

PHIL-P 242: Applied Ethics:
Life, Sex, and Death
Indiana University, Spring 2022

Professor: Dr. Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc

Contact: atarasen@iu.edu

Office location: Sycamore Hall 109

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, 1h45–2h45 PM—and by special appointment

Associate Instructor: [redacted]

Lectures:

Class: 9537

Time: Monday, Wednesday: 12h40–1h30 PM

Location: Biology Building A100

Discussion Sections:

Class: 12210

Time: Friday, 1h50–2h40 PM

Location: Ballantine Hall 015

Class: 12211

Time: Friday, 3h–3h50 PM

Location: Ballantine Hall 015

Course Description

We will examine three clusters of moral issues pertaining to human mortality and sexuality. First, we will begin by trying to understand the nature of sex (and sexual desire) in order to help us determine which kinds of sex acts are morally wrong (or otherwise morally objectionable) and why. If a sex act is consensual, does that make it morally permissible? Do any sexual desires count as unnatural or perverted, and if so, is it wrong, on these grounds, to act on them? What is it to use someone for sex, and is doing so ever consistent with respect for that person's humanity? Can certain forms of sexual objectification be good? Second, we will move on to explore the moral significance of killing people, by sketching the moral profile of two forms of killing: abortion and euthanasia. Questions to be discussed include these: What kind of value do human beings have? How much are we morally required to sacrifice for the sake of other people? How extensive is our sovereignty over our bodies? Finally, we will consider why death is bad, why living is good, and whether life's meaningfulness depends, in an interesting way, either on our mortality or on the survival of the human species.

Course Readings

There is only one required text for this course:

Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife* (Oxford University Press, 2013)

This book may be bought online at a reasonable price or borrowed from numerous libraries. Readings will otherwise consist in articles or book chapters, which will be made available on Canvas.

For those seeking an introduction to the subject of moral philosophy, I recommend this one:

Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2020)

Course Goals

This is an intermediate course in *ethics*—the branch of philosophy dedicated to the study of right and wrong, of good and evil and of how we ought to live. Unlike in an introductory course, we will pay particularly close attention to (1) the structure and content of arguments for various positions on a range of complex moral issues; (2) the relation between philosophy and other fields and media (such as the arts and the humanities); and (3) the mechanics of writing an extended argumentative essay.

As such, this course is ideal for those who have completed at least one philosophy course, particularly PHIL-P 141 ('Introduction to Ethical Theories and Problems'), but it aims to be accessible to students with no prior exposure to philosophy, much less moral philosophy.

By the end of the semester, you should be able to

- identify substantive value judgments in both philosophical and nonacademic texts/media;
- articulate the reasons or arguments that might support various value judgments;
- understand how value judgments shape our conception of ourselves and the world;
- evaluate various views concerning morality, the good life, and matters of value generally;
- characterize and critically engage with these views, in writing, in a clear and cogent manner; and
- conduct discussions with others in a way guided by the virtue of intellectual humility.

Note: PHIL-P 242 has no prerequisite and counts toward the General Education Arts and Humanities requirement (3 credits). Specifically, this course will realize the following learning outcomes:

- knowledge of origins, varieties, and meanings of the expressions and artifacts of human experience, including (a) original written texts in various literary forms, (b) works of visual art and design, (c) musical compositions, and (d) dramatic performance (live theater, dance, film, video, digital, etc.);
- knowledge of the cultural, intellectual, and historical contexts through which these expressions and artifacts are interpreted;
- an understanding of the modes of symbolic expression and aesthetic and/or literary conventions that are used in these expressions and artifacts;
- the ability to develop arguments, ideas, and opinions about forms of human expression, grounded in rational analysis and in an understanding of and respect for the historical context of expressions and artifacts, and to express these ideas in written and/or oral form;

- the ability to explore one's own identity within prior and current intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks.

Course Requirements and Grades

Every student is required (1) to participate thoughtfully and respectfully in lectures and discussion sections; (2) to submit three argumentative essays; and (3) to complete five short reading quizzes.

Here is how each component of your final grade is weighted and the deadlines for each (if applicable):

- 15%: *Participation*
- 15%: *Paper 1* (5–6 pages): February 20
- 20%: *Paper 2* (6–8 pages): April 3
- 25%: *Paper 3* (7–10 pages): May 6
- 25%: *Quizzes*: January 30, February 6, March 9, March 27, April 24

Except in special circumstances, to pass this course you must submit all required written work to your AI. In addition to these assignments, there will be occasional opportunities for extra credit.

- **Participation:** Participation is very important in this course—as reflected by the fact that your participation score accounts for a significant proportion of your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute to class discussion in some form. I especially encourage you to ask clarificatory questions about the material: if you are confused about some topic that we are studying in this course, it is very likely that other students are, too! This means that not only will you be penalized for failing to participate in course discussions, you will also lose out on an essential source of philosophical understanding: dialogue with others, the clash of differing points of view.

By extension, attendance, too, is crucial. Attendance will be taken at each lecture and discussion section. It is your responsibility to (a) sign the attendance sheet, (b) to inform the professor if you expect to be absent from lecture, and (c) to inform your AI if you expect to be absent from your discussion section. Please let us know if you believe that your absence should be excused.

The instructors have discretion over whether to excuse an absence. Yet, as a general rule, absences are excused in case of illness, mental health issues, death of a friend/family member, or job interview, among others. Here are the standard penalties for multiple *unexcused* absences:

- 0 absences = 1 point added to final score (= extra credit)
 - 1–5 absences = 0 points deducted from final score
 - 6–8 absences = 2 points deducted from final score
 - 9–11 absences = 3 points deducted from final score
 - >12 absences = automatic failure of the course
- **Quizzes:** You will complete five quizzes, all of them on Canvas, over the course of the semester. The aim of these quizzes is to ensure that you are reading regularly by testing your comprehension of the material. You will typically have a week to complete online quizzes.

While you may use the readings, your notes, or the instructors' handouts in taking the quizzes, we strongly recommend that you study for the quizzes as for an in-person, closed-book/-notes exam.

Note: We do not generally allow students to take a quiz once the deadline for that quiz has passed, unless the student also has a valid excuse for failing to complete it.

- **Papers:** You will write and submit three papers on topics that we will assign. These will be tightly structured argumentative essays with a substantial interpretive component. They will be graded according to how well they exemplify the virtues of philosophical writing: clarity of expression, organization, cogency, accuracy of interpretation, efficiency of communication, and charity.

Here is the grading scheme for papers:

A+	100	B+	89	C+	79	D+	69
A+/A	98	B+/B	87	C+/C	77	D+/D	67
A	96	B	85	C	75	D	65
A-/A	94	B/B-	83	C/C-	73	D/D-	63
A-	92	B-	81	C-	71	D-	61
A-/B+	90	B-/C+	80	C-/D+	70	F	60

Course Policies:

- **Respect:** Discussions in this course should be respectful, constructive, and inclusive. We will follow the NYU Guidelines for Respectful Philosophical Discussion, which can be found [here](#).

At the same time, however, we will strive to cultivate a learning environment that allows for the free expression of ideas and convictions—even those that others (including the instructors!) may find uncomfortable or offensive. One upshot of this policy is that students will never receive a lower grade on an assignment simply for expressing a view that the instructors find disagreeable.

- **Classroom Mask Requirement:** Starting Fall 2021, Indiana University is requiring that masks be worn indoors on campus, including in classrooms. This requirement will be in place until there is an officially announced change in policy. Please observe this requirement conscientiously, as it is intended for the safety of everyone in the community.

Any students who come to class without a mask will be asked to wear one. If any students further refuse to wear a mask in class, they will be dismissed from the classroom on that day and will be expected to leave the room and the building. On the third such incident, the Chair of the Department of Philosophy will be notified, who will in turn notify the Dean of Students Office.

- **Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct:** As a student at Indiana University, you are expected to adhere to the standards detailed in the [Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct](#). Academic misconduct is defined as any activity that tends to undermine the academic integrity of the institution, including the following: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and facilitating academic dishonesty (by, e.g., uploading course materials to any website other than

the course website). These activities are absolutely prohibited and typically carry severe penalties, up to—and including—failure of the course.

You are encouraged to discuss the material with your peers outside of class, but all work must contain your own thoughts, written in your own words. Feel free contact me for clarification concerning whether something counts as plagiarism or what proper citation consists in.

Common forms of plagiarism discovered in past iterations of this course have included these:

- borrowing wording from a handout (without quoting and citing it)
- borrowing wording from one of the readings (without quoting and citing it)
- borrowing wording from the essay prompt
- borrowing wording or ideas from an online source (without quoting and citing it)
- borrowing wording or ideas from another student's paper

You can find a definition of plagiarism, along with Indiana University's plagiarism policy, [here](#).

- **Course Materials:** The instructors of this course hold the exclusive right to distribute, modify, post, and reproduce course materials, including all written materials, lectures, assignments, exercises, and exams. Some of the course content may be downloaded, but you should not distribute, post, or alter the instructors' intellectual property. While you are permitted to take notes on the online materials and lectures posted for this course for your personal use, you are not permitted to re-post in another forum, distribute, or reproduce content from this course without the express written permission of the instructor(s). Online class or discussion sessions should not be recorded individually by students and recordings of class sessions should reposted or distributed in any forum. Violations of this course rule will be reported to the appropriate university offices and officials, including the Dean of Students, as academic misconduct.
- **Technology.** Use of laptops is not allowed. The temptation to misuse them is too strong (even for me!), and because I give you a detailed handout before every session, you will likely not need a laptop for wholesome note-taking purposes. I'm happy to make exceptions for students who can show that they have legitimate need of a laptop, such as students with documented disabilities.

For this reason, you should plan on bringing paper copies of relevant reading(s) with you to class.

Use of cellphones is not allowed, either. Please have your phone put away and your ringer silenced.

- **Readings:** This is a reading-intensive course. You can expect to have ~50 pages of reading each week. Required readings should be completed *before* the session for which they are assigned.

Selections may be particularly dense and difficult: you may have to reread them once or twice!

- **Extensions:** If you feel that you need an extension on a quiz, please contact the professor. As noted above, extensions on quizzes will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. If you feel that you need an extension on a paper, please consult with your AI, who has their own policy.
- **Late Work:** It is important that you submit your work on time. Except in unusual circumstances,

no late quizzes will be accepted. Late papers will generally be accepted; however, they will standardly be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g., from A+ to A, etc.).

Note: If you submit a paper late, you waive your right to receive comments in a timely manner! Please send your paper to your AI directly rather than to the professor of the course.

- **Accommodations:** Students who require special accommodations for a documented disability should contact the professor immediately, so that necessary arrangements can be made in a timely manner. You can find useful links and information about how to request an accommodation [here](#). Accommodations may also be granted for religious observances or extracurricular engagements.
- **Office Hours:** Office hours are two hours set aside each week for speaking with students about course-related matters or their intellectual trajectory generally. Please feel encouraged to meet with us, individually or in a group, for any academic reason—and particularly if you'd like to discuss course content or classroom dynamics. Please email us if you cannot make our office hours.

You should also consult with your AI if you would like information about their office hours.

- **Email:** I will strive to answer your emails within two business days, where this excludes weekends and holidays. If you have not received a response in this time, please remind me.
- **Sexual Misconduct and Title IX:** Indiana University policy prohibits sexual misconduct in any form, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, sexual exploitation, and dating and domestic violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, IU can help. If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with the IU Sexual Assault Crisis Services at 812- 855-5711, or contact a Confidential Victim Advocate at 812-856-2469 or cva@indiana.edu.

It is also important that you know that IU policy requires me to share certain information brought to my attention about potential sexual misconduct with the campus Deputy Sexual Misconduct & Title IX Coordinator or the University Sexual Misconduct & Title IX Coordinator. In that event, those individuals will work to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. Protecting student privacy is of utmost concern, and information will only be shared with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. I encourage you to visit stopsexualviolence.iu.edu to learn more.

- **Bias-Based Incident Reporting:** Bias-based incident reports can be made by students, faculty, and staff. Any act of discrimination or harassment based on race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability can be reported through these channels: (1) email biasincident@indiana.edu or incident@indiana.edu; (2) call the Dean of Students Office at (812) 855-8188; or (3) use the IU mobile App (m.iu.edu). Reports may be anonymous.

Schedule of Lectures and Assignments

* Titles with an asterisk denote recommended readings; titles without one denote required readings.

Sex I: The Nature and Aim(s) of Sex

January 10: [No Readings: Introduction to Topics and Mechanics of Course]

January 12: Greta Christina, 'Are We Having Sex Now or What?'

January 17: [Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: No Class!]

January 19: Thomas Nagel, 'Sexual Perversion'

Alan Goldman, 'Plain Sex' *

Jessica Begon, 'Sexual Perversion: A Liberal Account' *

Sex II: Sexual Use and Sexual Objectification

January 24: Thomas Mappes, 'Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person'

January 26: Mappes, 'Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person', cont'd

Sunday, January 30: Quiz 1 Due by 11h59 PM

January 31: Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 96–98

Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, pp. 155–59

February 2: Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 123–30

Sally Haslanger, 'On Being Objective and Being Objectified', pp. 223–32

Raja Halwani, *Philosophy of Sex, Love, and Marriage*, ch. 8, pp. 245–59 *

February 7: Martha Nussbaum, 'Objectification', pp. 249–71

Rae Langton, 'Sexual Solipsism' *

Rae Langton, 'Autonomy-Denial in Objectification' *

February 9: Nussbaum, 'Objectification', pp. 272–91

Timo Jütten, 'Sexual Objectification' *

Lina Papadaki, 'What is Objectification?' *

Sunday, February 13: Quiz 2 Due by 11h59 PM

Killing I: Abortion

February 14: [No Readings: Workshop on Philosophical Writing]

February 16: Philippa Foot, 'The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect'

Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'The Trolley Problem' *

Sunday, February 20: Paper 1 Due by 11h59 PM

February 21: John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, excerpt (“The Unspeakable Crime of Abortion”)

February 23: Don Marquis, ‘Why Abortion is Immoral’
Don Marquis, ‘Abortion Revisited’ *

February 28: [No Class: Mental Health Holiday!]

March 2: Judith Jarvis Thomson, ‘A Defense of Abortion’
Michael Tooley, ‘Abortion and Infanticide’ *

Sunday, March 6: Quiz 3 Due by 11h59 PM

Killing II: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide

March 7: Margaret Olivia Little, ‘Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate’
Gina Schouten, ‘Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist’ *

March 9: Ronald Dworkin et al, ‘Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief’
Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ‘Declaration on Euthanasia’ *
James Rachels, ‘Active and Passive Euthanasia’ *
Bonnie Steinbock, ‘The Intentional Termination of Life’ *

Wednesday, March 9: Quiz 3 Due by 11h59 PM

March 14: [No Class: Spring Break!]

March 16: [No Class: Spring Break!]

March 21: Frances Kamm, ‘A Right to Choose Death?’

March 23: David Velleman, ‘A Right of Self-Termination?’, pp. 606–20
Frances Kamm, ‘Physician-Assisted Suicide, the Doctrine of Double Effect, and the Ground of Value’ *

Sunday, March 27: Quiz 4 Due by 11h59 PM

Death I: Is Death Bad for Us?

March 28: Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Book III, pp. 89–97

March 30: Thomas Nagel, ‘Death’

Sunday, April 3: Paper 2 Due by 11h59 PM

April 4: Bernard Williams, 'The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality'

Death II: Death and the Annihilation of Humanity

April 6: Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, lecture 1 ('The Afterlife, Part I')
Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, lecture 2 ('The Afterlife (Part II)'), pp. 62–4

April 11: Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, lecture 3 ('Fear, Death, and Confidence')

April 13: Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, lecture 3 ('Fear, Death, and Confidence'), cont'd
Susan Wolf, 'The Significance of Doomsday' *
Mark Johnston, 'Is Life a Ponzi Scheme?' *
Niko Kolodny, 'That I Should Die and Others Live' *

The Meaning of Life

April 18: Thomas Nagel, 'The Absurd'
Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, excerpt ('The Myth of Sisyphus') *

April 20: Kieran Setiya, 'The Midlife Crisis'

Sunday, April 24: Quiz 5 Due by 11h59 PM

April 25: Susan Wolf, 'The Meaning of Lives'

April 27: Rivka Weinberg, 'Ultimate Meaning—We Need It, We Can't Get It, and We Should Be Very, Very Sad'

Friday, May 6: Paper 3 Due by 11h59 PM