

PHIL 378
Moral & Ethical Philosophy
[held at Kettering
University]

Instructor: Levi Tenen
Office: AB 4510
Office Hours: By appointment—held virtually or outdoors



Course objectives:

- (1) Introduce you to many of the most popular moral theories discussed today, as well as their associated moral concepts.
- (2) Hone your ability to analyze the ethical complexities of various real-life issues
- (3) Learn to critically engage with others.

Grade breakdown:

Papers 1-3: 15% each

There will be three short papers in the first part of the semester that target the skill of critically engaging with a given author. Specific instructions will be provided 1 week before each is due. Length: 2 pages

Final paper: 25%

This paper will be 4-6 pages long. More instructions will be provided near the end of the semester.

Outline of final paper: 10%

As part of the process of writing the final paper, you will provide a brief overview of what you plan to argue two weeks before the paper is due. Length: 1 page.

Presenting an ethical problem: 10%

This part of class is meant to be especially fun. In groups of 2 or 3, I would like you to present an ethical problem from contemporary culture or your own life. Your goal is to explain the situation, identify what all, ethically, is at stake in the issue, and go some distance to figuring out what to do. You will need to meet with your peer and figure out what to talk about. Then, in class, you will spend 5-10 minutes exploring the issue with the class, perhaps first asking us what we would do and then providing your own analysis. I will not permit you to use PowerPoint in this “presentation.” You will be graded on how nuanced and thoughtful your discussion of the problem is.

Participation and attendance: 10%

There are many ways to participate. The most obvious is to have you participate in class by asking questions, sharing what you think about a topic, and so on. I expect you to participate in this manner. I know, though, that some people do not like to speak up much. So, I will also factor in other forms of participation, such as emails you send me where you ask content-related questions. In short, engaged students succeed in this category.

****Note:** completion of **all** writing assignments is necessary for passing the course.

Policy on Electronics:

Due to past issues, I will not allow students to use personal computers, cellphones, tablets, et cetera in class, unless of course one is using technology *to access* class. The other exceptions are for those who need such technology to learn, and for the student who is in charge of the virtual component of class.

Grading System:

94-100	A
90-93	A-
87-89	B+
84-86	B
80-83	B
77-79	C+
74-76	C
70-73	C-
67-69	D+
64-66	D
0-63	F

Reading Schedule

Unit 1:

Week 1— Introducing ethics

7. 14: What is valuable?

7. 17: R.M. Hare's *Freedom and Reason* section 6.3-6.5

Week 2— Is morality relative? Does it depend on the existence of God?

7.21: James Rachels' "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Group 1 presents

7.24: Plato's *Euthyphro* 2-11b **Paper 1 due**

Christian Miller's "The Euthyphro Dilemma"

Week 3— Doing what's best

7.28: A-L: Jeremy Bentham excerpts from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

M-Z: Mo Tzu p. 18-19 "Honoring the Worthy" and "Moderation in Funerals Part III"

7. 31: John Stuart Mill "Chapter II" of *Utilitarianism*

Week 4— More on Consequentialism

8.4: Peter Singer "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" **Paper 2 due**

8.7: Bernard Williams "A Critique of Utilitarianism"

Group 2 presents

Week 5— What are rights and who has them?

8.11: Joel Feinberg's "The Nature and Value of Rights" Section 1

Group 3 presents

8.14: Sarah Chan and John Harris' "Human Animals and Nonhuman Persons"

Week 6— Obligations to dependents

8. 18: Onora O'Neill "Begetting, Bearing, and Rearing" section 1, 2, and 5

8. 21: Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion"
Group 4 presents

Week 7— The duties of corporate executives, shareholders, and workers

- 8.25: Friedman's "The Social Responsibility of a Business is to Increase Profits"

Paper 3 due

Group 5 presents

8. 28: Elizabeth Anderson "The Business Enterprise as an Ethical Agent"

Assign Final paper

Week 8—Moral responsibility and introducing final paper

9. 1: Melanie Banks' "Individual Responsibility for Climate Change."

Group 6 presents

- 9.4: No class, but watch Michael Moore's "Roger and Me."

Week 9— Living well

- 9.8: Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I section 1, 2, 4, and 7.

Group 7 presents

- 9.11: Rosalind Hursthouse's "Virtue Ethics" **Outline of final paper due**

Week 10— Can bad people be good friends?

- 9.15: Alexis Elder's "Why bad people can't be good friends"

- 9.18: Alexander Nehamas' "The Good of Friendship"

Group 8 presents

Week 11—The limits of morality

- 9.22: Susan Wolf "Moral Saints"

Group 9 presents

TBD Final paper due

Instructions for Final Paper

From the syllabus:

Final paper: 25% **Due Sept. 24th by 11:59pm**

This paper will be 4-6 pages long. More instructions will be provided near the end of the semester.

Outline of final paper: 10% **Due Sept. 11th by 10:15am**

As part of the process of writing the final paper, you will provide a brief overview of what you plan to argue two weeks before the paper is due. Length: 1 page.

My goal for this paper is to have you explore the ethical complexities of an issue and continue to hone your analytic reasoning.

You may write on any topic you would like, provided that it has to do with an ethical issue.

For any paper, you must do the following:

1. Articulate a clear and interesting thesis
2. Explain or define any key concepts you will rely on in your paper
3. Critically engage, closely, with at least 1 source from class
4. Provide a detailed and convincing argument for your thesis
5. Entertain a plausible objection to your view and respond to that objection convincingly
6. Write as if a peer not in this class were reading your paper

Unlike the papers before, this is your chance to say what you want. But as before, I will grade you on the quality of your ideas and the care with which you convey them.

Now, even though I am leaving you the chance to talk about what you would like, let me warn you about one thing, and then identify one possible paper topic.

Warning: Do not pick too big of a topic. It would be really, really hard to argue, for instance, that moral objectivism is true.

And now for the suggestion: For about three weeks, we have been talking about duties and rights. Most recently, I introduced the notion of a *partial duty*, and we have discussed some examples of it. I thought it would be interesting for students to explore whether, or to what extent, GM had a partial obligation to the citizens of Flint, and the extent to which it failed to uphold that obligation by relocating factories from Flint to foreign countries (or similar such policies they enacted). There are many views one could develop on this, and the reason I am suggesting it as a paper is that there are a number of interesting *arguments* one can offer on the topic (historically, students have the hardest time coming up with arguments for a claim). For instance...

- 1a. One could argue that GM *did* have partial obligations to Flint which included the obligation to provide significant help in sustaining the community, and that they failed to meet this obligation. One could offer an argument by analogy for this view by showing that the relation between GM and Flint is importantly similar to that between parent and child. But then you might need to consider an objection to the effect that there are important *disanalogies* between the two cases such that, even

though parents owe things to kids, the same was not true of GM. Notice that a student writing a paper on this topic could engage with O'Neill, Friedman, or Anderson (though do not focus on all three necessarily—the more is NOT the merrier; depth of discussion is what matters).

- 1b. One could argue basically the opposite of the above. Basically, entertain the idea that GM wronged the citizens of Flint and explain why one might think this is correct. But then argue against the view, perhaps by drawing on Friedman (and probably improving/clarifying his argument) or by offering a different line of objection.
2. One could write a paper exploring what GM should do *today* for the citizens of Flint, if anything. Again, you could frame this discussion in terms of partial obligations. If GM did have such obligations and failed to satisfy them, then what do they owe Flint by way of recompense? An argument by analogy could probably work here as well.
3. Next week you will watch *Roger & Me*, in which Michael Moore seems to blame the CEO of GM for Flint's problems. You could write a paper exploring whether the CEO really is to blame. Here, Melanie Banks' paper will be crucial, which we'll read next Tuesday. Perhaps you could build on her discussion to argue that the CEO *is* to blame, or perhaps her view would support the idea that shareholders of GM are to blame. Or maybe you disagree with Banks' account of moral responsibility and would like to argue against her and then apply your findings to the case of GM.

Again, there are many other papers one could write on this topic, as well as other topics altogether. For any such paper, though, give quite a bit of thought to how you will *argue* for your view. I have already suggested you could use an argument by analogy, which means you support your thesis about X by showing how X is similar to something else, Y, where your view is pretty clearly true of Y.

There are other ways to develop an argument, though. One way is to show that your view about X follows from a more general *principle*. It will not be sufficient, though, to “support” your view about your topic simply by saying that it follows from a certain principle. For, your reader will want to know why that principle should be accepted. So, here are some possibilities:

- a. You could argue that your judgement about X follows from multiple, different principles/theories. For, this would imply that, regardless of one's convictions about which principle is correct, one should agree with you about X.
- b. You could provide support for a specific principle that you think implies your view about X. How do you do that? Well, in general, a principle is more plausible if it matches pre-theoretical judgments, ordinary practices, data from the sciences, and so on.
 - i. The greater the number of cases where this happens, the better the theory.
 - ii. The *wider* the *variety* of cases are where this happens, the better the theory.

So, to support a given principle and thereby also support your claim about X, you could defend the given theory by showing it does the above.

Kettering University

Summer 2020, PHIL 378 Moral & Ethical Philosophy
Instructor: Tenen, Levi (Primary)

There were: 24 possible respondents.

Note: each numeral (e.g. 4.6) is the average value I received for the associated question and is placed in the column that signals the percentile that my average ranks in compared to all courses in Liberal Studies that term. The bracket (e.g. 'l----l') is the confidence interval for that score in my class.

	Question Text	N	100-90%	89-80 %	79-70 %	69-60 %	59-50 %	49-40 %	39-30 %	29-20 %	19-10 %	9-1%
1	Course organized to help learning	16	-----	4.6	-----	-----						
2	Course developed abilities/skills for subject	16	-----	4.7	-----	-----						
3	Course developed ability to think critically	16	4.8	-----	-----							
4	Material organized around learning outcomes	16	-----	4.7	-----	-----						
5	Course improved problem-solving skills	16		-----	-----	4.4	-----					
7	Satisfaction with effort in course	16	-----	-----	-----	4.5	-----	-----				
14	Instructor presented organized content	16	-----	-----	4.7	-----						
15	Instructor increased understanding of material	16	-----	-----	4.7	-----						
16	Instructor helpful to student individually	16	-----	4.8	-----							
17	Instructor provided meaningful feedback	16	4.9									
18	Instructor provided timely feedback	16	-----	4.8								
19	Instructor encouraged participation	16	5									
20	Instructor conduct professional	16	-----	4.9	-----							
21	Overall effectiveness of instructor's teaching technique	16	4.9	-----	-----							
22	Overall demonstration of the significance of subject matter	16	-----	-----	4.7	-----	-----					
23	Instructor created an environment conducive to learning	16	-----	4.8	-----							

Full qualitative responses:

Instructor	Text Responses
	Question: Comments:
	Good teacher
	Overall the class was good, I took it as an writing intensive elective. The in class discussions we very good. However the first few paper assignments were unclear and in an unfamiliar format. I found it very hard to keep some of the papers to the 2 page limit the professor set. The final paper expectations were better outlined at the end of the term
	Overall I really enjoyed the course especially as an elective. My only problem was that for the first 7 or 8 weeks I was involved and fully attentive to the course and discussion but after participation grades came out it was demotivating and I definitely let my willingness to contribute go down even though I continued to read everything assigned.
	REally liked the course, opened my eyes to a whole new line of reasoning.
	I was very frustrated with this class early on, Dr. Tenen grades arguably harshly. I came to very much enjoy this class, and gained much knowledge that reflected the outcomes he wanted to get from this class. Truly a great prof, dont expect an easy ride (as you shouldnt).
	I particularly enjoyed the concepts taught in the course and how Levi challenged all students ideas. I thought it was very helpful in creating an engaging environment that really didnt have right or wrong answers but answers based entirely on how strong of an argument one could create.
	Great class and fascinating subject.
	Question: On average, how many hours per week have you spent on this course or section, including attending classes, doing readings, reviewing notes, writing papers, and any other course-related work?
	4
	About 8 hours per week
	meh
	9
	6 hours a week
	6 hours
	7
	6-8
	8
	Class=4hrs Readings=1-2hrs Writing=1-2hrs (3 papers, 1 outline, each took about 1-2 hours)
	5

	4-6 hours.
	4 in class, 4 outside
	Question: Please identify what you consider to be the strengths of the course (or section).
	The discussion in the class was great. Students engaged with each other on debated topics. The content was organized.
	This course lets you think critically and engage with other students about many hot button issues and is somewhat tailored to what the students want to learn about within reason. The course material was laid out in an easy to understand, but still thought provoking manner
	I couldve done better
	Discuss engaging topics
	Good lecture discussions
	Great class discussions
	It expanded my knowledge of ethics while also making me think more about how I view the world and my own actions
	The strengths of this course are definitely how the discussion is presented. First, the instructor opens with a question to challenge your thinking, and then it is followed up with the background and open discussion on ideas and your own opinions. No student is really singled out in the regard that they feel they are wrong as the instructor is open-minded and willing to listen and help students formulate coherent arguments.
	Great subject material.
	the ideas and concepts
	Question: Please identify area(s) where you think the course (or section) could be improved.
	I did not always agree with the grading structure. I felt like it was especially harsh especially given some papers based on opinion. It was also a lotttt of reading. I personally could not always find the time to keep up with course material.
	I feel like that the course readings werent too critical to read, as I didnt read all of them but did fine in the class lectures. In the future I feel like more emphasis should be put on students to tell the professor on what they thought the readings were discussing rather than the professor leading the discussion on the readings. (have it structured more like senior seminar)
	More clear expectations for the paper assignments, I was not clear on the adding another premise to the conclusion that already exists (paper 1 and 2) it was very challenging to work backwards in an argument like that. In all other courses we developed our argument and reached a conclusion.
	Difficult to see the direction that the professor wanted us to take with our papers.
	The course readings were too dense / long to be read easily prior to the classes with understanding. The professor mentioned adding quizzes to make sure that people were reading, but I think that would actually detract from the class as it would take away the interest of discussion in class. The quizzes may be beneficial only after the discussion occurred over the associated reading.
	Some of the readings were especially long and it was difficult to find time to read them with everything else going on with school. Having two readings a week definitely was difficult sometimes and it made discussion difficult because there wasnt enough time to fully understand the reading.
	N/A.
	Not sure
	Question: Feedback for other students: What advice would you give to another student who is considering taking this course (or section)?

	Email Levi before papers are due to make sure you have the right idea down. Many times the students would write these papers and not get what he was looking for and their grades suffered because of it.
	This course was a ton of fun and I am glad I was able to take it. Dr. Tenen was an amazing, laid back professor that taught the material in an easy, but critical way. The papers are important so do not push them off as he grades them critically, but fairly. You need to participate to get the most out of this class.
	good class
	Overall good and engaging professor, some of the paper assignments were difficult to find what he was looking for.
	Read, and pay close attention to the class discussions
	Take the class. Its hard but your communication and proper argument skills will greatly benefit.
	Definitely try to take your time with the readings as it will help with papers and make the in-class discussion a lot easier.
	Focus on understanding arguments in the reading and expanding on them. Also take controversial viewpoints in discussion to get full participation.
	N/A.
	Question: Comments about whether or not to recommend this course
	A great class. The professor is great, and very smart. The class discussions are very interesting.
	Its not a course I would recommend to someone who doesnt like reading and Socratic seminars since the entire course is structured around that. However, it still is a very thought-provoking class that I found very beneficial.
	I would recommend the course but only to people who are willing to put in the work necessary
	It is definitely a fun and interesting course to be a part of
	Its more entreating than some of the other electives I took.
	Intriguing course, but a lot of work.
	Question: Comments:
Tenen	Levi did a wonderful job with engaging the students in participation during class. He was also quick to respond to questions outside of class time. Overall, I felt very comfortable approaching him about questions and concerns, but did not always agree with the grades posted, especially given the effort I put towards for the submissions.
Tenen	Dr. Tenen was a joy to have as a professor and it showed that he cared deeply about his students. After having many new professors during my time at Kettering, I felt like he was by far the best right out of the gate. As stated earlier, he is critical, but fair when grading and by no means an easy grader. He has spent the most time out of any of my professors at Kettering to give thoughtful, individualized feedback to each of his students and it is much appreciated.
Tenen	he never once payed for drugs.. not once great teacher!
Tenen	I liked the class discussions, the papers in the beginning of the term were very challenging to understand what we needed to discuss and write about.
Tenen	I found Prof. Tenen to be a good professor, though he was stricter on the grading than I expected. Participation is normally an auto 100 as long as you make sure to talk every class period but he has a much stricter system in place that makes it hard to go above a 90. He was also pretty strict on the paper grades. Especially the first one. Still despite the somewhat harsher grading, it wasnt too bad and I will still say it was somewhat fair. He just seemed to expect more from us. Overall he was a good professor.
Tenen	He expects a lot from the students but is reasonable at the same time. He was willing to help out with assignments when needed and was understanding with due dates

Tenen	If I was not informed of this, I would have never guessed this was Levis first term at Kettering. His feedback was awesome and always super helpful. If you write this guy an email, hell get back to you almost immediately and provide very insightful feedback. When grading papers there is no rubric but honestly, there is no necessity as the information is clearly given to you in the course and then he comments the papers very extensively before handing them back. Honestly, my best experience in the liberal studies department at Kettering in my 4 years here. Thought-provoking material with a professor that will challenge everything and shows very little bias to the "right" answer.
Tenen	Great guy. Hope he stays at Kettering for a long time.