

**PHIL 332 – (3)**  
**Contemporary Moral & Social Issues**  
**Winter, 2010**

**Instructor:** Doug Al-Maini  
**Class Time:** see online schedule  
**Office:** NH 717  
**Office Hours:** see online schedule  
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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 monogamy, filial duties, surrogacy, the right to strike, the market for body parts, 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, discussion and debate. 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. Students will be required to participate in at least two formal debates, and a sign-up schedule will be made available in the second week of class.

**Schedule:**

The following is a tentative schedule for the semester. The majority of the readings may be found in Cahn & Markie Collection; the remaining essays will be handed out by the instructor. While this schedule may be changed depending on the progress of the class, students can expect to cover the following topics in roughly this order:

| WEEK      | TOPIC                   | READINGS (by author)  |
|-----------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Jan 4   | Abortion                | Warren, Marquis       |
| 2 Jan 11  | Reproductive Technology | Kumar                 |
| 3 Jan 18  | Body Modification       | Chadwick              |
| 4 Jan 25  | Care of the Elderly     | Collingridge, Baumrin |
| 5 Feb 1   | Famine Relief           | Singer                |
| 6 Feb 8   | Euthanasia              | Rachels, Foot         |
| 7 Feb 15  | Animal Rights           | Regan, Cohen          |
| 8 Feb 22  | Resource Use            | Narveson              |
| 9 Mar 8   | Torture                 | Shue                  |
| 10 Mar 15 | Ill-Gotten Knowledge    | Godlovitch            |
| 11 Mar 22 | Terrorism               | Primoratz             |
| 12 Mar 29 | Debates/Review          |                       |

**Evaluation:**

Students are responsible for completing the following assignments:

- 1) 2 two-page responses (10% of final grade each). It is expected that these responses will make use of and cite the readings relevant to the issue being canvassed in the response.
- 2) A 6-page essay (30%; due last class) analyzing a moral dilemma of your own choosing (part of the assignment consists in the student discerning a real moral problem not covered in class faced by modern society).
- 3) Participation in 2 debates (10% of the final grade each)
- 4) A final exam (30%)

**Response Questions (students are required to respond to two of the following questions by the assigned date):**

- 1) Is reproduction a right, or a privilege? (due Jan. 18)
- 2) According to Aristotle, who was happier: Salvador Dali, or Arthur C. Clarke? (due Jan. 25)
- 3) Should children inform the justice system of the parents' criminal behaviour? (due Feb. 1)
- 4) Is giving charitably a moral requirement? If it is, why is it called "charity"? If not, why is it considered a morally good thing to do? (due Feb. 8)

**Possible Debate Topics (students will be required to sign up for two of the following debates):**

Students will form teams of three and participate in the following debates in "Mace" style; students will be given four minutes each to make opening arguments, and then after a question period, three minutes each for rebuttal. We shall go over debating procedures in class.

- 1) Is prostitution a morally acceptable, and therefore in principle legal, form of employment?
- 2) Should athletes be allowed to take steroids to enhance their performance?
- 3) Is the war in Afghanistan a just war?
- 4) Should the police be using profiling in their investigation of crime?
- 5) Should corporations be allowed to make financial contributions to political parties?
- 6) Should vaccination for serious, highly communicable diseases be mandatory?
- 7) Should genomes be patentable?
- 8) Would Aristotle assess Malcolm X as a happy man?

**Required Text:**

*Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues* eds. Steven M. Cahn & Peter Markie (Oxford University Press: New York, 2009).

**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?

/20

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