

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 a moral analysis of such behaviours as abortion, surrogate motherhood, euthanasia, 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	READINGS
1 Jan 9	Famine Relief	Peter Singer, "Rich and Poor"
2 Jan 16		John Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code"
3 Jan 23	Abortion	Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"
4 Jan 30		Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defence of Abortion"
5 Feb 6	Surrogacy	Elizabeth Anderson, "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?"
6 Feb 13		Felicia Daunt, "Exploitation or Empowerment?"
7 Feb 27	Euthanasia	Dan Brock, "Voluntary Active Euthanasia"
8 Mar 6		Dan Callahan, "When Self-Determination Runs Amok"
9 Mar 13	Multiculturalism	Susan Haack, "Multiculturalism and Objectivity"
10 Mar 20		Charles Taylor, "Multiculturalism"
11 Mar 27	Violence	Laura Westra, "Terrorism, Self-Defence, and Whistleblowing"
12 Apr 3		Joseph Margolis, "Terrorism and the New Forms of War"

Required Text:

All of the readings can be found in:

Eldon Soifer (ed.), *Ethical Issues: Perspectives For Canadians*, 3rd Edition (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009).

Evaluation:

Students are responsible for completing the following assignments:

- 1) 1 Term Paper (min. 3000 words, 30% of final grade each). Due March 15th.
- 2) Argument Outlines of readings (40% of final grade). Due weekly, at the start of Tuesday's class.
- 3) Final Exam (30% of final grade). Date to be determined.

1) 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. Secondary sources are allowed, but not encouraged; students should 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 two 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. The first outline for the paper will be due March 6th, the second outline will be due March 13th, and the paper itself is due March 20th. We shall discuss what goes into a good argument outline in class.

Possible Essay Questions (students may choose their own topic if they wish):

- 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 the government be funding space exploration rather than social programs?
- 10) Should there be a minimum wage?

2) Argument outlines of the readings:

Each week at the start of Tuesday's class an argument outline of the article assigned may be handed in for assessment. The outline is to summarize the chief arguments of the article under review. The structure of the argument outline itself is covered in the accompanying handout, "The Logic of Essays". Students are required to read through the handout and to complete the exercises contained therein. We shall discuss the handout briefly in the first class, and there will be a review session scheduled where I will take up a selection of the exercises. Students are required to hand in eight outlines of the readings, and each outline will be worth 5% of the final grade. The outlines will be marked holistically, the chief criterion being how well the outline summarizes the main arguments that are made in the assigned reading.

3) Final Exam:

At the end of the term, students will be required to write a final exam consisting of essays questions that cover the various concepts we will have examined during the course.

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.

9) You are responsible for keeping an accessible copy of all the work you hand in. It is unlikely that anything untoward will happen to your assignment, but if it should, the best response is to simply have another copy of it available.

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