

Philosophy 106: Philosophy and Current Issues

The class will focus on a number of ethical topics of current interest, in particular world hunger, war, economic inequality, rights to sexual privacy, gay rights and marriage. Each of these issues presents various choices between different and even conflicting individual and social policies. The class will focus on reasons for and against adopting various courses of action, and will explore the cogency of the reasons offered. Students will work out their own positions and hopefully, come to better understand opposing views.

In the course of examining these reasons, we will become more familiar with a very general distinction between various forms of ethical justification - the distinction between consequentialist justifications and non-consequentialist justifications. We will explore how various of the positions with respect to the above issues are amenable to either form of justification.

Readings for the class will encompass both classic texts and current articles from philosophy journals. These will sometimes be quite dense, and require some work to understand. *You may need to read them twice, once before and once after the lecture.*

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Class Times: This class meets twice a week in a large lecture section. Each student is also registered for a discussion/recitation section which is primarily for discussion and exercises aimed at helping you do the major assignments. These will be run by the TAs. Discussion sections are at least as important as the lectures.

Coursework: One mid-semester written exam, one final exam, two short papers (5-6 pages each), homework assignments randomly assigned as we see fit, in-class exercises (including use of clickers), as well as participation in discussion sections. Students will be responsible for knowledge of all of the reading and homeworks may be designed to check that. Both exams will involve essays, the topics of which you will know ahead of time. We will be using the plagiarism catching software, SafeAssign that UNL has a license to use on assignments.

Grading: The exams and papers will each count for 22% of the course grade, and the homework/clicker exercises will count for 12%. Homework will be graded in accordance with how seriously it appears to have been taken. Ordinarily this means full credit for serious efforts (whether correct or not) and no credit if the assignment appears to have been taken less than seriously. Most clicker questions won't have unique correct answers so will be counted as correct however you answer. Some will be based on the readings and these may be graded according to their accuracy. Discussion section participation and even useful comments in lecture may be taken into account in borderline cases to raise a grade and also to lower it where students regularly miss sections. Due dates for the first test and first paper are listed in the schedule below. The second paper due date will be during the last 3 weeks or so of classes with the exact due date depending on which topic you choose to address. The final exam will be at the regularly scheduled final exam time for this class.

Difficulty: This course is an introductory course in the sense that it presupposes no specialized background knowledge. But even philosophy texts that presuppose no background information require college level reading ability. None of the readings for this class are dumbed down and this can be daunting at first. **Many students will find the reading and the work assignments somewhat difficult. Usually it gets less difficult with practice over time.** The readings have been chosen from classic sources, court opinions, and articles by professional philosophers writing for other adults of similar ability. On average (and assuming college-level reading and writing abilities), this class should take you *six hours outside of class* on average per week though weeks in which major assignments are due should take more and other weeks will take somewhat less. Both the tests and the papers will require you to write coherent and well-reasoned essays. You are encouraged to take advantage of our office hours to ask questions and get help.

Readings: Readings will be from the electronic reserves at the library (there are links to e-reserves on the main library webpage) and from the web where I could find them. I have decided to distribute these readings in this way

so as to save you money (and partly also to make up for asking you to buy or borrow a clicker for the class). We expect you to download the materials so that you have them available to consult in class. (You can print them or have them on a laptop for all we care.) I have listed URLs for these readings at the relevant points in the schedule below, and I will put a copy of this syllabus on the web at <http://www.mvr1.com/106stuff/106SylS12.pdf> so that you can click on links to make things easier. There is always a possibility that URLs may change or that there is a typo. Should that occur it is your responsibility to find alternate locations to obtain the materials for yourselves, but let me know and I will try to help. Still it is a good idea to download them immediately in case they disappear.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

1/9/12 Introduction

1/11/12 Philosophical Argument, Ethical Arguments, and Reading Philosophy.

World Hunger: What, if any, obligation or reason do we have to help feed the thousands and thousands of people starving in the world today? We will notice that people can have different ideas about what to do either because they disagree about the moral principles which give us obligations to others, **or** because they disagree about what the results of various policies would be.

1/18/12 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality," Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 1, No. 3, (Spring 1972) pp. 229-243, posted on web at: <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm> and at <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.unl.edu/stable/2265052>.

1/23/12 Garrett Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," Bioscience (1975) pp.561-568 by the American Institute of Biological Sciences, posted on web at: http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art_living_on_a_lifeboat.html .

1/25/12 Onora O'Neill, "Lifeboat Earth," Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 4, No. 3, (Spring 1975) pp. 273-292, available at the UNL library website via JSTOR at <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.unl.edu/stable/2265086>.

1/30/12 World hunger and the empirical world - no reading, but start the Bentham & Mill.

Moral Theories: Utilitarianism, Consequentialism, and varieties of Non-consequentialism: This is the most theoretical portion of the class, in which we look at general theoretical approaches to ethical issues. We will look at two kinds of general moral theory. One kind, those theories that are consequentialist, requires us *always* to bring about as much impartial good as possible. By impartial good, we mean good whose value does not change depending on the agent's relation to the outcome brought about. Non-consequentialist theories, on the other hand, say that we should *not always* bring about as much impartial good as possible, either because we sometimes have personal obligations which put constraints on what we can do to bring about overall good, or because the notion of impartial good does not always make sense. Utilitarianism is one kind of consequentialist view. It says that happiness or pleasure is the only impartial good, and that we should all do our best to bring as much happiness into being as possible. So we will start by looking at two classical formulations of utilitarian theories.

2/1/12 Excerpt from Jeremy Bentham's, excerpts from Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789) (the first and fourth chapters - The principle of utility and Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to be measured.)) available on the web at <http://www.ecn.bris.ac.uk/het/bentham/morals.pdf> . Read chapters 1 & 4. John Stuart Mill, chapter 2 of Utilitarianism (1861) . This one is available on the web at http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john_stuart/m645u/ .

2/6/12 Bernard Williams, excerpt from Utilitarianism: For and Against (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1973). On electronic reserve at UNL library.

- 2/8/12 Robert Nozick, Excerpt from Anarchy, State and Utopia (New York; Basic Books, 1974). On electronic reserve at UNL library.
- 2/13/12 Phillipa Foot, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," Mind 94 (1985) pp. 196-209, available through UNL library JSTOR database at: <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.unl.edu/stable/2254745>.
- 2/20/12 W. D. Ross, The Right and the Good, chapter 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930) pp. 16-22. On electronic reserve at UNL library.

War: Are there situations in which entering or starting a war is just, and if so what criteria would have to be met before entering or starting a war is justified? Students will write a paper discussing a particular war and arguing whether our participation in it was or is justified or not.

- 2/22/12 No reading/ lecture on wars and on Pacifism.
- 2/27/12 **First Exam** - on hunger/resources and moral theory topics
- 2/29/12 Jonathan Glover, chapter 19 of Causing Death and Saving Lives, (Penguin, 1977) pp. 251-269. On electronic reserve at UNL Library.
- 3/5/12 Jeffrie G. Murphy, "The Killing of the Innocent," The Monist 57, no. 4 (1973), on the web at: <http://www.ditext.com/murphy/innocent.html>.
- 3/7/12 Elizabeth Anscombe, "War and Murder," in Nuclear Weapons: A Catholic Response, ed. by Walter Stein, (Merlin Press Ltd.) 1961 pp.45-62. On electronic reserve at UNL library.
- 3/12/12 James F. Childress, "Just War Theories," Theological Studies, 39, (1978) pp.427-445, you can get this from the EBSCO database at UNL library. The link I got is as follows, but you may need to do a search for the particular article to get the right page:
<http://0-web.ebscohost.com.library.unl.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=5a9f9514-d99d-4068-a d32-63c1cab0a995%40sessionmgr111&vid=2&hid=106> . (For some reason this link doesn't work as a clickable link so you will need to type it in.)
- 3/14/12 Michael Walzer, "Supreme Emergency," chapter 16 of Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations, (Basic Books, 1977) pp. 251-268. On electronic reserve at UNL library.
- 3/18-25/12 **Spring Break**

Economic Inequality: The distribution of wealth and income in this country is fairly unequal relative to many other countries and also relative to past distributions in this country. Some people think there are reasons to lament these patterns whereas others think they pose no problem. We'll look at some arguments on both sides of this debate. The reading list for this section is still under construction as it is new this semester.

- 3/26/12 Some empirical information about the distribution of wealth and income in the US. No reading for today but you may want to read ahead as you'll be working on your papers for the next class when there is reading.
- 3/28/12 **First Papers Due** - at start of class. Reading To Be Announced.
- 4/2/12 Reading TBA.
- 4/4/12 Reading TBA.

4/9/12 Reading TBA,

Privacy Rights/Gay Rights: Do adults have a right to be free of governmental interference with consensual sexual activities? What could justify such a right? Are there other rights or obligations that affect how the government treats sexuality and ties of affection between adults. Should such rights (if any) include a right to marry a person of one's choosing?

- 4/11/12 Bowers v. Hardwick, 106 S. Ct. 2841, 478 US 186 (1986) - US Supreme Court Opinion and dissents available on the web at: <http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/cases/478us186.htm> (The site divides the case into seven or eight separate pages which you have to click through, all of which need to be printed out and read to get the whole case.) If that link does not work, try http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0478_0186_ZS.html
- 4/16/12 John Stewart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter 4 available on the web at: <http://www.bartleby.com/130/>. Also review Bentham.
- 4/18/12 Lord Patrick Devlin, "Morals and the Criminal Law," from The Enforcement of Morals, (Oxford University Press) 1965. pp. 1-25. This will be on electronic reserve in the library.
- 4/23/12 Ralph Wedgewood, "The Fundamental Argument for Same-Sex Marriage", Journal of Political Philosophy 7 (1999), 225-242, another one in the EBSCO database in the library at <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.unl.edu:80/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=3254173&site=ehost-live> **AND**
Jeff Jordan, "Contra Same-Sex Marriage," in Same Sex Marriage; The Moral And Legal Debate, Baird & Rosenbaum, eds. (2004), 39-52. This will be on electronic reserve in the library.
- 4/25/12 Final Lecture and Last Official Time to hand in Final Paper as determined by University rules for dead week. But note that papers on the economic inequality topic may be due earlier than this. We will start taking points off when papers are more than two days late.

Final Exam will be on the day scheduled by the University for finals in classes meeting in this time slot. I believe that is 10 am to 12 noon on Monday April 30th, but you may want to check this for yourself on the University website.

ACE Program Credit Statement: Successful completion of this course will serve to meet either Student Learning Outcome #8 (Explain ethical principles, civics, and stewardship, and their importance to society) or Student Learning Outcome #9 (Exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an issue) of the ACE general education program of UNL. Explanation and assessment of these outcomes: The principle topics of the course are, as noted above, world hunger, war, economic inequality, rights to sexual privacy, gay rights, and marriage. All of these topics involve application of ethical principles relevant to SLO #8, and the concerns with civic duty and stewardship of social justice also relevant to SLO #8 are specifically addressed through the topics on affirmative action, rights to sexual privacy, gay rights, and marriage. These learning outcomes are assessed by either the final exam and/or the second paper. The topics of world hunger and just war will develop global awareness and knowledge of human diversity through the analysis of not merely one but two important issues, and hence satisfy SLO #9, and these outcomes will be assessed by the first exam and/or the first paper.