

PHIL 147-20
Ethics, Activism, and Resistance
Summer 2018
M-Th 5:45 PM – 7:45 PM

Instructor:

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Office Hours: TBA

Required Texts:

Electronic copies of all required readings will be available on Canvas.

Course Description:

We live in a radically unjust world. Much of moral and political philosophy focuses on the way things ought to be, but we often neglect the processes by which we get there. After a brief grounding in moral theory and theories of justice, we will draw on a rich historical and contemporary tradition of resistance movements to racial/environmental/economic/gender/etc. oppression to raise and evaluate core philosophical issues in the struggle to rectify injustice.

This course has several purposes. One is to ask, and try to answer, some important ethical questions. How is responsibility for resisting injustice distributed? What is it to stand in solidarity with victims of injustice? Under what conditions might we ever have a moral right (or duty) to engage in civil disobedience, property destruction, violence, or revolution to protest injustice? What is the role of ritual, symbol, and art in resistance movements? We will cover diverse sources ranging from Martha Nussbaum and John Rawls to MLK, Malcolm X, Berta Cáceres, Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh, and others.

Another purpose is to improve your skills in reading, writing, and thinking critically about hard problems. It is not necessary that you agree with any particular author. Rather, I hope that you will learn to articulate and provide good reasons for your own views and seriously and charitably engage with other viewpoints.

Course Requirements, Policies, and Expectations:

- **Two short (2-3 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, size 12 font) position papers.** Take a stance on a topic discussed in class and create an argument for that view, taking care to provide solid reasons. I will provide prompts prior to the due date. Other topics must be approved in advance. These two papers will be worth 20% of the final grade. **Due Dates: 7/22, and 8/5 at 5:00 PM.**
- **One medium (5-6 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, size 12 font) position paper.** This paper will be similar to the short papers, with an added element. Take a stance on a topic discussed in class and create an argument for that view. Next, discuss the strongest objection someone might pose in response to your view. Finally, respond to the objection. I will provide a prompt prior to the due date. Other topics must be

approved in advance. This paper will be worth 20% of the final grade. **Due Date: 7/29 at 5:00 PM.**

- **One final project.** You have a number of choices for this portion of the grade. You may choose one of the following. This project will be worth 30% of the final grade. **Due Date: 8/12 at 5:00 PM.**
 - Do five hours of community service and write a brief (2 page) reflection about the experience, connecting your experience to something we have learned in class. I will provide you with a number of options, but you may also approve other sources with me.
 - Attend two or three community events (large rally, public forum, town hall, etc.) and write a brief (2 page) reflection about the experience, connecting your experience to something we have learned in class. The number of events will depend on the nature of the events selected. I will provide you with a number of options, but you may also approve other sources with me.
 - Write a final (6-7 page) position paper following a similar format to the medium paper listed above.
 - Something else (other projects must be approved with me by 7/16).
- **Pop quizzes, unannounced, at the beginning of class.** These are meant to ensure that required readings are done in advance. They aren't meant to be difficult or to trick you. Quizzes will be in short answer format. Barring unusual circumstances (extended illness, etc.), I don't provide make-up quizzes. However, the two lowest quiz grades will be dropped (including zeros from missed quizzes). Quizzes will be worth approximately 20% of the final grade.
- **Regular attendance and participation.** Attendance and regular participation is required, with excused exceptions for religious holidays, documented illness, etc. Two unexcused absences are allowed without penalty. You may use these at your discretion for any reason. Participation can take several different forms: talking in class, asking questions, working in small groups, attending office hours, etc. I understand that some students find it difficult to talk in class. If this is the case, please come talk to me. Attendance and participation will be worth approximately 10% of the final grade.
- **Required readings.** Required readings (see the reading schedule) should be completed before the start of class on the day they are due.
- **Extensions and late papers.** I am very generous about giving extensions that are requested at least 48 hours in advance. Assignments turned in late without permission will be penalized by one letter grade per day. It is your responsibility to back up your work. Leave yourself enough time to deal with tech problems when they arise.
- **Emails.** Checking your email and responding (when applicable) is required. You are responsible for any announcements that might come your way. I will typically respond to emails within 24 hours (48 hours during the weekend).
- **Re-grades.** If you receive a grade that you believe does not reflect the quality of your work, I am more than happy to take another look. Requests must be made in writing, taking into account my comments on your work. I will accept re-grade requests 24 hours after the grade is posted. You have one week after receiving the grade to make your

request. A re-grade does not guarantee that the grade will change, and it may go up or down.

- **Office hours.** I am more than happy to meet with you in office hours or by appointment. I welcome the opportunity to get to know you better, discuss philosophy, or address any issues that may be affecting your performance in class.
- **Food and drink.** Our class meets during dinnertime. Feel free to bring food or drink, but try to avoid smelly or messy foods.
- **Laptops and phones.** I don't allow phones in class. Laptops and tablets are permitted for note taking and viewing the readings, but I reserve the right to ban them if they become a problem. Please don't play games in class. PowerPoints and handouts will be made available on Canvas after class.
- **In-class conduct.** Philosophy is fun! I hope that we will have an enjoyable semester. Please respect each other and be willing to engage with and evaluate new ideas.

Plagiarism and academic integrity:

Cheating is wrong and will not be tolerated. I will discuss what constitutes plagiarism with you before assignments are due. Please read about Georgetown's [honor system](#) and in particular "[What Is Plagiarism?](#)"

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities should inform me at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

Heads up:

Some of the material we will read and discuss may be disturbing. Keep track of the upcoming topics and please let me know if thinking about such material is disturbing to you in a way that interferes with your learning.