

Practical Ethics: Ethics and Activism

Spring 2016



Description

This course is an introduction to practical ethics with special focus on the ethics of activism and advocacy. We will start with a survey of moral philosophy. Is there a moral difference between causing and allowing harm? What, if anything, do we owe to people in other nations and future generations? We will then consider some of the moral problems that come up in legal activism and advocacy, including abolition vs. regulation, intersectional vs. single-issue activism, and symbolic vs. strategic activism. Finally, we will consider some of the moral problems that come up in illegal activism and advocacy. For example, do we ever have a moral right, or duty, to engage in civil disobedience, property destruction, or violence?

General Information

- Time: T/R 3:30-4:45
- Place: Peabody #218
- Instructor: Jeff Sebo
- Email: jeffsebo@unc.edu
- Office: Caldwell #207B
- Office hours: T/R 5:00-6:00
- Course website: jeffsebo.net/teaching/

Readings

The required books for this class are:

- Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*
- Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*
- Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

You can find these books at the UNC-Chapel Hill bookstore as well as online. All readings not from the required books will be posted on Sakai and/or distributed by email.

Grading

Your grades will be determined as follows:

- **Papers** (75%): You will write three papers for this course and submit them by email. For each paper, you can either create your own prompt (provided that you clear it with me in advance) or select from prompts that I create. The first paper (20%) will be six pages long and will be due at 10pm on 2/7; the second (25%) will be eight pages long and will be due at 10pm on 3/13; and the third (30%) will be eight pages long and will be due at 4pm on 4/30.
- **Daily Reactions** (15%): Prior to each session, you will send me an email that (a) summarizes one of the main claims made in the reading and (b) presents a question or comment about that claim. Your subject heading should be DR, Last Name, Date (e.g. DR Jones 1/14). Your DR can be brief (4-6 sentences), but it must demonstrate that you did the reading carefully and critically. This assignment is due no later than 1pm on the day of class. DRs will be graded Pass/Fail.
- **Participation** (10%): I expect regular attendance and thoughtful participation from all students. You can participate by speaking in class, attending office hours, posting articles through Sakai, and more. My assessment of the quality of your performance on these items will account for 10% of your grade.

Policies

- **Laptops/Cell Phones:** Laptops are allowed, but only for taking notes. Cell phones must be on silent.
- **Special Accommodations:** If you need special accommodations, please let me know so that I can properly assist you.
- **Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. See the UNC Writing Center Handout on Plagiarism, available online, for more information.
- **Late Papers/Extensions/Incompletes:** Late papers will be accepted, but will lose 1/3 letter grade for each day late. Extensions and incompletes will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. If you would like to request either, please do so well before the due date.

Schedule

- **Week 1 - Introduction**

1/12 - Introduction

1/14 - Peter Singer, "Famine, affluence, and morality"

- **Week 2 - Moral Theory - 1**

1/19 - Julia Driver, "Classical utilitarianism"

1/21 - Julia Driver, "Kantian ethics"

- **Week 3 - Moral Theory - 2**

1/26 - Julia Driver, "Virtue ethics"

1/28 - Julia Driver, "Feminist ethics"

- **Week 4 - Moral Status**

2/2 - Dale Jamieson, "Humans and other animals"

2/4 - Dale Jamieson, "The value of nature"

- **Week 5 - Cause Selection**

2/9 - William MacAskill, "Hard trade-offs," "Poverty versus climate change versus..."

2/11 - Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, 'world'-traveling, and loving perception"

- **Week 6 - Intersectionality**

2/16 - Iris Marion Young, "Five faces of oppression"

2/18 - Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the margins"

- **Week 7 - Solidarity**

2/23 - Kristie Dotson, "Tracking epistemic violence"

2/25 - Emily Gaarder, "Gender divisions in labor, leadership, and legitimacy"

- **Week 8 - Abolition / Reform**

3/1 - Angela Davis, "Prison reform or prison abolition?", "Abolitionist alternatives"

3/3 - Robert Garner, "Welfare, rights, and non-ideal theory"

- **Week 9 - Individual / Structural Change**

3/8 - William MacAskill, "Why voting is like donating thousands of dollars to charity"

3/10 - Michael Maniates, "Individualization: plant a tree, buy a bike, save the world?"

- **Week 10 - Horizontal / Hierarchical Activism**

3/22 - Meerkat Media Collective, "Consensus"

3/24 - Jo Freeman, "The tyranny of structurelessness"

- **Week 11 - Education / Manipulation**

3/29 - Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the oppressed"

3/31 - Iris Marion Young, "Activist challenges to deliberative democracy"

- **Week 12 - Civil Disobedience**

4/5 - A. John Simmons, "Civil disobedience and the duty to obey the law"

4/7 - Will Potter, "War at home," "The green menace"

- **Week 13 - Uncivil Disobedience**

4/12 - Annette Baier, "Violent demonstrations"

4/14 - Virginia Held, "Terrorism, rights, and political goals"

- **Week 14 - Positivity / Negativity**

4/19 - Andrew Fiala, "Playing a requiem on the Titanic"

4/21 - Audre Lorde, "Uses of anger"; Maria Lugones, "Hard-to-handle anger"

- **Week 15 - Revolution**

4/26 - Grace Lee Boggs, "These are the times to grow our souls," "Revolution"

4/30 - Optional Session / Final Exam Due