

On What Is Intolerable
Phil 174C-01, Phil 274C-01
(4 units)

Spring 2018

Tuesday/Thursday 9:00AM-10:20AM in building 200, room 107

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Office Hours: Thursday 10:30AM-11:30AM and by appointment

Teaching Assistant:

Course Description

Moral and political philosophy often focuses on ideals and principles we should aspire to and follow. Yet individuals and societies almost invariably fall short of these ideals and principles. Unless you are a fundamentalist or a relentless perfectionist, you tolerate these failures. That is, you tolerate them to a point. This point will be the topic of our course. How badly may we fail? How far short of the ideal is too far? We will be concerned with that which is not merely bad, unjustified, wrong, or unjust, but which is intolerably so. Examples include: racial discrimination, rotten compromises, unconscionable contracts, dirty hands, and unjust wars. We will also consider instances of the personally intolerable: unbearable pain, personal failures, desperation, betrayal, humiliation, and public shame. Just as important, we will ask: How should we respond to the intolerable? Should intolerably unjust political institutions be met with disobedience, or perhaps rebellion? Must we continue to regret our past failures and mistakes? When we emerge from grief to continue with our lives, do we thereby accept our loss as tolerable? Can we ever forgive without forgetting the severity of the wrong done to us and the harm we suffered? Can we justify hope in the face of pervasive injustice on a massive scale? We will consider contemporary examples as well as literary examples, and we will draw on thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Du Bois, Orwell, De Beauvoir, and Baldwin, as well as contemporary thinkers, such as John Rawls, Thomas Nagel, Bernard Williams, Susan Sontag, Elaine Scarry, Alexander Nehamas, Jonathan Lear, and others.

Course Goals

The goal of this course is not merely to read philosophy, but to do philosophy. Toward that end, in each class meeting we will critically evaluate the arguments made in the readings, identify the tools philosophers use to make those arguments, and, ideally, use these tools to make and assess our own arguments. By the end of the quarter, students should be able to:

- i. Reconstruct and evaluate arguments for controversial moral conclusions.
- ii. Articulate shared presuppositions of conflicting views about one and the same moral problem.
- iii. Distinguish and move back and forth between academic and literary modes of philosophizing.
- iv. Tell the difference between an illuminating disagreement and a merely competitive one.
- v. Communicate nuanced answers to the questions that drive this course.

Student Preparation

This is an intermediary-level course. Students should have experience in reading and critically assessing philosophical texts, as well as some preliminary background in moral philosophy.

Assignments and Grade

The primary course assignment is the final paper. Other assignments are meant as preparatory work toward the final paper. Accordingly, work on the final paper will be conducted throughout the term and divided to three stages. Each stage will count toward the final grade.

First stage. In **week 4**, on **April 24**, students will submit **preliminary sketches**. Looking over the syllabus, each student will propose three possible topics on which he or she might write the final paper as well as a brief description of the ideas the student would like to explore. The aim is to present three promising lines of argument. This is a 4-5 page assignment.

Second stage. In **week 8**, on **May 22**, students will submit an **outline**. This will be an outline of the argument upon which the student will expand in the final paper. The outline should consider relevant texts and present a firm grasp of the intended argument. This is a 5-7 page assignment. The feedback received in the first stage should inform the paper outline in the second stage.

Third stage. The **final paper** is due on **June 12, at noon**. Undergraduates will submit a 15-20 page-long paper and graduate students will submit a 20-25 page-long paper. The feedback received in the second stage should inform the final paper in the third stage.

Final grade will be calculated in the following manner: 15% first stage, 15% second stage, 50% final paper, and 20% participation in lecture and discussion section.

Readings

The course requires a large amount of reading. For each meeting, one or two texts are designated “primary” to indicate that they will be the focus of the lecture, but in one way or another each lecture will draw on *all* the readings assigned to the relevant date. Lectures will presuppose a careful reading of the “primary” texts and familiarity with the “secondary” texts. All the readings for the course will be posted in the Resources section of the course’s Canvas site except where noted otherwise.

Topics and Readings

Week 1: Introduction to intolerance

April 3. Acquiescence as moral failure

- No readings.

April 5. Tolerance and political membership

- **Primary:** Scanlon, T. M. “The Difficulty of Tolerance.” In *The Difficulty of Tolerance*. Cambridge University Press (2003) pp. 187-201.
- Locke, John. *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*. Edited by Mark Goldie. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund (1689/2010) pp. 7-33.

Week 2: Intolerable obedience

April 10. Obedience as moral failure

- **Primary:** Rawls, John. "Civil Disobedience." In *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press (1999). §53-§59.
- La Boétie, Étienne. *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*. Translated by James B. Atkinson and David Sices, Hackett Classics (2012/1576).
- Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience." In *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*. Dover Thrift Editions (1993/1849). Available online: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/stanford-ebooks/detail.action?docID=380877>

April 12. Resistance and defiance

- **Primary:** Gottlieb, Roger. "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust." *Social Theory and Practice* 9 (1983) 31-49.
- **Primary:** Shelby, Tommie. *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*. Harvard University Press (2016) chapter 7.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. Vintage Books (1952/1989) Introduction; Part VII: Toward Liberation.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press (1990) preface and chapter 1.
- Purvis, Jane. *Pankhurst: A Biography*. Routledge (2002) pp. 1-9; 65-79; 217-231.

Week 3: Intolerable racial discrimination

April 17. The nature of racial discrimination

- **Primary:** Baldwin, James. "My Dungeon Shook." In *The Fire Next Time*. Vintage Books (1962/1993) pp. 1-10.
- **Primary:** Shelby, Tommie. *Dark Ghettos*. Chapter 1.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press (2010) pp. 1-19.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford University Press (1903/2007) pp. 3-14.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel & Grau (2015).

April 19. No class.

Week 4: Intolerable affluence

April 24. Ideal and nonideal theory

- **Primary:** Murphy, Liam. *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory*. Oxford University Press (2000) Introduction and chapter 5.
- Shelby, Tommie. *Dark Ghettos*. pp. 10-15.
- Singer, Peter. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972) pp. 229-243.

First stage: submit preliminary sketches for final paper.

April 26. Falling short of one's ideal

- **Primary:** Young, Iris Marion. "A Social Connection Model" and "Avoiding Responsibility." In *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press (2011) chapters 4 and 6.
- Cohen, G. A. "Political Philosophy and Personal Behavior." In *If you're an egalitarian, how come you're so rich?* Harvard University Press (2001) pp. 148-179.

Week 5: Intolerable war

May 1. The calamity of war

- **Primary:** Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars*. Basic Books (1977/2015) pp. 21-50, 127-160.
- **Primary:** Sebald, W. G. "The History of Natural Destruction." *New Yorker* (11.4.2002) pp. 66-78.
- Lifton, Robert. *Home from the War*. (Excerpts).
- Orwell, George. "Looking Back on the Spanish War." Available online: <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/looking-back-on-the-spanish-war/>

May 3. Justifying killing in war

- **Primary:** McMahan, Jeff. *Killing in War*. Oxford University Press (2009) chapters 1 and 5.
- Nagel, Thomas. "War and Massacre." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972) pp. 123-144.

Week 6: Intolerable politics

May 8. Intolerable politicians

- **Primary:** Nagel, Thomas. "Ruthlessness in Public Life." In *Public and Private Morality*. Edited by Stuart Hampshire. Cambridge University Press (1978) pp. 75-92.
- Williams, Bernard. "Politics and Moral Character." In *Public and Private Morality*. Edited by Stuart Hampshire. Cambridge University Press (1978) pp. 55-74.

May 10. Intolerable concessions

- **Primary:** Shiffrin, Seana Valentine. "Paternalism, Unconscionability Doctrine, Accommodation." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (2000) pp. 205-250.
- Margalit, Avishai. *Rotten Compromises*. Princeton University Press (2010) (Excerpts).

Week 7: Intolerable thoughts and deeds

May 15. The unthinkable

- **Primary:** Williams, Bernard. "Practical Necessity." In *Moral Luck*. Cambridge University Press (1981) pp. 124-131.
- **Primary:** Gaita, Raimond. "Forms of the Unthinkable." In *A Common Humanity*. Routledge (2000) pp. 157-186.

- Frankfurt, Harry. “Rationality and the Unthinkable.” In *The Importance of What We Care About*. Cambridge University Press (1998) pp. 177-190.

May 17. The possibility of forgiveness

- **Primary:** Griswold, Charles. *On Forgiveness*. Cambridge University Press (2007) Chapter 4, pp. 134-194.
- **Primary:** Hieronymi, Pamela. “Articulating Uncompromising Forgiveness.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001) pp. 529-555.
- Goldie, Peter. “Self-Forgiveness: A Case Study.” In *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, and the Mind*. Oxford University Press (2012) chapter 5, pp. 98-116.

Week 8: Intolerable pain

May 22. The representation of pain

- **Primary:** Berger, “Photographs of Agony.” In *About Looking*. Vintage Books (1980) pp. 41-44.
- **Primary:** Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2003) chapters 1 and 2.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford University Press (1985) chapter 1, pp. 27- 59.

Second Stage: submit outline of final paper.

May 24. Bearing pain

- **Primary:** Williams, Bernard. “Unbearable Suffering.” In *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy*. Edited by Myles Burnyeat. Princeton University Press (2008) chapter 23.
- **Primary:** Sussman, David. “What’s Wrong with Torture?” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33 (2005) pp. 1-33.
- Améry, Jean. “Torture.” In *At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*. Indiana University Press (1980) chapter 2, pp. 21-40.

Week 9: Intolerable loss

May 29. Grief

- **Primary:** Nussbaum, Martha C. *Upheavals of Thought*. Cambridge University Press (2001) pp. 19-24 and 79-85.
- **Primary:** Moller, Dan. “Love and the Rationality of Grief.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love*. Edited by Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts.
- **Primary:** Goldie, Peter. “Grief: A Case Study.” In *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion and the Mind*. Oxford University Press (2012) chapter 3, pp. 56-75.
- Montaigne, Michel. “Of Friendship.” In *Essays*. Translated by Charles Cotton, edited by William Carew Hazlitt. The Floating Press (2009).
- Barthes, Roland. *Mourning Diary*. Translated by Richard Howard. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2010) (Excerpts).
- Bonnano, George. *The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss*. Basic Books (2009) chapter 1, pp. 1-10.

May 31. Regret and cultural devastation

- **Primary:** Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Harvard University Press (2006)
- **Primary:** Wallace, R. Jay. “Affirming the Unacceptable.” *The View from Here: On Affirmation, Attachment, and the Limits of Regret*. Oxford University Press (2013) pp. 78-131.
- Baldwin, James. “Down at the Cross.” In *The Fire Next Time*.
- Zola, Émile. *Thérèse Raquin*. (Excerpts).

Week 10: Intolerable life

June 5. To live it all again (and again.)

- **Primary:** Anderson, Lanier. “Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption.” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2005) pp. 185-187, 196-203.
- **Primary:** Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Harvard University Press (1985) Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 141-199.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. (Excerpts).
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Repetition*. (Excerpts).

Final paper due by 12PM Monday, June 12.

Course Information and Policies

Lectures: Lectures will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00AM-10:20AM in 200-107. I expect attendance at all lectures. Failure to attend lectures will lead to a lower participation grade. I will encourage questions, comments, and discussion about the readings during lecture.

Section: Section attendance is mandatory, and you must register for a section through Canvas. Participation in section is an important part of the course, since it is the time when you will have the most extensive opportunity to discuss the issues raised in the readings and lectures.

Office Hours: My office hours will be Tuesdays after class, from 10:30AM-11:30AM, in my office, 90-92K. If you can't make it to normal office hours, I would be more than happy to schedule another time to meet. Please don't hesitate to come to me with any course-related matter, including personal matters that impact your participation.

Late Papers: Late papers will be penalized one grade-step (e.g. a B to a B-) for each day that a paper is late, with a maximum penalty of one full grade (e.g. a B to a C).

Students with Documented Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oea>).

The Stanford University Honor Code is a part of this course: It is Stanford's statement on academic integrity first written by Stanford students in 1921. It articulates university expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. It is agreed to by every student who enrolls and by every instructor who accepts appointment at Stanford. The Honor Code states:

- 1) The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively
 - a) that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
 - b) that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
- 2) The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
- 3) While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Penalties for violation of the Honor Code can be serious (e.g., suspension, and even expulsion).

So re-read the Honor Code, understand it and abide by it.

Plagiarism: In order to clarify what is regarded as plagiarism, the Board on Judicial Affairs adopted the following statement on May 22, 2003:

“For purposes of the Stanford University Honor Code, plagiarism is defined as the use, without giving reasonable and appropriate credit to or acknowledging the author or source, of another person's original work, whether such work is made up of code, formulas, ideas, language, research, strategies, writing or other form(s).”

If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism in the context of a particular assignment, talk with the instructor.

For more details, see: <https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/student-conduct-process/honor-code-and-fundamental-standard/additional-resources/what-plagiarism>