

**Course Syllabus**  
**PHIL 334: Pandemic Ethics**  
Spring 2021  
MW 4-5:20

**Instructor:** Dr. Ryan Doody

**Office Hours:** MWF 12-1

**Course Website:** <http://ole.sandiego.edu>

**Email:** [rdoodo@sandiego.edu](mailto:rdoodo@sandiego.edu)

**Zoom Link:** <https://sandiego.zoom.us/j/99784462904>



**Required Readings:**

Reading will be posted online on [Blackboard](#).

**Core Requirements:** This course fulfills the Core Curriculum requirement for Ethics.

**Course Description:** The COVID-19 pandemic raises several pressing ethical and political issues. If faced with shortages, how should hospitals allocate scarce medical resources? Is it morally wrong to stockpile provisions, like hand sanitizer and toilet paper? Under what conditions are lockdowns justified? Is anyone morally to blame for the pandemic? What's the fairest way to develop and distribute a vaccine? How should we address the spread of misinformation during a health crisis? What lessons can the pandemic teach us about what's morally important? This course will explore these and related issues by reading classic and contemporary texts in ethics and political philosophy.

**Learning Outcomes:** By the end of this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

1. *Foundational Knowledge:* Describe and analyze key ethical concepts (e.g., justice, happiness, the good, rights, equality, etc.)
2. *Ethical Reasoning:* Reason ethically by drawing on major ethical theories and traditions (e.g., deontological ethics, consequentialist theories, etc.) and the values grounding those traditions (e.g., autonomy, utility, etc.) to normatively assess individual, professional, and institutional decisions

3. *Perspectival Reflection*: Analyze a contemporary ethical issue from multiple perspectives, including identifying potential biases on the basis of social location.
4. *Clarity of Argument*: Develop, articulate, and defend well-reasoned judgments on particular ethical issues, demonstrating nuance and ambiguity, as well as clarity and precision, in thinking and writing about moral problems, concepts, and ideals.
5. *Ethical Self-Reflection*: Reflect on and evaluate their own ethical decisions, actions, and practices, as well as on their obligations as morally responsible agents.

### **Grading Policy:**

- *Homework & Weekly Quizzes* [25%]  
Throughout the semester, you will be assigned short homework assignments and quizzes. Some of these assignments might ask you to reconstruct and critically assess an argument from one of the readings. Some might test your understanding of some of the key concepts discussed in the material previously covered. These assignments will be turned in on Blackboard.
- *Midterm Podcast Assignment* [25%]  
This assignment asks you to make your own podcast. Identify a gripping pandemic-related story with ethical significance, and report on it, drawing on the ideas of at least three philosophers surveyed in this course, and making the ethical dimensions of the situation explicit for your audience. A detailed prompt may be found on the course website. Your podcast is due on March 12th.
- *Participation* [10%]  
Ideally, this would be a discussion-heavy course---with lots of spirited debate during class. Our current circumstances make it difficult to conduct class in a way that will make this both fair and effective. Participating in class over Zoom---either by speaking up at appropriate times, or by using the chat function to make comments or ask questions, or during “break-out room” sessions, etc.---is one way of satisfying this course’s participation requirement. But it is not the only. You are also free---in fact, *encouraged*---to make use of Blackboard’s discussion forums for asynchronous participation.
- *Final Take-Home Exam* [40%]  
There will be a final exam, which will be administered (you guessed it!) at the end of the semester. The exam will cover *all* of the material covered in the class, but it will focus somewhat more heavily on the material from the second-half. The test will be administered over Blackboard.

### Grading Breakdown

Homework & Quizzes	...	25%
Midterm Assignment	...	25%
Final Exam	...	40%
Participation	...	10%

**Honor Code:** All students are expected to follow the guidelines set out in USD's [Honor Code](#). In particular, please refrain from cheating and plagiarism. It's fine to do outside research, just be sure to cite it. Furthermore, admitting that you don't know something is one of the primary philosophical virtues (e.g., Socrates: "All I know is that I know nothing), so---even setting ethics and integrity aside---it's always better to shrug than to cheat.

**Availability and Communication:** I encourage you to meet with me (over Zoom) during office hours to talk about *anything* related to the course. Don't hesitate to meet even if you don't have a specific question. If you can't meet during my office hours, we can make an appointment for a time that works better for you.

### Exciting Extra Credit Opportunities!

Throughout the semester there will be an exciting assortment of ethics-related events that nicely complement the course. You are hereby strongly encouraged to attend these events. Because my encouragement might not be enough, I will offer the following incentive: for each event you attend this semester, if you post a short (200-300 word) reflection about it, I will raise your final grade. For the first event, I will raise your grade one percentage point; for every event after that, you will earn half the number of points as you did on the previous occasion. (See [Zeno's Paradox](#).)

**Modifications to Syllabus:** I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus---including due dates and test dates---when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible. These are difficult times, so I ask for your patience and flexibility.

**Schedule for PHIL 334: Pandemic Ethics**  
**Spring 2021**  
**Professor Ryan Doody**

**Week 1: Lockdown ! - Risks, Rights, and Freedom**

**January 25** - Introductions

No readings

**January 27** - Risk Impositions & Complicity

Gerald Lang, "[Costs and Risk Imposition](#)", *Public Ethics*

**Week 2: Lockdown !! - Ethical Theories & Imposing Risks**

**February 1\*** - Two Frameworks: Consequentialism & Deontology

"Consequentialism" excerpt from *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

"Duty Theories" excerpt from *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

**February 3** - Ethics and Imposing Risks

J.J. Thomson, "Imposing Risks", in *Rights, Restitution, and Risk*

**Week 3: Risks, Rights, and Freedom, revisited**

**February 8\*** - Mandatory Vaccines?

Daniel Halliday, "[Should a Covid-19 Vaccine Be Mandatory?](#)", *Public Ethics*

Douglas MacLean, "Ethics and Risk"

**February 10** - Freedom & Mandatory Mask-Wearing

Annalisa Costella, "[Does Mandatory Mask-Wearing Restrict Individual Freedom?](#)", *Public Ethics*

Feb 11, 2pm: [Labor, Exploitation, and the Pandemic](#)

Joshua Cohen, Matt Zwolinski

**Week 4: Back to Work, Like It or Not?**

**February 15\*** - Mobilizing the Workforce

Danielle Allen et al, excerpt from "[When Can We Go Out? Evaluating Policy Paradigms for Responding to the COVID-19 Threat](#)", *Harvard Safra Center for Ethics White Paper*

Lucas Stanczyk, "Productive Justice", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*

**February 17** - Professional Obligations of Healthcare Workers

Udo Schuklenk, "[Health Care Professionals Are under No Ethical](#)

[Obligation to Treat COVID-19 Patients](#)” Reprinted in *The Ethics of Pandemic*

### **Week 5: Work After the Pandemic**

**February 22\*** - Good Jobs

Joshua Cohen, “[Good Jobs](#)”, MIT *Work of the Future Research Brief*

Watch *Labor, Exploitation, and Work in the Aftermath of the Pandemic* (Joshua Cohen, Matt Zwolinski)

**February 24\*** - The Future of Work

Fudge and Mundlak, “[The Future of Work and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)”

Feb 25, 2pm: [Gender, Labor, and the Pandemic](#)

Gina Schouten, Judy Fudge

### **Week 6: Gender, Labor, and Economic Justice**

**March 1\*** - The Pandemic and Gender Equality

Gina Schouten, “[The Pandemic May Set Gender Equality Back by Decades. Should Liberal Feminism Declare Bankruptcy?](#)”, *Public Ethics*

Nancy Fraser, “[A Feminism Where ‘Lean In’ Means Leaning on Others](#)”, *New York Times - the Stone*

Nancy Fraser, “[A Feminism Where ‘Lean In’ Means Leaning on Others](#)”, *New York Times - the Stone*

**March 3** - The Pandemic and Gender Equality II

Watch *Gender, Labor, and the Pandemic* (Gina Schouten & Judy Fudge)

Mar 4, 2pm: [Vaccine Distribution and Justice](#)

Lisa Herzog, Brian Berkey

### **Week 7: Rationing Scarce Resources I - Health and Disability**

**March 8\*** - The Value of Health: QALYs

Bognar and Hirose, “Chapter 2: The Value of Health”, *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing*

**March 10** - Health, Disability, and Discrimination

Bognar and Hirose, “Chapter 4: Problems of discrimination”, *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing*

Watch: *Health, Disability, and Triage* (Elizabeth Barns, August Gorman, Christopher Lunsford)

*Midterm Assignment Due (March 12th)*

## **Week 8: Rationing Scarce Resources II - Ageism**

**March 15\*** - Age-Related Rationing

Franklin G. Miller, "Why I Support Age-Related Rationing of Ventilators for COVID-19 Patients"

Diana Popescu and Alexandru Marcoci, "[Coronavirus: allocating ICU beds and ventilators based on age is discriminatory](#)", *The Conversation*

**March 17** - Fair Innings

John Harris, "Chapter 5: The Value of Life", *The Value of Life*

Greg Bogner, "Fair Innings", *Bioethics*

Mar 18, 10am: *Conspiracy Theories, Truth, and the Pandemic*

Rachel Fraser, C. Thi Nguyen

## **Week 9: Rationing Scarce Resources II - Aggregation**

**March 22\*** - Bogner and Hirose, "Chapter 5: The aggregation of health benefits", *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing*

**March 24** - Rationing Scarce Resources during the Pandemic

Ezekiel Emanuel et al., "[Fair Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources in the Time of COVID-19](#)"

OPTIONAL: Ben Bramble, "Chapter 7: Triage", *Pandemic Ethics*

## **SPRING BREAK (March 29 - April 5) - NO CLASS**

## **Week 10: Conspiracy Theories**

**April 7** - Conspiracy and COVID-19

Jane Coaston, "[Why coronavirus conspiracy theories have spread so quickly](#)"

Rachel Fraser, "[Epistemic FOMO](#)"

Apr 8, 2pm: [Collective Action, Public Choice, and the Pandemic](#)

Stephanie Collins

## **Week 11: Human Challenge Trials**

**April 12\*** - Risk & Research

Nir Eyal, "Why Challenge Trials of SARS-CoV-2 Vaccines Could Be Ethical

Despite Risk of Severe Adverse Events", *Ethics & Human Research*

OPTIONAL: Ben Bramble, "Chapter 6: Vaccine Trials", *Pandemic Ethics*

**April 14 - Informed Consent**

Gopal Sreenivasan, "Does informed consent to research require comprehension?"  
Arnon Keren, Ori Lev, "Uncertainty, error and informed consent to challenge trials of COVID-19 vaccines: response to Steel et al", *J Med Ethics*

**Week 12: Vaccine Distribution & Justice**

**April 19\*** - Vaccine Distribution I

NY Times, [People Are Dying Whom Do We Save First With the Vaccine](#)  
Lisa Herzog et al. "[Covax must go beyond proportional allocation of covid vaccines to ensure fair and equitable access](#)"

**April 21** - Vaccine Distribution II

Ezekiel Emmanuel et al. "[An ethical framework for global vaccine allocation](#)",  
*Science*

Tyler Cowen, "Vaccine Distribution Shouldn't Be Fair: Priority should be given to methods that will save more lives and bring back the economy more rapidly."  
*Bloomberg Opinion*

**Week 13: Collective Responsibility & Collective Action**

**April 26\*** - Responsibility and Complicity

Stephanie Collins, "[Are you complicit in deaths if you don't stay home? How to do good during the virus lockdown](#)", *The Conversation*  
Watch *Collective Action, Public Choice, and the Pandemic* (Stephanie Collins)

**April 28** - Do I make a difference?

Shelly Kagan, "Do I Make a Difference?"

**Week 14: How Should We Feel?**

**May 3\*** - Emotions and the Pandemic

Ben Bramble, "Chapter 8: Onlookers", *Pandemic Ethics*

**May 5** - Survivors' Guilt

Michael Zhao, "Guilt without Perceived Wrongdoing", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*