

## Current Moral and Social Issues

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**Required Texts:**

Singer: *Ethics in the Real World*  
Kaplan: *Does Santa Exist?*  
Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*  
Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*

- Articles will also be provided to the class or placed on reserve

**Supplementary Texts (optional):**

*Anime and Philosophy*  
*Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*  
*Futurama and Philosophy*  
*The Princess Bride and Philosophy*  
*Blade Runner 2049 and Philosophy*

**Assignments and Grading:**

In addition to the required reading, the students will be assigned:

- **1) Weekly Reflections**

1-2 page outlines of major concepts + your own philosophical analysis  
(40 % of total grade)

- **2) Final Philosophical Project**

(35% of total grade)

- **3) Participation**

You are expected to participate regularly and assiduously in online forum discussions  
(25% of total grade)

••• There will also be surprise quizzes. So be prepared! •••

## **IMPORTANT:**

### **Class Credo and Ethic:**

Like all classes, philosophy is about the free exchange of ideas as well as relentless questioning of beliefs and concepts. You are entitled to your beliefs but in a philosophy class *no idea is spared* from questioning or examination. If you do not want your beliefs or faith questioned, you are *strongly* advised to enroll in other classes more suitable to your beliefs and temperament.

### **Participation and Conduct:**

Students are expected to engage in lively discussion and spirited exchange during office hours and forum debates. They need not agree with one another and they are encouraged to question ideas, but they must also be respectful towards other students and the instructor. You can argue forcefully for or against an idea, but are required to comport yourselves with civility.

### **Communications:**

You may email me with concerns and questions, but do not expect me to recapitulate class lectures or discussions. Feel free to attend online office hours (or make an appointment) if you wish to discuss the ideas or other issues.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Violations of Rutgers policies on academic honesty will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism and cheating will be grounds for failure, if not expulsion from the university.

**Course Outline:****I. Introduction to Current Moral and Social Issues**

Overview and Course Goals

What is it Mean to be Philosophical?

Approaches to Morality and Ethics

The free exchange of ideas

Readings:

- Singer, *Ethics*: The Value of a Pale Blue Dot
- Singer, *Ethics*: Does Anything Matter?
- Haraway: *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (handout)

**II. Morality & Ethics in an Insane World**

Speech, Correctness, and Censorship

What is Free Speech?

How Do We Decide What Can Be Said, and What Cannot? (And Who Decides?)

The Precariousness of Righteousness

Moral and Legal Consistency

Readings:

- Singer: *Ethics*, Free Speech, Muhammad, and the Holocaust
- Coyne: Select blogs from *Why Evolution is True* website  
(<https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/>  
<https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/archives/>)

Suggested Readings – Optional! For your interest and edification only:

J.S. Mill: *Utilitarianism*

Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good & Evil*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Ethics*

Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue*

Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*

Richard Bernstein: *The Abuse of Evil*

Carol Gilligan: *In a Different Voice*

John Caputo: *Against Ethics*

Derek Parfit: *On What Matters*

**III. Current Moral Debates**

Climate Change, Alt Facts, & Hoaxes

Animal & Inhuman Rights

Abortion, Execution, & the Sanctity of Life

Immigration & Malhombresation

Readings:

- Singer: *Ethics*, Animals / Beyond the Ethic of the Sanctity of Life / Global Governance

- Singer: All Animals Are Equal (handout)
- Norcross: Puppies, Pigs, and People (handout)
- Cohen: Do Animals Have Rights? (handout)
- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations
- Chandran Kukathas: Why Open Borders? (handout)
- Other readings on immigration (tbd!!!)

Suggested Readings:

Peter Carruthers: Against the Moral Standing of Animals  
 Stephen Macedo: Should Liberal Democracies Restrict Immigration?  
 Arash Abizadeh: Legal Egalitarian Arguments for Closed Borders  
 Alex Sager: Immigration, Ethics, and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion  
 C.B. Sanchez Marban: Liberalism and Migration  
 Patrick Lee and Robert P. George: The Wrong of Abortion  
 Don Marquis, Why Abortion Is Immoral  
 Bjørn Lomborg, Let's Keep Our Cool about Global Warming  
 Peter Singer: *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty*  
 Frances Fox Piven & Richard Cloward: *Regulating the Poor*

**IV. Politics**

Societies: Democratic and Despotic  
 Rights: Human, Inalienable, and Alienable  
 Capitalism, Imperialism, Colonialization  
 When Are Intervention and War Justifiable?

Readings:

- Singer: *Ethics*, Why Vote?
- Singer: *Ethics*, Is Citizenship a Right?
- Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*, Chapter 2: The Psychotic Core of Capitalist Ideology
- Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*, Chapter 3: Passion of the Christ in Abu Ghraib
- Solomon, et al., "The Trump Card" (handout)
- Piven: Terror, Sexual Arousal, and Torture (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Locke: *Two Treatises of Government*  
 Thomas Hobbes: *Behemoth*  
 Karl Marx: *The Communist Manifesto*  
 C.-L. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*  
 Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*  
 John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*

## **V. Politics, Race, and Sexuality**

Race and Ethnicity

Bigotry, Racism, Supremacy: Personal, Social, and Institutional

Sexism, Sexuality, and Exploitation: Personal, Cultural, and Systemic

Racism and Sexism Today: Overt and Covert

Homosexuality, Transsexuality, and LGBTQ Rights

What Motivates Fear and Hatred?

Readings:

- Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*
- Paglia: *Sexual Personae* (handout)
- Singer: *Ethics*, Sex and Gender (entire section)
- Singer: *Ethics*, Should We Honor Racists?
- West: *Race Matters* (handout)
- Patterson: *Rituals of Blood* (handout)
- Mbembe: *Necropolitics* (handout)
- Thomas: *The Use of Bad Arguments in the Defense of Homosexuality*
- Corvino: *Why Shouldn't Tommy and Jim Have Sex?* (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Frederick Douglass: *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*

James Baldwin: *The Fire Next Time*

W.E.B. Du Bois: *The Souls of Black Folk / Darkwater*

Malcolm X: *Malcolm X Speaks*

Eldridge Cleaver: *Soul on Ice*

J.S. Mill: *The Subjection of Women*

Wolfgang Lederer: *The Fear of Women*

Karen Horney: *Feminine Psychology*

Evelyn Accad: *The Excised*

Nel Noddings: *Women and Evil*

Nancy Burke: *Gender and Envy*

Nawal El Saadawi: *The Hidden Face of Eve*

Gerda Lerner: *The Creation of Patriarchy*

Walter Davis: *Deracination*

Linda Alcoff: *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*

John Corvino: *What's Wrong with Homosexuality?*

## **VI. Politics and Religion**

What is Religion?

Freedom of Religion

Freedom to Believe, Freedom from Belief

Religion and Violence

Readings:

- Singer: *Ethics*, The Use and Abuse of Religious Freedom
- Gray: The Americanization of the Apocalypse (handout)
- Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*, Chapter 7: Bible Says: The Psychology of Christian Fundamentalism
- Davis: *Death's Dream Kingdom*, Chapter 8: The Psychodynamics of Terror
- Zizek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (handout)

Suggested Readings:

David Hume: *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (esp. III & IV)

Immanuel Kant: *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*

Thomas Paine: *The Age of Reason*

Ludwig Feuerbach: *The Essence of Religion*

Arthur Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Idea*

Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Gay Science* (sec. 108-125) & *The Antichrist*

Karl Marx: "Critique of the Hegelian Concept of Right"

William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Sigmund Freud: *The Future of an Illusion & Civilization and Its Discontents*

J.L. Mackie: *Evil and Omnipotence*

Masao Abe: *Zen and Comparative Studies*

Weston La Barre: *The Ghost Dance*

Paul Kurtz: *The Transcendental Temptation*

William Alston: *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*

Lawrence Hatab: *Myth and Philosophy*

Ruth Stein: *For Love of the Father: A Psychoanalytic Study of Religious*

*Terrorism*

## **VII. Truth, Untruth, Lies, and Myths**

Epistemology and the Epistemic Imperative

What Qualifies as Truth?

Facts, Alt-Facts, Alt-Reality

How Does One Determine the Facts in a World of Chaos and Lies?

The Necessity of Myth (Multiple Entendres)

Readings:

- Kaplan: *Does Santa Exist?*

Suggested Readings:

Ernest Becker: *The Birth and Death of Meaning*

Rollo May: *The Cry for Myth*

Wendy Doniger: *The Implied Spider*

John Schumaker: *The Corruption of Reality*  
 Paul Boghossian: *The Fear of Knowledge*  
 Linda Alcoff: *Real Knowing*  
 Roland Barthes: *Mythologies*  
 Jean Baudrillard: *Seduction*  
 Elemer Hankiss: *Fear and Symbols*  
 Slavoj Zizek: *The Plague of Fantasies*  
 Julia Segal: *Phantasy in Everyday Life*  
 Leonard Shengold: *Delusions of Everyday Life*  
 Thomas Gilovich: *How We Know What Isn't So*

### **VIII. Conclusions**

The Wisdom Gleaned

Further Explorations

Philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Readings:

- Haraway: *Cthulucene*, chapters 3 & 4 (handout)
- Scranton: *How to Die in the Anthropocene*, chapter 1 (handout)