

The Ethics of a Human Life

Harvard University

Phil 12, Spring 2019

Instructor

K. Lindsey Chambers

Meeting

T/R 10:30-11:45am, Emerson 101

Office Hours

R 12-2pm, Emerson 309

Course Information

Ethical questions arise at every stage of a human life, from before a person is born until after she dies. We will explore the ethical questions that arise at familiar stages of a person's life: her conception, childhood, adulthood, death, and after her death. We will consider some surprising ways philosophers have tried to answer these questions, and we will think about how the arguments they make can help us better understand the ethical shape of a human life as a whole.

Evaluation

Your grade will be comprised of the following components:

Component	Weight	Due Date
Reading Responses	20%	Every Thursday, 10:30am (hard copy)
1 st Paper (3-4 pages)	15%	Feb 19 th , 10:30am (online)
2 nd Paper (5-7 pages)	30%	April 9 th , 10:30am (online)
Final Exam	35%	May 10 th (time and room TBD)

Expectations

Philosophy is an active discipline. You are expected to engage with the philosophical ideas. To do so you must both do the readings and participate in class. To that end, this will be a no electronics (no laptops, no cell phones) course. Laptops, cellphones, and other electronics must be stowed away prior to the start of class.

You will be expected to print out the course readings and bring the paper copy to class. You should also bring a pen and notebook to class. You won't be expected to take extensive (read: transcription of lecture) notes during class. You will be expected to engage with the philosophical ideas in class and to keep track of your ideas, questions, and the arguments presented (which will always also be written up on the board). Studies show that, for the kind of learning we're after, reading on paper and taking notes by hand is more effective than reading on screens and taking notes on a computer:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/>

<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159>

You should also expect the readings to be short, but difficult. I have posted a resource on how to read philosophy on the course website. Reading philosophy is unlike reading in other disciplines. Expect to take notes on each reading and to read each text several times.

Weekly Reading Responses

Each week you have the opportunity to write a 3/4 to 1 page (double-spaced) response to one of the week's readings. A hard copy of your response should be turned in at the beginning of Thursday's lecture. In your response you can raise a question, contribute a thought, agree or disagree with the author's argument, etc. The response is not a summary of the reading. The response should show that you have critically engaged with the reading. The responses will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Late responses and emailed responses will not be accepted. You only need to pass 10 responses for an A, 9 for an A-, 8 for a B+, etc.

Papers

The papers should be submitted via the course website at 10:30am on the day they are due. Late papers will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each day it's late.

Writing Resources

I have posted a resource on how to write a philosophy paper on the course website. Philosophy papers are not research papers. You will be expected to have your own view about the arguments presented in class. Expect to begin working on your paper well ahead of the deadline.

I encourage you to brainstorm with classmates, discuss your ideas with me at office hours, and make use of the Philosophy Department's Writing Fellow, Noel Dominguez (ndominguez@g.harvard.edu). You can schedule a meeting with the DWF here (<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/phil-dwf/writing-meetings>). Note that the meeting slots fill up quickly around mid-term and at the end of term.

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with Harvard University's honor code, available here (<https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/honor-code>) and on the course website. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me before turning in your work. All work is expected to be your own and original (not previously submitted to another class).

Special Needs

Any student needing an accommodation due to a documented disability should speak with me before the end of the second week of term. Please bring along your Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office. You can find more information at (<http://aeo.fas.harvard.edu/>).

Course Readings and Schedule

All readings will be posted on the Canvas website. Readings are subject to change.

Birth: Is it bad to be born?	
Date	Required Readings and Assignments

Jan 29 th : Coming into this world	Arthur Schopenhauer, “On the Sufferings of the World”
Jan 31 st : Better never to have been	“Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence,” <i>American Philosophical Quarterly</i> (1997) <i>Reading response due in class</i>
Feb 4 th : Abortion and the moral status of a fetus	Judith J. Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” Optional: Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” <i>The Journal of Philosophy</i> (1989)
Feb 6 th : Abortion and caregiving ethics	Gina Schouten, “Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist” <i>Social Theory and Practice</i> (2017) Optional: Elizabeth Harman, “Creation Ethics: The Moral Status of Early Fetuses and the Ethics of Abortion” <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> (1999) <i>Reading response is due in class</i>
Childhood and Adolescence: Is it bad to be young?	
Feb 12 th : The moral predicament of childhood	Tamar Schapiro, “Childhood and Personhood” <i>Arizona Law Review</i> 2003
Feb 14 th : The value of childhood	Anca Gheaus, “Unfinished Adults and Defective Children: On the Nature and Value of Childhood” <i>Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy</i> (2015) Sarah Hannan, “Why Childhood is Bad for Children” <i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i> (2017) <i>Reading response is due in class</i>
Feb 19 th : Enfranchising the youth	Nicholas Munn, “Reconciling the Criminal and Participatory Responsibilities of the Youth,” <i>Social Theory and Practice</i> (2012) Michelle Cottle, “How Parkland Students Changed the Gun Debate” <i>The Atlantic</i> (2018) Optional: Juliana Bidadanure, “Six Reasons why the UK Parliament should have Youth Quotas” <i>Open Democracy UK</i> (2015) <i>First paper due at 10:30am</i>
Love, Sex, and Marriage: Is it bad to be romantically attached to others?	
Feb 21 st : Loving some people but not others	Simon Keller, “How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Properties” <i>American Philosophical Quarterly</i> (2000) Optional:

	<p>Neil Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment" Friedman, "Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy"</p> <p><i>Reading response is due in class</i></p>
Feb 26 th : Love and the problem of partiality	<p>David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion" <i>Ethics</i> (1999)</p> <p>Optional: Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality" in <i>Moral Luck</i></p>
Feb 28 th : What is sex and who gets to have it?	<p>Greta Christina, "Are We Having Sex Yet or What?" Amia Srinivasan, "Does Anyone Have a Right to Sex?"</p> <p>Optional: David Halperin, "What is Sex For?"</p> <p><i>Reading response is due in class</i></p>
March 5 th : Sexual objectification	<p>Catherine MacKinnon, "Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: 'Pleasure under Patriarchy'" <i>Ethics</i> (1989) Martha Nussbaum, "Objectification" <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i></p>
March 7 th : Sex and the value of marriage	<p>Barbara Herman, "Could it be worth thinking about Kant on sex and marriage?" in <i>A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity</i> (2002) Immanuel Kant, <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> (excerpts)</p> <p><i>Reading response is due in class</i></p>
March 12 th : Promising to love and to cherish	<p>Elizabeth Brake, "Is Divorce Promise-Breaking?" <i>Ethical Theory and Moral Practice</i> (2011)</p>
Becoming Parents: What makes a family?	
March 14 th : Parenthood and the import of biological ties	<p>David Velleman, "Family History"</p> <p><i>Reading response due in class</i></p>
March 19 th and 21 st : Spring break!	
April 2 nd : Reconsidering what makes a family	<p>Sally Haslanger, "Family, Ancestry and Self: What is the Moral Significance of Biological Ties?" Elizabeth Brake, "Do genetic ties matter?"</p> <p>Optional: Jaime Ahlberg & Harry Brighouse, "An Argument Against Cloning"</p>
Aging: Is it bad to grow old?	
April 4 th : Aging bodies	<p>Martha Nussbaum, "Our Bodies, Ourselves: Aging, Stigma, and Disgust"</p> <p><i>Reading response due in class</i></p>

April 9 th : Aging minds	Agnieszka Jaworska, "Respecting the Margins of Agency: Alzheimer's Patients and the Capacity to Value" <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> (1999) <i>Second paper is due (10:30am)</i>
April 11 th : The costs of prolonging life	Margaret Battin, "Age Rationing and the Just Distribution of Health Care: Is there a duty to die?" <i>Ethics</i> (1987) <i>Reading response due in class</i>
Death: Is it bad to die?	
April 16 th : End of life decisions	James Rachel, "Active and Passive Euthanasia" <i>The New England Journal of Medicine</i> (1975) Peter Singer, "Voluntary Euthanasia: A Utilitarian Perspective"
April 18 th : Self-determination and choosing to die	Brock, "Voluntary Active Euthanasia," <i>The Hastings Center Report</i> Daniel Callahan, "When Self-determination Runs Amok" <i>Hasting Centers Report</i> (1992) <i>Reading response due in class</i>
April 23 rd : Death and the value of life	Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" Thomas Nagel, "Death"
April 25 th : Living forever	Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" <i>Reading response due in class</i>
April 30 th : Caring about what happens after we die	Samuel Scheffler, "The Afterlife: Lecture I" <i>Reading response due in class</i>