES

Attendance. Attendance is mandatory. Two unexcused absences are permitted; every additional unexcused absence lowers the final grade one-third of a letter grade. An absence may be excused at my discretion in the case of a documented emergency or university-sanctioned activity. **Failure to attend class will result in failure of the course.**

Electronics. Cell phones must be silenced and stowed during class. Laptops are not permitted in class. If you have special learning considerations that require the use of a laptop for note-taking during class, you may request special permission from me in advance.

Late Submissions. No late papers will be accepted. Extensions on papers are only available if a student makes arrangements with me 48 hours in advance.

Students requiring extra time on assignments and exams should speak with me about arrangements at the beginning of the term.

If there is a special circumstance you think may affect your performance in the course, please let me know; it will be kept in strict confidence. I am more than happy to work with

students finding themselves in adverse circumstances, but it is considerably harder to do so if you wait to notify me until after it has already negatively impacted your performance.

Academic Integrity. Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by Saint Louis University policies regarding academic integrity and plagiarism. *General guidelines:* If it is a direct quotation, **cite it**. If it is a paraphrase, **cite it**. If it is an idea you got from a particular source — whether a publication or a person — **cite it**. If you are in doubt about whether it should be cited, **cite it**. The only items that are not cited are those that you think up on your own or that belong to general knowledge.* **Plagiarism on any assignment may result in an automatic failure of the course.**

* I am indebted to Mark Murphy for this suggestion.