

PHILOSOPHY 105 – CURRENT MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

DAYS & TIMES: Mon/Wed 2:50 – 4:10

ROOM: Scott Hall 220

INSTRUCTOR: Jennifer Burgis

EMAIL: jennburgis@gmail.com

OFFICE HOURS: Thursday 3:00 – 5:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We will begin this course by demonstrating that there is such a thing as objective morality and taking a look at the most prominent ethical theories. Then we will critically examine various contemporary issues as well as cases from recent Ethics Bowls. That is, we will look at these issues in terms of what we have learned about ethical theories. While we may not determine what the right answer is, we will evaluate the arguments presented on both sides – are they *good* arguments, and do they prove what their authors say they do?

The readings must be done before coming to class and you need to ensure that you have adequate time to do your reading. Philosophy is not easy. Contrary to what you may have heard, it is not simply a forum for airing opinions. It is *not* the case that “there are no right or wrong answers.” We are going to critically analyze what we are reading. You will not be expected to agree with any particular author’s viewpoint (or mine), but you will be expected to give thoughtful and reasoned responses to those viewpoints. Make sure that you are prepared to do this when you come to class.

REQUIRED TEXT

The Right Thing To Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy, 7th edition by James Rachels.

Two of the early readings will be found on Sakai.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

IN-CLASS RESPONSE PAPERS 25%

You will be expected to write 10 random in-class response papers on the reading for that day. Many of the authors you will read will present more than one argument for their point of view. You will be asked to pick out one of their arguments, explain it, and evaluate it. These should be short and grading will not be strict, but you must demonstrate that you have done the reading before coming to class. There will be no makeups without a documented reason for missing class (doctor’s note, religious holiday, school event, etc.), but your lowest grade will be dropped.

FIRST EXAM 25%

This exam will cover everything up to and including the class meeting of February 15th. It will contain a combination of multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, and long-answer questions.

SECOND EXAM 25%

This exam will cover all class material following the first exam, up to and including the class meeting of April 3rd. The format will be the same as the first exam.

STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION 25%

For the last five class days, you will be leading the class discussion on topics of your choice. There is more information on how this works on Sakai. There is also the option of writing a paper, but in my experience, students find that doing this is overwhelmingly preferable to a paper or final exam.

OTHER POINTS

ATTENDANCE/TARDINESS

Considering that there will be in-class response papers, it is in your best interest to attend class. I will not monitor your attendance, but it will affect your grade. Please do not come to class late. I understand that there are sometimes circumstances outside of our control, but consistently coming to class late is an indication that you do not respect this class, your classmates, or me. You can decide whether it is wise to give me that impression.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Participating in class discussion is not required; however, it is *highly* encouraged. You will gain more from the class and it will be more enjoyable for you to engage with each other than to listen to me lecture for an hour and twenty minutes. If you do not want me to call on you, please tell me. I know that talking in class makes some people uncomfortable and that is not the experience I want anyone to have.

CELL PHONES/LAPTOPS

I am not going to make the futile attempt to institute a device-free classroom policy. Please ensure that all sounds are off on phones and laptops. It is inevitable that students will check their phones once or twice during class. If you do, attempts to be surreptitious about it are actually more time-consuming and distracting than just picking up your phone, looking at it, and putting it back down. You are not a phone ninja – I will see you regardless. However, if you are spending an extended amount of time on your phone, I will ask you to put it away.

If you are taking notes on your laptop, I obviously cannot see what else you are doing. However, keep two things in mind. First, watching videos, basketball games, etc. is distracting to people around you – even those who are attempting to focus on the class. Please be respectful of others. Second, you may not be as capable of multitasking as you think you are, but this is up to you to decide.

IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE:

You are encouraged to email me or come to office hours with any questions you may have about the material. The best time to do so is as close to the class discussion as possible while the material/lecture is still fresh in your mind. The longer you wait to ask the questions, the more difficult it will be to fully understand the answers. Waiting to ask until you are studying for the exams means you have waited too long. I will be happy to set up a meeting time with you if you prefer that to email and cannot come to office hours. Please do not wait until the night before the exam to attempt to learn all of the material. You will not succeed.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class Introduction/What Is Philosophy?

Wed 1-18 Class discussion

Religion, Arguments & Relativism

Mon 1-23 Morality & Religion (no reading)

Arguments & Fallacies (no reading)

Wed 1-25 The Challenge of Cultural Relativism – James Rachels (Sakai)

Moral Theories

Mon 1-30 Utilitarianism – John Stuart Mill

The Categorical Imperative – Immanuel Kant

Wed 2-1 Why Doesn't Batman Kill the Joker? – Mark D. White (Sakai)

The Virtues – Aristotle

Abortion

Mon 2-6 Why Abortion Is Immoral – Don Marquis

Wed 2-8 A Defense of Abortion – Judith Jarvis Thomson

Animals

Mon 2-13 All Animals Are Equal – Peter Singer

Wed 2-15 Torturing Puppies and Eating Meat – Alastair Norcross

Do Animals Have Rights? – Tibor R. Machan

EXAM ONE

Mon 2-20

Bioethics

Wed 2-22 The Morality of Euthanasia – James Rachels

The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia – J. Gay-Williams

Mon 2-27 The New Eugenics – Matt Ridley

Human Cloning and the Challenge of Regulation – John A. Robertson

Wed 3-1 Selling Organs for Transplantation – Lewis Burrows

A Free Market Would Reduce Donations.... – James F. Childress

Poverty

- Mon 3-6 Famine, Affluence, and Morality – Peter Singer
Wed 3-8 Poverty and Parenthood – Stuart Rachels

SPRING BREAK

Capital Punishment

- Mon 3-20 A Defense of the Death Penalty – Louis P. Pojman
Wed 3-22 Why the United States Will Join.... – Stephen B. Bright

War, Terrorism & Torture

- Mon 3-27 Fifty Years After Hiroshima – John Rawls
 What Is Wrong With Terrorism? – Thomas Nagel
Wed 3-29 Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb

Drugs

- Mon 4-3 America’s Unjust Drug War – Michael Huemer

EXAM TWO

Wed 4-5

Class-Led Discussions

- Mon 4-10 To be scheduled
Wed 4-12 To be scheduled
Mon 4-17 To be scheduled
Wed 4-19 To be scheduled
Mon 4-24 To be scheduled
Wed 4-26 To be scheduled
Mon 5-1 To be scheduled

Final Exam – Wednesday, May 10th, 12:00 – 3:00