

Sample Syllabi

1. Individual Morality and Social Justice—Taught Summer 2023

Course Description: Life presents us with many practical problems. How should we live? How should we treat other people? How should we arrange our government and economy? In this introductory course in moral and political philosophy, we will take up these questions and more. We will study both theoretical moral philosophy and specific issues in contemporary society like free speech, pornography, reparations for slavery, and climate change. Our goal will be to see how philosophy can clarify our thinking about these issues, and we will challenge our own beliefs to determine whether they hold up to rigorous examination.

Course Policies:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and **this includes using AI** (such as ChatGPT) to write your essays. All assignments submitted are presumed to be your own, original work. The Teaching Assistant will pass on any suspicious papers to the instructor. Any plagiarism or use of AI to write a paper will result in an 'F' in the course, and the incident will be reported to the Center for Student Conduct. **If you are worried about a writing assignment or a due date, please talk to the instructor or Teaching Assistant. We are here to help you—don't turn to AI to solve these problems!**

Due Dates: Due dates for assignments will be enforced. Late work will be penalized one grade interval (e.g. A- to B+) for each day late. If you have an emergency, please contact the Teaching Assistant to request a due date extension.

Classroom Environment and Harassment: Our goal is to have a classroom where everyone can be excited to attend class and fulfill their learning potential. If your behavior harms another person in this class, you may be removed from the class temporarily or permanently, or from the University. If you or someone you know experiences sexual violence or harassment, there are options, rights, and resources, including assistance with academics, reporting, and medical care. For more information, visiting survivorsupport.berkeley.edu.

Readings: All course readings will be made available on the course website. So, there is no need to purchase a textbook.

Assignments: Your grade will be the product of four assignments plus participation.

Assignment 1: In Class Quiz—15%

You will be given 6 short answer questions and be asked to answer 4. These questions will be drawn from a 12-question study guide, which will be distributed one week in advance.

Assignment 2: Oral Exam—15%

You will have a 5–10 minute oral exam with the Teaching Assistant. You will simply discuss 1–2 questions drawn from a study guide, which will be distributed one week in advance. The goal is not to “grill” you, but simply to gauge your comprehension of the assigned readings.

Assignment 3: First paper—25%

You will write a 4-page paper that focuses on analyzing an argument from one of the assigned readings. You will be asked to reconstruct an argument in premise-conclusion format, and to assess the validity and soundness of the argument. The purpose of this paper is to practice logical analysis and charitable interpretation.

Assignment 4: Second paper—30%

You will write a 5-page paper that focuses on analyzing an argument from one of the assigned readings. This is just like the first paper, except that you should spend extra space raising an objection and considering a reply.

Assignment 5: Participation—15%

Participation falls into three buckets: asking questions in class, contributing to discussion section, and submitting a question for the Town Hall. There are no stupid questions! You can easily get full participation credit by voicing any question or confusion that arises while you do the readings or listen to lectures.

Part I: The Right and The Good

We begin by studying two of the fundamental concepts in practical reasoning, the right and the good. These concepts are latent in our everyday thinking about how to act. Our goal is to see how philosophers use them to construct systematic ethical theories.

Readings: July 3: Plato, *The Republic*, excerpts from Books I and II
 July 4: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I; Book II, chapters 1–5
 July 5: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters 1–2, (5 optional)
 July 6: Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Part II: Distributive Justice

People often claim that society is “unjust.” But what is justice? How does it relate to the right and the good? By addressing these questions, we will investigate the issues of fundamental rights, equality of opportunity, and wealth inequality.

Readings: July 10: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pages 3–24, 47–80, 102–138

July 11: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, chapter 7
July 12: Parfit, “Equality and Priority”
July 13: Coates, “The Case for Reparations” and TOWN HALL

Part III: Freedom of Expression

In theory, freedom of expression is a cherished feature of liberal democracy. In practice, it is the source of much controversy. Does freedom of expression include hate speech? Does it include illiberal religious practices? Does it include pornography?

Readings: July 17: Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech*, chapters 1, 3, 5
July 18: Waldron, cont.
July 19: Bowen, “Muslims and Citizens”
July 20: MacKinnon, “Francis Biddle’s Sister”

Part IV: Bodily Rights

How we live our lives is determined in large part by what we do with our bodies. Does the right to bodily autonomy include the right to abortion or to doctor-assisted suicide? Do we always have the right to deny other people sex?

Readings: July 24: Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
July 25: Velleman, “A Right to Self-Termination?”
July 26: Catch up day
July 27: Srinivasan, “Is there a right to sex?”

Part V: Society and World

We live in a shared world. And we have the power—collectively—to shape this world. What values and institutions should we rely on when addressing the global problems posed by climate change, markets, and borders?

Readings: July 31: Broome, “The Public and Private Morality of Climate Change”
August 1: Satz, “Do Markets Drive Out Traditional Values?”
August 2: Parekh, *No Refuge*, Introduction and chapter 6