

Contemporary Moral Problems (PHIL 1318)—J-Term 2013

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Course Description

We will begin with a general introduction to ethics by examining several different ethical theories. We will then discuss a number of important issues facing contemporary society. These issues include capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion, the treatment of animals, and obligations to the poor.

Required Text

- *Morality and Moral Controversies: Readings in Moral, Social and Political Philosophy*. Arthur, J. & Scalet, S. 8th edition, Prentice Hall, 2009
- All other readings will be available on blackboard (courses.smu.edu)

Requirements

- *Two Exams* (30% of final grade [or, 15% each])
- *Final Exam* (20% of final grade)
- *Critical Paper* (20% of final grade): You must write one 3-5 page (or, 1000-1500 word) critical paper (to be submitted on blackboard) in which you examine at least one of the positions regarding one of the issues we will cover. You will also be required to state and support your own position.
- *Précis* (20% of final grade): By the end of the session, you will have written *five* 1-page (or, 300 word) papers, each of which exhibits that you have read the material and have made a sincere effort to understand both the position and argument(s) of the philosopher in question. Which readings you will write précis for is your choice (except that you may write no more than two précis over the introductory material). Each of these papers must be submitted on blackboard no later than the day the reading is to be covered.
- *Participation/Attendance* (10% of final grade): Students must exhibit a willingness to think, and be open to revising their current opinions. Frequent absences, sleeping during lecture, text messaging, and being disruptive will negatively affect your participation grade. Engaging with the material, whether that involves asking questions, contributing to discussion, or simply being attentive, will positively affect your participation grade.

Philosophy Department Goals

- Students will be able to describe and explain some of the general features and principal theoretical methods of ethics, social and political philosophy, and logic.
- Students will develop techniques of formal reasoning.
- Students will develop the ability to apply techniques of formal reasoning to current ethical issues.
- Students will develop writing and analytic skills.

Tentative Schedule

Introductory Issues & General Theories

Jan 7: Arguments/Logic; Cultural Relativism (blackboard); Divine Command Theory (16-21)
Ethical Egoism (blackboard)

Jan 8: Mill & Utilitarianism (65-72); Kantian Ethics (56-65); *First Exam

Contemporary Moral Issues

Jan 9: *Capital Punishment*: Van den Haag (146-151); Reiman (151-156)

Euthanasia: Dyck (252-255); Rachels (256-259)

Jan 10: *Abortion*: Thomson (211-218); Warren (218-225)

Marquis (231-239); *Second Exam

Jan 11: *Capitalism, Property, and Poverty*: Singer (blackboard); Arthur (blackboard); Nozick (452-460)
Nielsen (blackboard)

Jan 14: *War*: Wasserstrom (115-123)

Jan 15: *Animals and the Environment*: Singer (158-166); Steinbock (167-173)

Baxter (173-177)

Jan 16: *Final Exam

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Violation of SMU's honor code will not be tolerated. Every piece of work you turn in must be entirely your own. Writing a paper means *both* expressing your own thoughts *and* expressing them in your own words. You may not copy unquoted passages from our texts, from any other texts (including others students' papers), or from the internet, even if the passages are brief. No one else may write a paper for you, whether in whole or in part. In a typical case (for example, a student turns in a paper mostly cut-and-pasted from web sites), the **penalty** for violating the honor code will be an **F** in the course. On top of this grade penalty, the case may be presented to the honor council, in which case the student may be subject to **further disciplinary action**, such as suspension or dismissal from the university.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Ms. Rebecca Marin, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities (214-768-4557) to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence.