

# Contemporary Social and Moral Problems in the U.S.

PHIL 2367 *The Ohio State University* Spring 2021

**Instructor:** Preston Lennon (he/him)

**Email:** lennon.76@osu.edu

**Meeting Time:** T, R 2:20pm-3:40pm

**Zoom meeting ID:** 456-572-7344

**Office Hours:** T, R 3:45pm-4:45pm

**Carmen site:** <https://osu.instructure.com/courses/95136>

## Course Description

This course covers current issues in social and moral philosophy in the United States. We will be asking questions like the following: what is racism? Should we consume animal products? What is the role of government? Is there a right to own a gun, or to have an abortion? What do we owe one another in the time of coronavirus? We will investigate these questions using the methods of argumentation characteristic of philosophy.

## Required Materials

All course readings will be distributed via the course Carmen site.

## Course Format

This course will be held online via Zoom.

## About Philosophy Courses

There are almost never obvious “right answers” in philosophy. There are many sides to the issues we will encounter, and intelligent people can (and do) disagree about which views and conclusions are correct. Doing philosophy well rarely results in firm conclusions; instead, it typically results in seeing more clearly just how complex issues are, and how those issues can vary from one context to another. On that note, philosophy is not simply a matter of opinion—if it were, then philosophy would be nothing more than stating one’s beliefs and calling it a day. Instead, philosophy is greatly concerned with having well-constructed arguments that support one’s conclusion. In philosophy, it’s not enough to just have the opinion that, say, God doesn’t exist, or that it is never permissible to eat meat. Rather, one has to have logical arguments with conclusions that can then be scrutinized by others. In this sense, philosophy is like science: both philosophers and scientists strive to attain cogent arguments that others can evaluate and criticize, rather than merely stating individual opinions that we can simply agree to disagree about.

## Course Assignments

### *Attendance and Participation*

Doing philosophy well requires critical engagement with ideas and arguments. To this end, you are expected to come to class and be an *active* participant. Philosophy is difficult; if you are struggling to understand a concept or idea, the chances are good that someone else in class is as well. So, please don’t be timid in speaking up—asking clarifying questions is often a good and useful way to participate in discussion. As for attendance, *you are allowed up to three unexcused absences during the semester*. More than three will result in a significant penalty on your participation grade. If you need to miss class for medical, athletic, or family reasons, please let me know, and be ready to provide the appropriate documentation. **Percentage of overall grade: 20%.**

### *Argument Analyses*

Philosophy proceeds by developing rational arguments for or against views, and one of the skills you will learn in this class is to develop your own arguments and assess both your own arguments and the arguments of others. One way you will practice this skill is by doing four argument analyses. In the first, you will be asked to reconstruct the argument of a passage from our reading in premise-conclusion form. In the second and third argument analyses you will reconstruct the argument and present an objection to the argument. In the fourth argument analysis you will reconstruct the argument, present an objection, and suggest a way for the author to reply to this objection. A prompt with more details will be provided at least two class meetings before each analysis is due. **Percentage of overall grade: 36%**

### *Short Paper 10*

You will write a short paper (~500 words) on a topic from the first 1/3 of our course. The paper is due **Monday, Feb. 22 at 11:59pm**. More details will be provided at least two class meetings before the paper is due. **Percentage of overall grade: 10%**

### *Medium Paper 15*

You will write a medium length paper (~750-1,000 words) on a topic from the second 1/3 of our course. The paper is due **Friday, Mar. 26 at 5pm**. More details will be provided at least two class meetings before the paper is due. **Percentage of overall grade: 14%**

### *Final Paper 20*

You will write a final, longer length paper (~1,500 words) on any topic from our course that you like. The paper is due **Friday, Apr. 30 at 5pm**. More details will be provided later on in the course before the paper is due. **Percentage of overall grade: 20%**

### **Grading Scale**

A: 100-93.0 A-: 92.99-90.0 B+: 89.99-87.0 B: 86.99-83 B-: 82.99-80.0 C+: 79.99-77.0 C: 76.99-73 C-: 72.99-70.0 D+: 69.99-67.0 D: 66.99-60.0 E: <60.0

*Note: please do not email the instructor at the end of the semester asking for more points on various course assignments. If you spot a specific inconsistency in your grades (e.g. you have a zero for an assignment that you completed and turned in) please reach out. I will not, however, respond to requests asking for more points in order to inflate your final letter grade.*

### **Other Administrative Notices**

#### *Contacting Me*

The best way to get in touch with me is via email: [lennon.76@osu.edu](mailto:lennon.76@osu.edu). I greatly prefer this to Carmen messages, so please email me rather than using that method. If you send me an email during the week, please allow for up to 24 hours for a response. I am usually much quicker than this, but do not count on a response quicker than 24 hours. If you send me an email during the weekend, please allow for up to 48 hours for a response. Note: the weekend begins at 5pm on Friday and ends at 9am on Monday.

#### *Course Technology*

For help with your password, university email, Carmen, or any other technology issues, questions, or requests, contact the Ohio State IT Service Desk. Standard support hours are available at [ocio.osu.edu/help/hours](https://ocio.osu.edu/help/hours), and support for urgent issues is available 24/7.

**Self-Service and Chat support:** [ocio.osu.edu/help](https://ocio.osu.edu/help)

**Phone:** 614-688-4357(HELP)

**Email:** [servicedesk@osu.edu](mailto:servicedesk@osu.edu)

**TDD:** 614-688-8743

Baseline technical skills for online courses

- Basic computer and web-browsing skills
- Navigating Carmen: for questions about specific functionality, see the [Canvas Student Guide](#).

Required Technology skills specific to this course

- [CarmenZoom virtual meetings](#)
- [Recording a slide presentation with audio narration](#)
- [Recording, editing, and uploading video](#)

Required equipment

- Computer: current Mac (OS X) or PC (Windows 7+) with high-speed internet connection
- Webcam: built-in or external webcam, fully installed and tested
- Microphone: built-in laptop or tablet mic or external microphone
- Other: a mobile device (smartphone or tablet) or landline to use for BuckeyePass authentication

### *Carmen access*

You will need to use [BuckeyePass](#) multi-factor authentication to access your courses in Carmen. To ensure that you are able to connect to Carmen at all times, it is recommended that you take the following steps:

- Register multiple devices in case something happens to your primary device. Visit the [BuckeyePass - Adding a Device](#) help article for step-by-step instructions.
- Request passcodes to keep as a backup authentication option. When you see the Duo login screen on your computer, click **Enter a Passcode** and then click the **Text me new codes** button that appears. This will text you ten passcodes good for 365 days that can each be used once.
- Download the [Duo Mobile application](#) to all of your registered devices for the ability to generate one-time codes in the event that you lose cell, data, or Wi-Fi service.

If none of these options will meet the needs of your situation, you can contact the IT Service Desk at 614-688-4357 (HELP) and IT support staff will work out a solution with you.

### *Academic Misconduct*

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the university's [Code of Student Conduct](#), and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the university's *Code of Student Conduct* and this syllabus may constitute "Academic Misconduct."

The Ohio State University's *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: "Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the university or subvert the educational process." Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the university's *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an excuse for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the *Code of Student Conduct* and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct.

**If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by university rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.** If COAM determines that you have violated the university's *Code of Student Conduct* (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the university.

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

Other sources of information on academic misconduct (integrity) to which you can refer include:

- The Committee on Academic Misconduct web pages ([COAM Home](#))
- *Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity* ([Ten Suggestions](#))
- *Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity* ([www.northwestern.edu/uacc/8cards.htm](http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/8cards.htm))

### *General Education*

This course fulfills OSU's General Education category of Cultures and Ideas. These courses have the following aims: Goals: Students evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas in order to develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; and interpretation and evaluation. Expected Learning Outcomes: (1) Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression. (2) Students evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

### *Disability Services*

Students with disabilities (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions) that have been certified by the Office of Student Life Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated. They should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue; telephone (614) 292-3307; [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); [www.sldus.osu.edu](http://www.sldus.osu.edu).

### *Mental Health Statement*

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of

Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting [ccs.osu.edu](https://ccs.osu.edu) or calling [614-292-5766](tel:6142925766). CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on call counselor when CCS is closed at [614-292-5766](tel:6142925766) and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

#### *Sexual Misconduct Statement*

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at [titleix@osu.edu](mailto:titleix@osu.edu)

#### *Diversity Statement*

The Ohio State University affirms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

#### *Statement with COVID Process Addition*

The university strives to make all learning as accessible as possible. In light of the current pandemic, students seeking to request COVID-related accommodations may do so through the university's request process, managed by Student Life Disability Services. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue; telephone (614) 292-3307; [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); [www.sldus.osu.edu](http://www.sldus.osu.edu).

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1            Course Introduction and Arguments**

T Jan 12            Read this syllabus.  
R Jan 14            Introduction to logical arguments; no assigned reading.

### **Week 2            Is morality relative?**

T Jan 19            Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"  
R Jan 21            Rachels, continued

<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Is there a right to own a gun?</b>
T Jan 26	Huemer, "Is There a Right to Own a Gun?"
R Jan 28	McMahan, "Gun control," <i>Philosophy Bites</i> podcast
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Should we consume non-human animals?</b>
T Feb 2	Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People"
R Feb 4	Carruthers, "Against the Moral Standing of Animals"
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>An introduction to philosophical writing</b>
T Feb 9	Institutional break—no class
R Feb 11	Pryor, " <a href="#">Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper</a> "
<b>Week 6-7</b>	<b>Private property and distributive justice</b>
T Feb 16	Nozick, "The Entitlement Theory of Justice"
R Feb 18	Bruenig, "How Did Private Property Start?"
T Feb 23	Instructional break—no class
R Feb 25	Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> , selections
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>What is racism?</b>
T Mar 2	Garcia, "The Heart of Racism"
R Mar 4	Shelby, "Is Racism in the 'Heart?'"
<b>Week 9</b>	<b>Is political rioting permissible?</b>
T Mar 9	Gay, "No One's Coming to Save Us"; Boxhill TBA
R Mar 11	Pasternak, "Political Rioting: A Moral Assessment"
<b>Week 10</b>	<b>What is gender?</b>
T Mar 16	Srinivassan, "What is a woman?" <i>Philosophy Bites</i> podcast
R Mar 18	Benatar, "The Second Sexism"
<b>Week 11-12</b>	<b>Is the death penalty morally permissible?</b>
T Mar 23	Bruenig, "The Man I Watched Them Kill" <i>The New York Times</i>
R Mar 25	Sorrell, "Aggravated Murder and Capital Punishment"
T Mar 30	No new reading
R Apr 1	Institutional break—no class
<b>Week 13-14</b>	<b>Climate Change</b>
T Apr 6	Broome, "The Public and Private Morality of Climate Change"
R Apr 8	Sinott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault"
T Apr 13	Hickey et al, "Population Engineering and the Fight Against Climate Change"
R Apr 15	Kukla, "Whose Job Is It to Fight Climate Change?"
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>Catch Up / Student Choice</b>
T Apr 20	TBA

R Apr 22 TBA