

PHILOSOPHY 105 H1 05402 – CURRENT MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

DATES: July 11 – August 17

INSTRUCTOR: Jennifer Burgis

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

We will begin this course by demonstrating that there is such a thing as objective morality and taking a look at the two most prominent ethical theories. Then we will critically examine six contemporary issues in terms of these 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?

Your success in this class will hinge upon doing the reading and understanding it. This means allowing yourself 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, but you will be expected to give thoughtful and reasoned responses to those viewpoints.

REQUIRED TEXT

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

Two of the first week’s readings will be found on Sakai.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

READINGS

Each week you will be asked to read four to six short chapters totaling roughly 50 pages. My advice is to not read them all at once, especially in the weeks when we are covering two topics. Try to break up the reading over several days.

INTERACTIVE ASSIGNMENTS

Each week I will give you two sets of questions. The first set will be factual questions, meaning that the answers will be found in the reading. The second set will give you an opportunity to analyze the authors’ arguments and tell me *why* you agree or disagree. Your answers will be due by the end of each Thursday. I will reply to the second set with possible objections to your position or other points you could consider. Your responses will be due by the end of Sunday.

PAPER

I will post a list of cases taken from Ethics Bowl debates on Sakai. Pick the case that is most interesting to you and take a position on the issue. You will write a 6-8 page paper that demonstrates the relevant points of the case, what your point of view is on the case, and what your reasons are for holding it. Make sure you address at least one possible objection to your view and reply to it. You are not expected to use any outside sources – it is your own original thoughts that I am interested in. *You must take a firm stand within your paper and defend it.* I will be happy to read a draft if you would like me to.

EXTRA CREDIT

There will be a discussion forum for this course. Participation is not mandatory, but it is the only way to get extra credit.

GRADING SCALE

A+	97-100	A	93-96	A-	90-92
B+	87-89	B	83-86	B-	80-82
C+	77-79	C	73-76	C-	70-72
D+	67-69	D	63-66	D-	60-62
F	0-59				

OTHER POINTS

PLAGIARISM

Students are expected to uphold the honor code of Rutgers University. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.* Plagiarism is presenting the unacknowledged work of others as your own, including that of fellow students, past students, and authors of books, websites, and other resources. If you are not certain whether something is plagiarism, ask me before turning it in. This is an ethics class. You are expected to behave in an ethical manner.

IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE

Please let me know if you are having difficulties with any aspect of the course. I will be happy to answer questions about the readings, clarify my comments on your interactive assignments, etc. You may either send me an email or post on the Questions Forum on Sakai. There is no such thing as a stupid question.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE (JULY 11 – JULY 17)

Arguments & Relativism

Some Basic Points About Arguments – James Rachels

The Challenge of Cultural Relativism – James Rachels

Ethical Theories

Utilitarianism – John Stuart Mill

The Categorical Imperative – Immanuel Kant
Why Doesn't Batman Kill the Joker? – Mark D. White

WEEK TWO (JULY 18 – JULY 24)

Abortion

Why Abortion Is Immoral – Don Marquis
A Defense of Abortion – Judith Jarvis Thomson

Animals

All Animals Are Equal – Peter Singer
Torturing Puppies and Eating Meat – Alastair Norcross
Do Animals Have Rights? – Tibor R. Machan

WEEK THREE (JULY 25-JULY 31)

Poverty

Famine, Affluence, and Morality – Peter Singer
Poverty and Parenthood – Stuart Rachels

The Death Penalty

A Defense of the Death Penalty – Louis P. Pojman
Why the United States Will Join the Rest of the World In Abandoning Capital
Punishment – Stephen B. Bright

WEEK FOUR (AUGUST 1 – AUGUST 7)

War, Terrorism, and Torture

Hellhole – Atul Gawande
The Ethics of War and Peace – Douglas P. Lackey
Fifty Years After Hiroshima – John Rawls
What Is Wrong With Terrorism? – Thomas Nagel
Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb – David Luban

WEEK FIVE (AUGUST 8 – AUGUST 14)

Bioethics

The Morality of Euthanasia – James Rachels
The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia – J. Gay-Williams
The New Eugenics – Matt Ridley
Human Cloning and the Challenge of Regulation – John A. Robertson
Selling Organs for Transplantation – Lewis Burrows
A Free Market Would Reduce Donations and Would Commodify the Human Body –
James F. Childress

WEEK SIX (AUGUST 15 – AUGUST 17)

Papers due August 17.