

FALL 2025

**PHI 6667: Ethics and Metaphysics**

3:00 – 6:00 pm Tuesdays

Room 303 Griffin-Floyd Hall

Professor Molly Gardner

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1 – 3 p.m. and by appointment

Office Hours Sign-Up Sheet: <http://bit.ly/2vYpCml>

Zoom office hours link: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/5413165558>

**Course Description:** If the future isn't real, can we have moral obligations to future generations? Do merely possible people have moral standing? Which consequences, if any, are morally relevant--causal consequences, counterfactual consequences, or logical consequences? Can an action you perform today have morally relevant consequences for someone in the past? (And is this how it is possible to harm the dead?) In this course we will examine these and other issues at the intersection of metaphysics and ethics. We will consider both whether our moral judgments can inform our metaphysical theories of time, reality, and causation, and whether our metaphysical theories of time, reality, and causation can inform our moral judgments.

**Course Goals:** This course is designed to increase your “knowledge how,” which is acquired through practice; and your “knowledge that,” which is acquired through exposure to information.

*Knowledge how:*

- To read for, charitably understand, and reconstruct arguments
- To critically evaluate your own and other people’s views
- To develop and situate your own contributions to the literature
- To teach the methodology of and main ideas in ethical theory to undergraduates

*Knowledge that:*

- Knowledge of the major contributions that have so far been made to discussions about ethical theory

**Materials:** All of the required readings will be available as PDFs on our Canvas website. Studies suggest that reading printed words promotes comprehension better than reading words on a computer screen, so I recommend that you print out the readings and compile them in a three-ring binder. This will have the added advantage of making it easier for you to refer to specific passages from the readings during our seminar discussions.

**Requirements:**

(1) *Attendance and Participation.* You will be expected to attend and actively participate in our seminar discussions. **However, please do not come to seminar even if you are just the slightest bit sick.** Missing class will not adversely affect your grade unless you accrue an usually large number of absences; quality

participation (when you are healthy) is more important than perfect attendance. ***There is no need to email me about any individual absence unless you have a large number of them.*** (10% of grade)

(2) *Weekly Question or Comment.* By 5 p.m. every Monday before each class in which there are required readings, you must upload a question or a comment on at least one of those readings to Canvas. Your question or comment can take a variety of forms. You can raise an objection, offer a response to an objection on behalf of the author, attempt to explicate the structure of an argument that is difficult to interpret, consider how a particular view might handle certain cases that the author doesn't discuss, draw an interesting connection between one reading and another, or simply raise a question about something you found puzzling. Aim to write approximately 200 words each week. Our in-class discussion will be centered, in large part, on some of your comments or questions, so this is one of the main ways in which you can help set the agenda for our seminar. (20% of grade)

(3) *Midterm Exam.* There will be a "take-home" exam for you to complete on Canvas. It will consist of short essay questions asking you about the material from the first two thirds of the semester. (20% of grade)

(4) *End of Semester Conference and Term Paper.* At the end of the semester, you will present your term paper idea to the class. You should then write/revise your paper in light of the feedback you receive during the Q&A. The final draft of your term paper will then be due at 5 p.m. on December 9. It should be between 3,000 and 4,500 words. (50% of grade)

### **AI Policy:**

You are not permitted to use ChatGPT or any other form of artificial intelligence to help you with *any aspect of this class*. This means, first, that you are not permitted to use AI to summarize the readings I have assigned. It also means you are not permitted to use AI when you are writing your weekly comment papers, working on the midterm, or writing your term paper. There are no exceptions to this rule.

### **University Policies:**

This course complies with all UF academic policies, including the following:

- Attendance and make-up policies
- Disability resource center information
- Assigning grade points
- Gator Evals
- Honesty policy
- In-class recording
- Academic and wellness resources

For information on those policies and for further resources, please see [this link](#). (The direct link is [https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/.](https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/))

## Schedule

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### August 26: Time Travel

- David Lewis (1976). The paradoxes of time travel. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13: 145 – 152.
- Kadri Vihvelin (1996). What time travelers cannot do. *Philosophical Studies* 81: 315 – 330.
- Theodore Sider (2002). Time travel, coincidences and counterfactuals. *Philosophical Studies* 110: 115 – 138.

### September 2: The Ethics of Time Travel

- Ira Kiourti (2008). Killing baby Suzy. *Philosophical Studies* 139(3): 343 – 352.
- Sara Bernstein (forthcoming). Ethical Puzzles of Time Travel. In Nina Emery (ed.), *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Time*. Routledge.
- George Pitcher (1984). The Misfortunes of the Dead. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2(2): 183 – 188.

#### **Non-Required Readings:**

- Peter Vranas (2010). What time travelers may be able to do. *Philosophical Studies* 150(1): 115 – 121.
- Peter Vranas (2009). Can I kill my younger self? Time travel and the retrosuicide paradox. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90(4): 520 – 534.

### September 9: Ethics and the Future

- Theodore Sider (2001). Against presentism. In *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*, 11 – 25.
- Molly Gardner (2016). Beneficence and Procreation. *Philosophical Studies* 173(2): 321 – 336.

#### **Non-Required Readings:**

- Ned Markosian (2009). The Truth About the Past and the Future. In F. Correia and A. Iacona (eds.), *Around the Tree: Semantic and Metaphysical Issues Concerning Branching and the Open Future*. Synthese Library, 127 – 141.
- Aaron M. Griffith (2017). The Rights of Future Persons and the Ontology of Time. *Journal of Social Philosophy* 48(1): 58 – 70.

### September 16: Determinism, Fatalism, and Moral Responsibility

- John W. Carroll (2010). Context, conditionals, fatalism, time travel, and freedom. In Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O'Rourke, and Harry S. Silverstein (eds.), *Time and Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 79 – 94.
- Carolina Sartorio (2013). Making a difference in a deterministic world. *The Philosophical Review* 122(2): 189 – 214.

#### **Non-Required Readings:**

- Peter Vranas (2005). Do cry over spilt milk: Possibly you can change the past. *The Monist* 88(3): 370 – 387.
- Carolina Sartorio (2012). Causation and Freedom. *Journal of Philosophy* 109(11): 629 – 651.

**September 23: Causation and Ethics**

- Alex Broadbent (2016). Causation. In *Philosophy for Graduate Students: Metaphysics and Epistemology* by Alex Broadbent. New York: Routledge, p. 31 – 51.
- Carolina Sartorio (2009) Causation and Ethics. In Helen Beebe, Christopher Hitchcock, and Peter Menzies (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Causation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 575 – 591.

**Non-Required Reading:**

- Christopher Hitchcock (2007). Three Concepts of Causation. *Philosophy Compass* 2(3): 508 – 516.

**The Midterm Exam will be due on Canvas at 11:59 p.m. on Friday, September 26.**

**September 30: Causation and Harm**

- Molly Gardner (forthcoming). The Causal Account of Harming. In Erik Carlson, Jens Johansson, and Olle Risberg (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Harm*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Non-Required Readings:**

- Molly Gardner (2019). When Good Things Happen to Harmed People. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22(4): 893 – 908.
- Molly Gardner (2025). A Deontological Approach to Future Consequences. In Stephen Gardiner (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alex Broadbent (2008). The Difference Between Cause and Condition. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 108: 355 – 364.

**October 7: Scalar Causation**

- Carolina Sartorio (2020). More of a Cause? *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 37 (346 – 363).
- Sara Bernstein (2017). Causal Proportions and Moral Responsibility. In David Shoemaker (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility, Volume 4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 165 – 182.
- Matthew Talbert (forthcoming). Blameworthiness and Causal Outcomes. *Erkenntnis*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-024-00818-3>

**October 14: Omissions**

- Sara Bernstein (2015). The Metaphysics of Omissions. *Philosophy Compass* 10(3): 208 – 218.
- Sara McGrath (2005). Causation by Omission: A Dilemma. *Philosophical Studies* 123(1-2): 125 – 148.
- Michael S. Moore (2009). *Causation and Responsibility: An Essay in Law, Morals, and Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (excerpt)

**October 21: Ethics and Possible Worlds**

- Karen Bennett (2005). Two Axes of Actualism. *Philosophical Review* 114(3): 297 – 326.
- Caspar Hare (2007). Voices from another world: Must We Respect the Interests of People Who Do Not, and Will Never, Exist? *Ethics* 117(3): 498 – 523.

***Non-Required Reading:***

- Shamik Dasgupta (2018). Essentialism and the Non-Identity Problem. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96(3): 540 – 570.

**October 28:** Ethics and Modal Realism

- Mark Heller (2003). The Immorality of Modal Realism, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let the Children Drown. *Philosophical Studies* 114: 1–22.
- Bob Fischer (2017). The Moral Objection to Modal Realism. *Erkenntnis* 82(5): 1015 – 1030.
- Neil Sinhababu (2008). Possible Girls. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 89 (2): 254–260.

**November 4:** *Topic and required readings to be determined by class interest.*

*November 11: Veterans Day (no class)*

**November 18:** Conference (no readings)

**December 2:** Conference (no readings)

*The final draft of your term paper will be due Tuesday, December 9 at 5 p.m. in place of a final exam.*