

**St. Francis Xavier University**  
**Department of Philosophy**  
**Course Outline**  
**PHIL 332 Contemporary Moral & Social Issues**

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**Course Description:**

This course is meant to serve as an introduction to the process of thinking philosophically about practical ethical problems that confront individuals and communities. We shall seek to apply the study of ethical theory to specific issues, and thereby help students generate their own substantial moral positions. Hopefully, students coming out of this class will be equipped with the skills necessary to participating in both current ethical discussions as well as future debates over moral issues as yet untreated. To aid us in this process, the course will provide an analysis of topics such as animal rights, environmental ethics, filial duties, assessing the happiness of others, euthenasia, and terrorism.

In the application of the skills covered in this class, we shall look over and evaluate various articles that present philosophical arguments advocating some position within the topic being covered. Careful analysis of the reasoning process being used in the readings will help us to become better able to engage in moral debates, and much class time will be spent discussing the issues that this sample material raises. Classes will be a mix of lecture and discussion. Lectures will be devoted to covering the material presented in the text, and discussions will be more open-ended in structure in order to facilitate student participation.

**Schedule:**

WEEK	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
1 Jan 7	Animal Rights	
2 Jan 14	Environmental Ethics	
3 Jan 21	Environmental Ethics	
4 Jan 28	Happiness	
5 Feb 4	Happiness	Midterm
6 Feb 11	Love & Friendship	
7 Feb 18	Responsibilities of Parents	1 <sup>st</sup> Outline due (Monday)
8 Mar 4	Responsibilities of Children	2 <sup>nd</sup> Outline due
9 Mar 11	Privacy Issues	3 <sup>rd</sup> Outline due
10 Mar 18	Cheating & Knowledge Issues	Term Paper due
11 Mar 25	Obligations to Future Generations	
12 Apr 1	Terrorism	

**Evaluation:**

Students are responsible for completing the following assignments:

- 1) 1 Term Paper (min. 3000 words, 40% of final grade each).
- 2) A midterm (25% of final grade).
- 3) Final Exam (35% of final grade)

## Readings:

All of the following readings can be found through the library access to scholarly journals.

### Week Readings

- 1 Peter Seeger, "All Animals Are Equal"  
<http://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil1200.Spr07/singer.pdf>
- 2 Jan Narveson, "Resources and Environmental Policy" (handout)
- 3 Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement. A Summary"  
[http://www.ecology.ethz.ch/education/Readings\\_stuff/Naess\\_1973.pdf](http://www.ecology.ethz.ch/education/Readings_stuff/Naess_1973.pdf)
- 4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk I, ch 5, 7; bk II, ch 1, 2, 4-8; bk VI, ch 1, 2, 5, 7
- 5 Aristotle, continued.
- 6 Paul Gregory, "Against Couples," "Against Couples," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1984. 263-268.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy.stfx.ca/store/10.1111/j.14685930.1984.tb00008.x/asset/j.14685930.1984.tb00008.x.pdf?v=1&t=hbm7qk67&s=ae6f5d95f6a0a685032fd690524791287d87c2c8>
- 7 Saul Smilansky, "Is There a Moral Obligation to Have Children?" *Journal Of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 12 No. 1, 1995. 41-53.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy.stfx.ca/store/10.1111/j.1468-5930.1995.tb00118.x/asset/j.1468-5930.1995.tb00118.x.pdf?v=1&t=hbm7u79s&s=393d65d2c971e182d0c6e64de4f9d1e3286387fd>
- 8 Abigail Rosenthal, "The Filial Art," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 2 No. 1, 1985. 19-29.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy.stfx.ca/store/10.1111/j.1468-5930.1985.tb00016.x/asset/j.1468-5930.1985.tb00016.x.pdf?v=1&t=hbm7wxre&s=23eecf8c077d29cb463009a36f986228d0da889e>
- 9 S. E. Marshall, "Public Bodies, Private Selves," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 5 No.2, 1988. 147-58.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy.stfx.ca/store/10.1111/j.1468-5930.1988.tb00238.x/asset/j.1468-5930.1988.tb00238.x.pdf?v=1&t=hbm7zdeb&s=1f1c48b00b0986927a669039ae00986ed9a7ec23>
- 10 Stan Godlovitch, "Forbidding Nasty Knowledge: On the Use of Ill-gotten Information," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 14 No. 1, 1997. 1-17.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy.stfx.ca/store/10.1111/1468-5930.00035/asset/1468-5930.00035.pdf?v=1&t=hbm89fe7&s=2f2b84331ef46fdb10408c5165139c7b696f5f51>
- 11 Garrett Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics"  
<http://web.ntpu.edu.tw/~ckliu/course/research/lifeboat.pdf>
- 12 Igor Primoratz, "What Is Terrorism?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1990. 129-38.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy.stfx.ca/store/10.1111/j.1468-5930.1990.tb00261.x/asset/j.1468-5930.1990.tb00261.x.pdf?v=1&t=hbm8m8jh&s=3a4346dad2fc89c75a245106509a437feff415d2>

### Term Paper:

Students are required to write a term paper. This paper is to present the student's own reasoning concerning a pressing moral issue of our time. The paper is to be roughly 10 pages in length, but not less than 3000 words. Students are encouraged to choose the moral issue that they wish to write on and then develop their own question in relation to it, but some suggestions as to possible essay topics are presented

below. The only sources to be used in this essay are Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and Mill's *Utilitarianism*; students are encouraged to try to develop their own arguments concerned with the issue they are interested in. To help aid this process, students will be required to hand in a series of "argument outlines" that clarify the reasoning involved; the essay itself will then be a chance for students to translate the arguments developed in the outlines into paragraph form. We shall discuss what goes into a good argument outline in class.

### **Possible Essay Questions:**

- 1) Is prostitution a morally acceptable form of employment?
- 2) Should athletes be allowed to take steroids to enhance their performance?
- 3) Should private citizens be allowed to own exotic pets?
- 4) Should the police be using profiling in their investigation of crime?
- 5) Should Canada reinstate capital punishment?
- 6) Should vaccination for serious, highly communicable diseases be mandatory?
- 7) Should we ban boxing and other forms of competitive fighting (UFC, et cetera)?
- 8) Should genomes be patentable?
- 9) Should surrogate mothers receive financial recompense?
- 10) Should there be a minimum wage?

### **Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:**

- 1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No extra line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.
- 2) Please no title pages. Also no "Works Cited" or "Bibliography" pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. Please no enormously large-fonted things like titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If for some reason you must hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.
- 3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips. Loose sheets are acceptable, but do remember to number them.
- 4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.
- 5) For help on writing humanities papers, please consult the handout, "The Logic of Essays".
- 6) The final page of this outline is the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.
- 7) The late policy is a deduction of 3% per day that the assignment is handed in late. No comments will be given to late assignments. This course outline lets you know when assignments are due, and you have been given plenty of time to complete them. Consequently last minute excuses for not completing assignments on time will be met with skepticism.
- 7) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. If you do not follow these guidelines, YOUR MARK FOR ORGANIZATION ON THE EVALUATION FORM WILL SUFFER DRASTICALLY.
- 8) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea. Failure to properly cite sources may result in removal from the course and expulsion from the school.

**EVALUATION FORM**  
**(Late assignments will not receive comments)**

Style:

Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped?

/10

Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or are they haphazardly strewn together? Are there explicit premises deductively producing conclusions? Are the arguments connected at all, showing a chain of reasoning?

/10

Content:

Argument Outline: /10

Thesis: Does the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple "yes" or "no"? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated?

/10

Arguments: Are there arguments presented in the paper? Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or superficial? Do the arguments explicitly outline broad premises that act as guides to understanding and reveal the unquestioned perspectives adopted in the paper?

/20

Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student's part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion?

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Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Are passages from the text cited? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addendum to the main arguments of the paper?

/20

TOTAL /100