

Ethics and Society II: Luck, Morality, and Justice
Philosophy 28
Summer Session 1

Instructor: Dana Kay Nelkin

Class Meetings: 11-12:50 MW

Office Hours: W 1-2, 2 additional hours TBD with student input, and by appointment

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Teaching Assistant: Dallas Amico

Section Meetings: 10-10:50 MW and 3-3:50 MW

Office Hours: TBA

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Course Topic: Luck seems to permeate our lives and even who we are. Consider that the location of our birth, the identity of our early caregivers, the social and economic environments in which we grow up, and even whether world events allow us to turn our plans into reality, are not in our control. Reflection on this point has led to a question about whether any of us is morally responsible for anything we do. To take a famous set of cases, suppose that two people negligently fail to get their car's brakes checked, both drive home, and yet only one of them runs over a pet dog as a result while the other makes it home without incident. We tend to blame the first person more than the second. Does that mean that the first person is actually more blameworthy than the first, even though the only difference between them was something that was out of their control or, in other words, a matter of luck? We will begin with this question and related questions about what our moral practices surrounding interpersonal blame and praise should be. It turns out that there are related questions in a number of areas of human life and we will take these up in the next weeks. Should someone who commits a crime be punished more, or exactly the same as, someone who attempted to commit the same crime, but failed because of factors beyond their control? Should someone who is attempting, but failing to harm you be liable to harm from self-defense if you can only save yourself from an actual threat by harming them? Should recognition of luck have an impact on the fair distribution of resources and opportunities in society? And finally, how should the recognition of luck affect our relationships?

Course Objectives: In answering these questions, we will read texts with care and hone skills of close reading, analyzing and assessing arguments, writing with clarity, and being able to engage in constructive conversation about important topics. We will also aim to provide frameworks that can be taken and applied to new ethical issues in personal, political, and legal life.

Course Logistics: There are two lecture classes and two sections each week. Lectures will be recorded in cases you cannot make it in real time, although attendance is *highly* recommended. (More on this below.) In lecture, I will present material, but will also set aside time for discussion and welcome questions and interaction. We will take a short break in the middle each time. Dallas Amico will lead sections and you will learn more about these on the first day of class. They will include time in discussion with Dallas, and time working on assignments together.

Requirements and Extra Credit:

- **1 paper** (1000-1200 words/3-4 pages) (35%) (Due: July 20 at 11 am)
- **1 take-home final exam** (40%) (Due: July 31 at 2:30 pm)
- **Pre-class short responses** of 200 words maximum (25% based on top 5 out of 7, due at the start of each class, 11 am)
- **Participation in class and section* (Up to 10% extra credit)**
*If you have a valid excuse and cannot make these times live (for example, you are in a very different time zone or have essential care-giving duties at particular times that conflict with class due to the coronavirus), but would still like to be eligible for extra credit, please let me know what your situation is, and we can make arrangements for you to do extra written assignments instead.

Notes:

- Assignments must be turned in on time unless you have a valid excuse, conveyed in advance if at all possible.
- All assignments will be uploaded to Turnitin through Canvas.

Course Assessment Details

1. Paper

There will be a prompt for the paper, given at least a week in advance, and you will receive detailed instructions and advice on how to write a strong paper.

2. Take-Home Final Examination

This examination will consist of essays and will be based on prompts provided at least one week ahead of time. The prompt questions will be based on all the course material *including* all the lectures.

3. Pre-Class Responses

There will be responses to prompts that you will have at least 24 hours to complete and upload before each class (Monday and Wednesday at 11 am). These will be based on readings and previous lectures. 200 words maximum. These will be graded on a 4.0 scale, with 4=A, 3=B, 2=C, and 1=D. There will be 7 opportunities to complete prompts, beginning on the second day of class, and your grade will be based on the top 5. You are welcome to do only 5, or to do 6 or 7 and drop your lowest grade (or grades).

4. Participation

Participation is for extra credit only. You will receive credit for participation when you attend and participate in class, section or in office hours. Participating can take different forms, and includes asking questions, answering questions and participating in group assignments in class and sections. You don't have to get a right answer to a question in order to participate well; being engaged and making a good faith effort are sufficient for receiving credit and will help make the entire class experience a more valuable one.

Specific course topics and readings

There is typically one assigned reading for each class day. Reading should be done ahead of the class. All readings can be found on our Canvas website in the form of PDFs or links to articles. If there is any change to the schedule, I will be sure to let you know in class and on our Canvas web site.

I. Moral Luck, Blame and Praise

June 29: Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

July 1: Michael Zimmerman, "Taking Moral Luck Seriously"

July 6: Susan Wolf, "The Moral of Moral Luck"

II. Legal Luck and Punishment

July 8: David Lewis, "The Punishment that Leaves Something to Chance"

July 13: Michael Moore, *Placing Blame* (excerpt)

III. Moral Luck and Defensive Harm

July 15: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Self Defense"

July 20: Jeff McMahan, "The Basis of Liability to Defensive Killing"

IV. Moral Luck, Equality, and Distributive Justice

July 22: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (excerpt)

July 27: Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" and Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (excerpt)

V. Moral Luck and Relationships

July 29: No New Reading

How To Get the Most out of the Class and Do Your Best:

1. Attendance at course lectures and sections is *highly* recommended. Philosophy is done best when it includes conversation, and being able to interact with me, Dallas, and your fellow students will help you engage with the material more deeply and learn more.
2. Reading with care ahead of the class at which the readings will be discussed is essential. Asking yourself questions as you go and taking notes in the margins will help you to be engaged and increase your understanding. For example, you can ask yourself questions such as the following: “What is the author’s main thesis?”, “What reasons does the author provide to support their thesis?” “What position(s) is the author arguing against?” “What is at stake or important about the debate the author is engaged in?” “Are the author’s reasons convincing?” “How would an opponent best respond?” “What conclusion do I think is most plausible?”

Course Policies and Resources

1. Cheating and plagiarism, of any sort, are violations of the Academic Code of Conduct, and will be treated accordingly. Please refer to the resources at AIO: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu>.

The UC San Diego library has a useful set of tutorials on plagiarism prevention here:

Define <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/assets/elearning/plagiarism/mod1-define-web/story.html>

Prevent <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/assets/elearning/plagiarism/mod2-prevent-web/story.html>

Cite <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/assets/elearning/plagiarism/mod3-cite-web/story.html>

2. If you find yourself in need of psychological counseling, I would be glad to talk with you and help connect you to campus resources. One such resource is Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) which has more information here:

<https://wellness.ucsd.edu/CAPS/Pages/default.aspx>

3. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.