

## HONORS INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL THEORY

This course will consider a range of pressing ethical issues, such as poverty, racism, abortion, animal rights, and climate change. We will look closely at some contemporary writings on these topics, and on the larger questions they have in common. How much can morality legitimately demand of us? To what extent does the greater good outweigh the importance of respect for each person? Are there answers to moral questions at all? This course will be a chance to develop your own views on these topics through close reading, class discussion, and an emphasis on philosophical writing.

**Instructor:** Eugene Chislenko, [chislenko@temple.edu](mailto:chislenko@temple.edu)

Office hours: Anderson Hall 750, Thursdays 1-3pm or by appointment

**Course requirements:** (1) Up to 80 pages of reading each week (all on course website)  
(2) Four in-class quizzes (15%)  
(3) Two 5-page papers (40%)  
(4) Two peer feedback assignments (20%)  
(5) Final exam (25%)

### SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

#### I. Hard Problems

1. Tu 1/16: **Introduction**

2. Th 1/18: **Racism, I**

Reading: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," through §III (p.23).

3. Tu 1/23: **Racism, II**

Reading: Finish reading "The Case for Reparations."

View photos and other media online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/reparations>.

4. Th 1/25: **Poverty, I**

Reading: Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, Chapter 1, through p.20

5. Tu 1/30: **Poverty, II**

Reading: *Living High and Letting Die*, Chapter 2, pp. 24-61

6. Th 2/1: **Poverty, III**

Reading: *Living High and Letting Die*, Chapter 3, pp. 75-80

7. Tu 2/6: **Abortion, I**  
Reading: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
8. Th 2/8: **Abortion, II**  
Reading: Reread "A Defense of Abortion"
9. Tu 2/13: **Non-Human Animals**  
Reading: Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Chapter 3: "Equality for Animals?"
10. Th 2/15: **Climate Change, I**  
Reading: Naomi Klein, selections from *This Changes Everything*
11. Tu 2/20: **Climate Change, II**  
Reading: Naomi Klein, selections from *No is Not Enough*
12. Th 2/22: **No class.**  
**First paper due Friday, 2/23 by noon.**
13. Tu 2/27: **Open discussion**  
Reading: Someone's first paper. **Peer comments due Wednesday, 2/28 by noon.**
14. Th 3/1: **Writing workshop**  
**First paper rewrite and peer response due Friday, 3/2 by noon.**

[No class Tu 3/6 or Th 3/8. Happy spring break! ]

## II. Larger Issues

15. Tu 3/13: **The Greater Good**  
Reading: Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Chapters I and IX
16. Th 3/15: **Happiness and Integrity**  
Reading: Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" (selections)
17. Tu 3/20: **How Much can Morality Demand of Us?**  
Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail"
18. Th 3/22: **Making a Difference**  
Reading: Jonathan Glover, "It Makes No Difference Whether or Not I Do It"
19. Tu 3/27: **Doing and Allowing**  
Reading: Warren Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing"
20. Th 3/29: **Problem Cases and Moral Intuitions**  
Reading: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"  
**Second paper due Friday, 3/30 by noon.**
21. Tu 4/3: **Open discussion**  
Reading: Someone's second paper. **Peer comments due Wednesday, 4/4 by noon.**
22. Th 4/5: **Writing workshop**  
No new reading.  
**Second paper rewrite and peer response due Friday, 4/6 by noon.**

### III. Foundations

23. Tu 4/10: **Morality is Relative**

Reading: Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism" (Chapter 1 of Harman and Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*)

24. Th 4/12: **Morality is Objective**

Reading: Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, Chapter 2: "Objective Theories"

25. Tu 4/17: **The Normative Question**

Reading: Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Lecture 1, pp.7-39

26. Th 4/19: **Constitutive Standards of Action**

Reading: Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, Chapter 2, pp. 27-34

27. Tu 4/24: **Open discussion**

No new reading

28. Th 4/26: **Final exam review**

No new reading. Exam review questions distributed in class.

**Final exam [time and location TBA].**

### COURSE POLICIES

**Office Hours:** I encourage you to come to office hours often; talking one-on-one or in small groups is one of the best ways to get a handle on the material and methods of the course. You'll probably get more out of it if you come with specific questions, but coming to talk about the issues in a more general way is fine too. If you have friends in the class, feel free to come as a small group. If you want to meet but have a schedule conflict, let me know and we can find a different time. I'll also hold extra office hours each time a paper deadline is coming up.

**Quizzes:** There will be four short reading quizzes, usually at the beginning of class. This is a way of keeping attendance, holding you accountable for doing the readings, and reflecting how you are doing in the course. You won't know in advance which day there will be a quiz. Each quiz will be graded as an A, B, C, D, or F (no plus or minus grades); your three highest grades will be averaged together as 15% of your course grade. There will be no makeup quizzes, but only the best three count, so you can miss two quizzes or get two Fs with no penalty. Your answer does not need to be perfect in every detail to get an A; if you read the assigned reading a few times and take some notes on the main ideas, you should have no trouble.

The instructions on each quiz will be as follows: "Reading quiz: Please answer the following question about the reading for today, summarizing the relevant parts of the reading." The question will be a basic question about the main ideas of the reading for that day. For example, if there is a quiz on Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion," the quiz question will be: "What is Thomson's defense of abortion?"; if there is a quiz in the class on moral relativism, the

quiz question will be: “What is moral relativism, and how does Harman argue for it?” There will be no obscure or trick questions, but you will be expected to show a good basic grasp of the readings.

**Plagiarism:** *All* written work for this course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else’s work as your own is considered plagiarism. Please read Temple University’s Policy on Academic Honesty: [http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities\\_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm](http://www.temple.edu/bulletin/Responsibilities_rights/responsibilities/responsibilities.shtm)

**Disabilities:** Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact me privately to discuss your situation by the end of the second week of classes, or as soon as you can. If you haven’t already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in 100 Ritter Annex or 215-204-1280 to learn more about the resources available to you. I will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

**Statement on Academic Freedom:** Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. Temple University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: [http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy\\_no=03.70.02](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02)