PHIL 1318: Contemporary Moral Problems

SECTION: MayTerm 2018
COURSE DAYS: May 17 – June 1
CLASS LOCATION: TBD
CLASS HOURS: 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.

PROFESSOR: Dr. Kirsten Egerstrom
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OFFICE: Hyer Hall 210E

Course Overview:
The primary goal of this course is to encourage students to think critically about ethical issues that are of social, political, and personal importance. Students will learn both moral theory and how to apply moral theories to important topics in applied ethics. Theory will be taught throughout the course as needed when relevant to the weeks’ topics. Some topics include: euthanasia, capital punishment, animal ethics, and abortion.

Course Goals:
• Contemporary Moral Problems satisfies the Philosophical and Religious Inquiry and Ethics Pillar (Level I). As a result of taking this course, students should be able to describe, explain and/or employ some of the principles and theoretical methods of philosophy, religious studies, or ethics.
• Students will be taught important philosophical concepts, such as validity and soundness. A mastery of these concepts will enable students to explain and evaluate arguments in support of, or against, various positions in applied ethics.
• Students will be taught the skills necessary to reflect on their own belief systems. Philosophical reflection can lead students to either rebuild their belief systems on stronger foundations or to construct new belief systems that are the products of conscious reflection, evaluation, and dialogue with others.

Professor Bio:
Dr. Kirsten Egerstrom is a Lecturer in the Philosophy Department at Southern Methodist University. She completed her PhD in Philosophy from Syracuse University in August 2015. She wrote her dissertation on the topic of meaningfulness in life – i.e., what makes some lives meaningful and other lives meaningless.

Course Textbook:
The following required textbook is available in the university bookstore. Note: students must complete a reading assignment in advance of the first day of class. Please see the schedule (below) for the assignment.

Disputed Moral Issues (3rd Edition)
Author: Mark Timmons
Publication Year: 2013
Publication: Oxford University Press
ISBN: 9780199946792
Important: there is a 4th edition of this textbook. You should purchase the 3rd edition.
Grading Policy:

- **PARTICIPATION:** 20 Points Possible
- **COURSEWORK:** 50 Points Possible
- **MIDTERM EXAM:** 50 Points Possible
- **FINAL EXAM:** 80 Points Possible

**TOTAL POINTS:** 200 Points Possible

Course Requirements:

**PARTICIPATION:**
Worth a possible 20 points (10% of grade). Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. *Students are strongly encouraged to attend every class session in order to qualify for full participation points.* If you are dealing with a medical crisis that will result in your missing class, you must provide documentation from a doctor/hospital. Students are also expected to participate in class. Students who are uncomfortable participating in class may obtain their participation points through attendance at my weekly office hours. Students who engage in disruptive behavior in class (e.g., involving cell phones or laptops, or inappropriate comments) will lose participation points.

**COURSEWORK:**

Worth a possible 50 points. Coursework includes quizzes, writing assignments, and participation in the debate on capital punishment. The quizzes, debate, and writing assignments are all worth a possible 10 points. See the schedule (below) for estimated dates for coursework.

**Note:** the debate is scheduled for the first two hours of Thursday, May 31. You will meet with your group members to plan your defense during the last two hours of class on Wednesday, May 30. You do not want to miss these class periods.

**MIDTERM EXAM:**

Worth a possible 50 points. The exam will take place in class. The exam is scheduled for the first two hours of Friday, May 25. The exam will cover everything through the euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide unit. The format will include multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and possibly one or two essay questions. Exam accommodations will only be provided for students with disabilities and students experiencing a family or medical emergency. You will have to provide documentation of your family/medical emergency in order for me to change the time/date of your exam.

**FINAL EXAM:**

Worth a possible 80 points. The final exam is scheduled for Friday, June 1. The exam is technically cumulative. However, it will focus heavily on material covered after the euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide unit. Exam accommodations will only be provided for students with disabilities and students experiencing a family or medical
emergency. You will have to provide documentation of your family/medical emergency in order for me to change the time/date of your exam.

Classroom Policies:

LATE WORK:

Quizzes: if you are not in class to take a quiz, you will not be able to make it up. The only exceptions are emergency situations with documentation and absences approved in advance.

Debate: do not miss class on the day of preparation for the debate or the day of the actual debate. If you are not in class to participate, you will not be able to make up the points lost.

Writing Assignments: students will lose one-third of a letter grade for each day that the assignment is late, except when an extension has already been granted (e.g., A to an A-; B+ to a B). This policy is non-negotiable. If you do not think you will be able to turn your assignment in on time for whatever reason, you need to contact me right away. I must be contacted at least 24 hours in advance of the due date in order to receive an extension. Extensions will not be granted in most cases, so do not rely on an extension unless you have an emergency. In some emergency situations, I may grant an extension even if I have not been contacted in advance of the due date.

Note: I ask that you print out your writing assignments and bring them to class. However, if you are unable to print your writing assignment, you are allowed to email me the document before the start of class. If you do not email me your writing assignment before class and do not have a hard copy in class, you will automatically lose one-third of a letter grade. I only accept documents in Word document format or PDF. If you submit a document in a different format, I will assume you didn’t actually write your paper.

LAPTOPS
Students are not allowed to use laptops during class.

CELL PHONES

Cell phone use is prohibited in the classroom. You will lose participation points if you use your cell phone in class. If you use your cell phone during an exam, I will assume that you are cheating.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS: (from the university)

“Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make
appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.”

**Religious Observance:** (from the university)
“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. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)”

**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** (from the university)
“Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)”

**Academic Integrity**
Students who are caught cheating on either the midterm or final exam will, at a minimum, fail the exam. Plagiarism is also prohibited on all writing assignments. Students who plagiarize will, at a minimum, fail their writing assignment. The Honor Code can be found at [www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/StudentLife/StudentHandbook/HonorCode](http://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/StudentLife/StudentHandbook/HonorCode).

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**Schedule:**

*Note:* if a reading is due on a particular day, you should show up on that day having done that reading assignment.

**Day 1: Thursday, May 17**
*Topic(s):* Introduction; Arguments, validity, and soundness; Intro to moral theory; Consequentialism

**Readings** *(these readings should be completed before the start of MayTerm. You should show up on May 17 having completed these readings):*
- “A Moral Theory Primer” (TB): 1-11

**Schedule:**
- *First two hours:* arguments, validity, soundness, and basic ethical theory concepts
- *Last two hours:* consequentialism and utilitarianism
Day 2: Friday, May 18
**Topic(s):** Kantian moral theory; Interrogational torture

**Readings:**
- “A Moral Theory Primer” (TB): 15--20 (Kantian Moral Theory)
- Alan M. Dershowitz in “Should the Ticking Bomb Terrorist Be Tortured?” (TB): 617-628
- Marcia Baron in “The Ticking Bomb Hypothetical” (TB): 628-639

**Schedule:**
- First two hours: Kantian ethics
- Last two hours: the ethics of interrogational torture
  - Quiz on arguments, validity, soundness and basic ethical theory concepts
  - Short writing assignment assigned on the ethics of interrogational torture. Due Monday, May 21 in class.

Day 3: Monday, May 21
**Topic(s):** Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide

**Readings:**
- “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide” (TB): 340-345
- James Rachels in “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (TB): 346-350
- Philippa Foot in “Killing and Letting Die” (TB): 350-355

**Schedule:**
- First two hours: introduction to euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide
  - Short writing assignment due on the ethics of interrogational torture
- Last two hours: Rachels and Foot on the distinction between killing and letting someone die.

Day 4: Tuesday, May 22
**Topic(s):** Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide

**Readings:**
- Daniel Callahan in “A Case Against Euthanasia” (TB): 356-365

**Schedule:**
- First two hours: Short documentary on Jack Kervorkian
- Last two hours: Callahan against euthanasia and Gill in support of physician-assisted suicide

Day 5: Wednesday, May 23
**Topic(s):** Animal ethics
Readings:
- “The Ethical Treatment of Animals” (TB): 380-383
- Gaverick Matheny in “Utilitarianism and Animals” (TB): 383-391

Schedule:
- First two hours: introduction to the ethical treatment of animals; rights-based moral theory
  - Quiz on euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide
- Last two hours: Matheny on utilitarianism and animals and first half of documentary on animal ethics

Day 6: Thursday, May 24
Topic(s): Animal ethics

Readings:
- Tom Regan in “Are Zoos Morally Defensible?” (TB): 392-397
- Monday: Alastair Norcross in “Puppies, Pigs and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases” (CR)

Schedule:
- First two hours: Regan on animal rights and zoos; Norcross on ethics of eating meat
- Last two hours: Second-half of documentary on animal ethics; review for midterm exam

Day 7: Friday, May 25
Topic(s): Midterm exam; ethics of abortion

Readings:
- Monday: “Abortion” (TB): 423-431
- Mary Anne Warren in “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion” (TB): 431-437

Schedule:
- First two hours: midterm exam (exam will cover everything through the euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide unit; exam will not cover animal ethics)
- Last two hours: introduction to the ethics of abortion

Day 8: Tuesday, May 29
Topic(s): Abortion

Readings:
- Judith Jarvis Thomson in “A Defense of Abortion” (TB): 438-446
- Patrick Lee and Robert P. George in “The Wrong of Abortion” (TB): 447-457
- Don Marquis in “Why Abortion is Immoral” (CR)
Schedule:

• First two hours: Thomson in defense of abortion
  o Short Writing Assignment assigned on the ethics of abortion. Due Thursday, May 26
• Last two hours: Lee and George; Marquis

Day 9: Wednesday, May 30
Topic(s): Capital punishment

Readings:

• “The Death Penalty” (TB): 535-540
• Your debate group will be assigned one or more of the following:
  o Stephen Nathanson in “An Eye for an Eye?” (TB): 541-547
  o Ernest van den Haag in “A Defense of the Death Penalty” (TB): 547-551
  o Jeffrey H. Reiman in “Civilization, Safety, and Deterrence” (TB): 552-555
  o Louis Pojman in “A Defense of the Death Penalty” (CR)

Schedule:

• First two hours: introduction to capital punishment
• Last two hours: you will meet with your group members to plan your debate defense

Day 10: Thursday, May 31
Topic(s): Capital punishment

Readings:

• No reading

Schedule:

• First two hours: debate
• Last two hours: review for final exam

Day 11: Friday, June 1
Topic(s): Final Exam

Readings:

• No reading

Schedule:

• Final exam (exam is technically cumulative, but will focus heavily on the animal ethics, abortion and capital punishment units)
• Short writing assignment due on the ethics of abortion in class