

**PHIL 3302W: Contemporary Moral Problems
Stoner/Fall 2015**

T/Th 9:45-11:00, Blegen 250

Instructor

Dr. Ian Stoner
819 Heller Hall
ston0235@umn.edu

Office hour: Tuesdays, 11:15 – 12:15, and by appointment.

Teaching Assistant

Nicole Hamilton
718 Heller Hall
thom2406@umn.edu

Office hour: Mondays, 1:00 – 2:00, and by appointment.

Course Description

Philosophical reflection can help improve our views about political, social, and personal moral problems. Because the primary purpose of the course is not to convey information, but rather 1) to develop skill in understanding and critically evaluating arguments, and 2) to subject our own beliefs to critical examination, we will rely on small-group discussions and short, careful writing whenever possible. Expect the course to be about 1/2 lecture and 1/2 guided, small-group discussions. Expect to do some writing—short papers, long papers, or in-class essay exams—every week.

Required Texts

Required and recommended materials are available on the course website.

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~ston0235/3302/>

The small-group discussion guides will regularly direct you to read specific passages in the readings. Please bring the week's assigned readings with you on scheduled discussion days.

Course Requirements

Final exam:	150 points
Weekly Short Writing:	150 points
Long Paper:	300 points
Discussion Guide:	250 points
Participation:	150 points

Final exam. The final is an in-class essay exam. I'll hand out review questions ahead of the test and draw all test questions from the review sheet.

Participation. Small-group discussions are the centerpiece of the course. For these discussions to succeed, your attendance alone is insufficient. You must come prepared and contribute positively to lectures and sections.

Weekly short papers. Each week you will write a one-page paper. I will email the prompt for the week's paper to you on Friday, and the papers are due at the beginning of class the following Tuesday. Short papers will not be accepted late for any reason. Your total score for the weekly writing assignments will be the sum of your ten best scores out of thirteen available assignments. (That is, we'll drop your lowest three scores.)

Long Paper. In addition to the weekly writing you will write a longer paper that will require you to develop your own argument in some detail.

Discussion Guide. In the closing weeks of the semester, you will write your own discussion guide for one of the assigned readings. You will use your guide for an in-class discussion, and then turn it in as your second piece of substantial writing.

Grade Table

At the end of the semester, I will total up all your points and assign letter grades based on this table. These thresholds indicate firm cut-off points. For example, a total score of 864 points will be marked B, while a total score of 865 will be marked B+.

Letter Grade	Point threshold
A	935
A-	900
B+	865
B	835
B-	800
C+	765
C	735
C-	700
D	600
F	–

Course Calendar

Introduction and orientation

- 9/8: Lecture: Introduction and overview
- 9/10: Lecture: Ethics and culture
Reading: Midgley, "On Trying Out One's New Sword"
- 9/15: Lecture: Ethics and religion
Reading: Excerpt from Plato, *Euthyphro*
Genesis Chapter 38

- 9/17: Lecture: Empathy and other useful tools for moral thinking
 Discussion: A fictional moral dilemma
 Reading: From Hornby, *High Fidelity*
- 9/22: Lecture: Counterexamples and other useful tools for moral thinking
 9/24: Discussion: Correcting moral beliefs
 Reading: Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn"

Suicide and euthanasia

- 9/29: Lecture: Suicide
 Reading: Hume, "Of Suicide"
- 10/1: Lecture: Euthanasia
 Reading: Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"
 Brock, "Voluntary Active Euthanasia"
- 10/6: Discussion: Suicide and Euthanasia
 Reading: Review Rachels, Brock, and Hume
- 10/8: Lecture: Writing a philosophy paper
 Discussion: Paper 1 jump-start
 Reading: Jennings, from *Moral Hazard*
Long Paper prompt handed out in class

Eating animals

- 10/13: Lecture: Arguments for vegetarianism
 Reading: Singer, "All Animals Are Equal"
- 10/15: Discussion: Singer
 Reading: Singer, "All Animals Are Equal"
- 10/20: Lecture: Criticisms of Singer
 Reading: Hare, "Why I am only a demi-vegetarian"
 Gray, "In Defense of Speciesism"
- 10/22: Discussion: Eating cows
 Reading: Pollan, "Power Steer"
Draft of Long Paper due at the beginning of class

Abortion

- 10/27: Lecture: Thomson's defense of abortion
 Reading: Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
- 10/29: Discussion: Thomson
 Reading: Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
- 11/3: Lecture: Marquis against abortion
 Reading: Marquis, "An Argument That Abortion Is Immoral"
- 11/5: Discussion: Marquis
 Reading: Marquis, "An Argument That Abortion Is Immoral"
 Roe v. Wade

Drafts of Long Paper handed back in class

Immigration

- 11/10: Lecture: Open borders
Reading: Huemer, "Is There a Right to Immigrate?"
- 11/12: Discussion: Huemer on open borders
Reading: Huemer, "Is There a Right to Immigrate?"
Final draft of Long Paper due in class

Affirmative Action

- 11/17: Lecture: Overview of the affirmative action debate
Reading: Boxill, "Affirmative Action"
Selections from Pojman, "The Case Against Affirmative Action"
Discussion guide assignment and rubric handed out in class
- 11/19: Discussion: Boxill's justice argument
Reading: Boxill, "Affirmative Action"
Sign-up for discussion day at beginning for class

The horror! The horror!

- 11/24: Discussion: Can we do better than the argument from reactive attitudes?
Reading: Woodcock, "Horror Films and the Argument from Reactive Attitudes"
- 11/26: No class (Thanksgiving Day)

Disability and well-being

- 12/1: Lecture: What is disability?
Reading: Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability"
- 12/3: Lecture: What's bad about disability?
Reading: Johnson, "Unspeakable Conversations"
Amundson "Disability, Ideology, and Quality of Life"
- 12/8: Discussion: Prenatal screening and negative selection (student-written guides)
Reading: Parens and Asch, "The Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Genetic Testing"
- 12/10: Discussion: Disability and euthanasia (student-written guides)
Reading: Mayo and Gunderson, "Vitalism Revitalized: Vulnerable Populations, Prejudice, and Physician-Assisted Death"
Context: Peace, "Comfort Care as Denial of Personhood"
Final exam review sheet handed out in class.
- 12/15: Discussion: Choosing a disabled baby (student-written guides)
Reading: Davis, "Genetic Dilemmas and the Child's Right to an Open Future"
Context: Spriggs, "Lesbian couple create a child who is deaf like them"
- 12/21: Final exam 1:30 – 3:30 in our usual classroom

Course Policies

Accessibility. I want this course (in both content and assessment) to be accessible to all students regardless of impairments and disabilities. If you have a disability that I can better accommodate, please consider meeting with me to talk about it. Improvements to accessibility are improvements to the course, and students in future semesters will owe you a debt of gratitude (that will undoubtedly go forever unpaid) for taking the time to give me your feedback on accessibility.

Testing accommodations require you to register with Disability Services. Reach them by phone at 612-626-1333 or visit their website: <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>

Attendance. The active practice of critical reading and thinking skills, the development of which is the primary goal of the course, cannot be replicated alone in your room. The serious consideration of others' perspectives works better when others are present to present their perspectives. You should come to class. If you choose not to attend a given meeting, you will miss important content and opportunities for practice. Nicole and I will not re-cap for you the day you missed; please don't ask. If you make a habit of staying home, your progress (and your participation grade) will suffer.

Late work. Weekly short writing, due at the beginning of class on Tuesdays, will not be accepted late for any reason. The rough draft of long paper 1 will not be accepted late for any reason. You may turn in the discussion guide and the final draft of the long paper after the due date at a penalty of ten points per day late.

Emailed papers. If you anticipate an excused absence on a day course material is due, please talk to me or Nicole ahead of time, and make arrangements to turn in your work via email. We will only accept emailed work that we've discussed and approved ahead of time.

Electronic Devices. Please do not use any electronics during lectures. No phones, no laptops, no tablets, no nothing. If you need to use a device in class (if you have a sick kid at home who might need to call you, for example) please let me know before class starts.

Small group discussions. Small-group discussions are the core of this course. Disagreement is an inevitable and desirable consequence of any serious philosophical discussion. Disagreement can be fruitful, it can be fun, and it can also be frustrating. I expect you to be—always and without fail—respectful, thoughtful, and kind in discussion, even in the face of frustrating disagreements. This is not hard to do. If at any point you feel the temptation to sneer, or get angry or hurt, or raise your voice, take a moment to calm down. Then offer, as clearly and generously as you can, the reasons you disagree with the trend of the discussion.

Writing support. Most of your course grade is based on your writing. Don't hesitate to seek writing help from me, Nicole, or any of UMN's writing support programs.

- Student Writing Support: 306b Lind Hall (and other locations) (612.625.1893) <http://writing.umn.edu>. This is a service offering face-to-face tutoring for all University of Minnesota students by appointment in Lind Hall and walk-in at satellites around campus. Two ESL specialists and one IT specialist are on staff. There is also online writing help.
- Non-native speakers in need of assistance or guidance with writing concerns can contact Sheryl Holt, the Coordinator for Non-Native Speakers (holtx001@tc.umn.edu). 337 Nolte Center

(612.624.4524).

Scholastic Dishonesty. Quoth the Board of Regents: "Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; or altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying of data, research procedures, or data analysis."

The upshot, in the context of this course: do not plagiarize. Do not copy another author's words, or paraphrase another author's ideas without citing your sources. Citations should be thorough enough to allow your readers to locate the passage you are quoting or paraphrasing. There is no shame in understanding, appreciating, and incorporating another writer's views, so long as you give credit where it's due. There is much shame in passing off someone else's work as your own.

If I discover you've plagiarized any part of any assignment, you'll get a zero for that assignment (or, in the case of weekly writing, a zero for your entire weekly writing grade) and I'll file a report with the University.

