

**PHIL150—Everyday Ethics:  
Philosophical Issues in the Private Realm  
Dr. Coleen Zoller  
Fall 2011**

**Contact Information:**

**E-mail:** zoller@susqu.edu

**Office:** Bogar 024 (inside P&R dept suite)

**Office Telephone:** 372.4163

**Office hours:** MWF 10-10:40 AM, TTh 12-12:30 PM and by appt.

*“The unexamined life is not worth living for human beings.” --Plato, Apology 38a*

*“To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous.”  
--Confucious, Analects, 2:15*

**Course Description:**

The routine of daily life can induce someone to live passively, accepting human experience at face value rather than really thinking about it. Philosophy involves looking with fresh eyes at the same old world. From time to time we do stop to think about some aspects of life, but for a philosopher thinking critically is **a way of life**. This reflective activity is the **wondering** with which Plato said philosophy begins. The primary activity in this course is wondering about two central questions: (1) *Is it unethical to eat meat? Why or why not?* and (2) *Is it unethical to live luxuriously without aiding the world's poorest people? Why or not?* In our effort to explore these pressing contemporary issues, we will also investigate questions with which philosophers have struggled for millennia, such as: How should a human being live? What kinds of persons are worth emulating and which character traits are worth cultivating? How should one make ethical decisions? This course also inquires into more recent philosophical questions, such as: What role do factors such as species, gender, social class, and ethnicity play in ethical decision-making? How should I treat the environment? What moral obligations do we have in environmental crises? What obligations might I have to strangers in the world who live in extreme poverty? What should I have for dinner? How should food be produced? This course involves examination of the following ethical theories: ancient Greek virtue-ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, and deep ecology (a.k.a. ecosophy).

**Course Objectives:**

The general aim of a philosophy course is, as Kant wrote, to “have the courage to use your *own* mind!” More specifically, as a course that satisfies the Central Curriculum Ethics learning goals as well as the Diversity intensive learning goals, students in this course should:

- Closely read and analyze philosophical texts for understanding
- Critically read and analyze philosophical texts for evaluation
- Identify the fundamental vocabulary, questions, theories, and problems in ethical theory
- Identify and question one’s own beliefs about responsibility, morality, justice, self, and society
- Recognize the relevance of philosophy and apply philosophical theories to real-life decision-making
- Recognize and understand the diversities of the human experience in relation to ethical decision-making
- Debate effectively (in speaking as well as in writing), including: expositing positions, organizing thoughts logically, analyzing and evaluating arguments, and accounting for a variety of viewpoints

**Required Texts (Always bring your own copy of the day's reading with you to class):**

**Books:**

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin, 2006)  
Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (Random House, 2009)

Optional:

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (Norton, 2006)

**On Blackboard (print out your own copies):**

James Rachels, "Vegetarianism and the 'Other Weight Problem'"  
Immanuel Kant, excerpt from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*  
John Stuart Mill, excerpt from *Utilitarianism*  
Plato, excerpts from *Republic*  
Aristotle, excerpt from *Nicomachean Ethics*  
Doug Gurion-Sherman, "CAFOs Uncovered: The Untold Costs of Confined Animal Feeding Operations" (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2008)  
John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness" from *A Theory of Justice*  
Charles Sackrey et al., "Karl Marx and the Contradictions of Capitalism" from *Introduction to Political Economy*  
Arne Naess & George Sessions, "Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement" from *The Deep Ecology Movement*  
Al Gore, excerpt from *An Inconvenient Truth*  
Henry David Thoreau, excerpts from *Walden*

**Films:**

"Unser Taglich Brot"/"Our Daily Bread" (2005, dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter; 92 min)  
"The Corporation" (2005, dir. Jennifer Abbott & Mark Achbar; 145 min)

**Grading:**

Participation	= 25%
Symposium paper	= 25%
Quizzes	= 25%
Final Exam	= 25%

**Office hours:** Please take advantage of my office hours to discuss any problems you have with the reading assignments, discussions in class, meaning of life, etc. Do not feel that you must have a carefully formulated set of questions before you come to see me. The articulation of the problem is often the main stumbling block; so if something is an issue for you, don't hesitate to talk with me about it.

**Course Requirements:**

**A. Writing:** Each student is required to write a short formal essay on the symposium topic to which s/he is assigned. In these assignments students must demonstrate both their understanding and evaluation of course texts. Details about these essays will be announced in advance of the due dates. You should consult the grading rubric on Blackboard to see the grading criteria.

**B. Quizzes and Final Exam:** There shall be six quizzes throughout the semester. All quizzes will be cumulative. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. There will also be a cumulative final exam during the

exam period schedule by the Registrar's Office. A missed quiz or exam earns a zero (unless permission for an alternative has been granted by the professor and I do not automatically grant such requests).

**C. Attendance:** All students are expected to participate in all classes, arriving punctually. Missing class will negatively affect your participation grade. I follow the University's attendance policy (available in the student handbook) and reserve the right to assign an F to anyone who has missed two weeks or more of class meetings.

**D. Class Participation:**

*1. My Assumptions:*

**a. The classroom is an environment that must be conducive to learning. To help foster that environment cell phones should be entirely silent and stowed in your bag for the duration of all class meetings. Anyone using a phone will have to leave class.**

b. No one knows everything, but every one of us knows something and is able to contribute something to our class discussions.

c. Everyone *should* contribute to our class discussions. You are citizens, not consumers, at a university. Those who attend class and never participate are "moochers"—consuming the understanding being generated by class discussions without contributing to that process.

d. Coming to class unprepared is disrespectful.

e. Questions are just as important as comments.

f. Some of you are shy about speaking publicly.

*2. Why participate?* There are two main reasons to participate in your classes. First, pedagogical research has demonstrated that students learn more when they actively participate in class discussions. Second, all students have a civic responsibility to offer their questions and thoughts so that the entire class can collaboratively learn the course material. Furthermore, participating in class will help you practice having thoughtful conversations outside of class.

*3. Class format:* The format of this class will vary from day to day, including all of the following: recitation "lectures", conversations, debates, seminar. What I mean by recitation "lectures" is that when presenting new material, my presentation will include calling on students to elicit information about the readings. When class takes the form of a conversation I will ask students to discuss their responses to the texts and the issues they raise. Frequently there will be smaller group discussions—sometimes these will involve debating the strengths and weaknesses of theories and ideas, other times these will involve in-depth analysis of the day's topic.

*4. Assistance:* As soon as possible anyone who feels ill at ease should discuss with the instructor ways of easing oneself into participation.

*5. Rubric:* A participation grade will be assigned to each student based on which of the following regularly applied to her/him:

F = **absent**, or *severely detracting from* classroom discussion (e.g., behaving in a manner that is disrespectful like **checking text messages**); never interacts with peers; never prepared; demonstrates a noticeable and on-going lack of interest in course material (e.g., **sleeping**)

D = present physically but not mentally and/or not being prepared, or *detracting from* classroom discussion (e.g., **regular mid-class bathroom trips, not having text and classroom supplies with you**, having side conversations, daydreaming, etc.); never participates or making totally irrelevant comments

C = **present, alert, and prepared for class** (e.g., having read required texts in at least a cursory way, bringing text and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, etc.), and adding to the discussion **but in only minimal ways**

B = present, alert, prepared for class (e.g., having read required texts with significant attention, bringing text and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, etc.), and **contributing positively to class discussion (e.g., communicating some understanding of the text, asking related questions, sharing ideas, maintaining an appropriate balance of talking & listening, etc.)**

A = present, alert, prepared (e.g., having read required texts thoroughly, bringing notes, text--**with significant passages marked**--and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, having written a reflection paper as well as some additional questions to ask to advance the conversation, etc.), and **making thoughtful contributions to classroom discussion based on engagement with the texts** (e.g., communicating one's understanding of the text and the overall course, posing related questions to both the instructor and fellow students, sharing ideas and responding to the ideas of others, maintaining an appropriate balance of talking and listening, **applying course material to personal experience; actively engaging in one's own learning, etc.**)

#### **Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:**

All forms of plagiarism, cheating, and academic dishonesty are prohibited. This includes submitting without citation your own work originally written for other assignments. **Students found cheating on assignments will receive an F for the course** and will be reported to the Dean of Student Life. I reserve the right to have all student written assignments submitted in an electronic format for the expressed purpose of checking assignments for plagiarism against internet sources (including pay-sites for papers) using turnitin.com. If you are in doubt about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please discuss this with me BEFORE turning in an assignment.

#### **Students with Disabilities:**

If you are seeking an academic accommodation, it is essential that you have appropriate documentation on file with the University and present that documentation to me as early as possible in the semester. If you believe that you have a disability but have no documentation on file at Susquehanna and wish to discuss what steps can be taken to determine whether an accommodation is warranted, please contact the Counseling Center for further information and assistance. Some additional information is available at <http://www.susqu.edu/counseling/disabilities/>.

#### **Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

Week 1, Day 1 (8/29)	Introductory Session
Week 1, Day 2 (8/31)	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 1-56
Week 1, Day 3 (9/2)	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 57-119
Week 2, Day 1 (9/5)	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 123-184
Week 2, Day 2 (9/7)	In-class viewing of "Our Daily Bread"
Week 2, Day 3 (9/9)	In-class viewing of "Our Daily Bread"
Week 3, Day 1 (9/12)	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 185-238
Week 3, Day 2 (9/14)	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 239-273
Week 3, Day 3 (9/16)	Michael Pollan, <i>The Omnivore's Dilemma</i> , pp. 304-333
Week 4, Day 1 (9/19)	Field trip to the SU Campus Garden—arrive promptly by 11:20; write down questions for farm manager, Carla Hine
Week 4, Day 2 (9/21)	Rachels, "Vegetarianism and the 'Other Weight Problem'" <b>(bb=available on Blackboard under "course documents")</b>

Week 4, Day 3 (9/23)	Mill, excerpt from <i>Utilitarianism</i> (bb)
Week 5, Day 1 (9/26)	Kant, excerpt from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (bb)
Week 5, Day 2 (9/28)	Kant continued
Week 5, Day 3 (9/30)	Application of Utilitarianism and Deontology to meat-eating question
Week 6, Day 1 (10/3)	Plato, excerpt from <i>Republic II</i> (bb)
Week 6, Day 2 (10/5)	Plato, excerpt from <i>Republic IV</i> (bb)
Week 6, Day 3 (10/7)	Aristotle, excerpts from <i>Nicomachean Ethics I-II</i> (bb)
Week 7, Day 1 (10/10)	Application of Virtue-Ethics to meat-eating question
Week 7, Day 2 (10/12)	Gurion-Sherman, "CAFOs Uncovered: The Untold Costs of Confined Animal Feeding Operations" (bb)
Week 7, Day 3 (10/14)	Rawls, "Justice as Fairness" from <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (bb)
Week 8, Day 1 (10/19)	Sackrey, "Karl Marx & the Contradictions of Capitalism" (bb)
Week 8, Day 2 (10/21)	In-class viewing of "The Corporation"
Week 8, Day 3 (10/24)	In-class viewing of "The Corporation"
Week 9, Day 1 (10/26)	Discussion of "The Corporation" and application of Rawls and Marx to meat-eating question
Week 9, Day 2 (10/28)	Naess & Sessions, "Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement" (bb)
Week 9, Day 3 (10/31)	Al Gore, excerpts from <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> (bb), take global footprint quiz, and application of Deep Ecology to meat-eating question
Week 10, Day 1 (11/2)	Symposium preparation
Week 10, Day 2 (11/4)	<i>Symposium #1: Is it unethical to eat meat? Why or why not? Short Paper #1 due</i>
Week 10, Day 3 (11/7)	Peter Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , Preface (pp. xi-xv) & chapter 1 (pp. 3-12)
Week 11, Day 1 (11/9)	Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , chapters 2-3 (pp. 13-41)
Week 11, Day 2 (11/11)	Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , chapters 4-5 (pp. 45-78)
Week 11, Day 3 (11/14)	Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , chapter 6 (pp. 79-104)
Week 12, Day 1 (11/16)	Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , chapter 7 (pp. 105-125)
Week 12, Day 2 (11/18)	Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , chapter 8-9 (pp. 127-150)
Week 12, Day 3 (11/21)	Singer, <i>The Life You Can Save</i> , chapters 10 (pp. 151-173)
Week 13, Day 1 (11/28)	Thoreau, "Economy" from <i>Walden</i> (bb)
Week 13, Day 2 (11/30)	Thoreau, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for" (bb)
Week 13, Day 3 (12/2)	Thoreau, "Conclusion" (bb)
Week 14, Day 1 (12/5)	preparation for second Symposium (application of Utilitarianism, Deontology, Virtue-Ethics, Deep Ecology, Marx, Rawls, Thoreau, and Singer)
Week 14, Day 2 (12/7)	<i>Symposium #2: Is it unethical to live luxuriously without aiding the world's poorest people? Why or not? Short Paper #2 due</i>
Week 14, Day 3 (12/9)	Final Exam Review
Monday, Dec. 12 <sup>th</sup> , 8-10 AM	Final Exam