**CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES**

**PHIL 101**

**Summer 2014**

**Instructor: Kerry Vaughan**

Class times: MTWR: 9.00am – 10:45am

Class Location: Huma 226

Office hours: By appointment

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**Course Description:**

The main goal of this class will be to give students a chance to rigorously examine some of the main moral and social issues that we currently confront. We will examine such questions as abortion, our obligations to the poor, ethical career choice, sexual ethics, animal rights, performance enhancing drugs and many other topics.

In examining these questions, students will learn to think critically about difficult issues, learn to articulate and justify your position on these issues, learn to take seriously and assess the arguments of those who disagree with you, and learn to respectfully debate about such topics.

**Required Texts:**

All readings will be available on Owlspace

**Grading:**

Attendance/Participation = 30%

Short paper = 20%

Presentations = 20% (10% each)

Final Exam = 30%

Every component will be graded on a 100- point scale. After calculating the final score based on the above weight scale, a final grade will be assigned based on the following:

98-100: A+

94-97: A

91-93: A-

88-90: B+

84-87: B

81-83: B-

78-80: C+

74-77: C

71-73: C-

68-70: D+

64-67: D

61-63: D-

< or = 60: F

**Assignments:**

*Attendance, Participation:* Each day I ask you to come to class with a typed out question or criticism about the assigned reading. These must be turned in physically to me at the beginning of class. This will show me that you are here, you did the reading, and you started to think critically about it. These will also help serve as foci for the class discussion of the readings. You can miss two classes/question/criticism turn-ins. After that it will start counting against your attendance/participation (unless provided with a doctor’s note, coach’s note, or funeral notice). No late turn-ins will be accepted.

√ = full credit (100%)

√- = partial credit (70%)

0= no credit (didn’t turn in, or really lame)

Your question or criticism should refer to a specific part of the reading. You should be prepared to talk about your question/criticism a little bit to the class. Why did you think it was an important question? What were you thinking about that led to that question? If it is a criticism, how do you think that the author might respond to your criticism?

In addition to these question/criticisms, you should make an attempt to participate in class discussions. I am not measuring this in any objective way, but if you have a borderline grade and have done a good job of participating in class discussions, this will work in your favor.

*Short Papers:* You will need to write one short paper. This will be ~4-6 pages long. I will give you the assignment, but generally you will be asked to summarize one of the author’s major claims (not summarize the whole article), give the author’s reasons for that claim, and give your own evaluation of those reasons.

*Presentations:* Each student will be required to make two presentations during the class. I will provide a list of topics that students can sign up to present on. Students will be given an article related to the topic and will be asked to give a 20-30 minute presentation on the article. The first 10-15 minutes should be spent clearly and precisely explaining the argument made by the author. The next 10-15 minutes should be spent making an original argument that evaluates the author’s argument and either suggests ways that the argument fails or ways that the argument can be improved.

*Final Exam:* The final exam will consist of two essay questions. I will give you some essay questions ahead of time, and of those two will appear on the exam. The exam will be taken in class on the last day of classes

**Late Assignments:**

All work it to be turned in during class, the day that it is due. Late assignments will be deducted 10% for each day that they are late. Due dates are listed in the schedule. Note that no question/criticism turn-ins will be accepted late.

**Plagiarism**: You are expected to know and follow Rice’s policies on plagiarism and cheating. If you plagiarize or cheat I reserve the right to fail you for the assignment or the course. As a guideline: do not copy text without using quotation marks and citing the author, do not paraphrase someone’s writing without acknowledgement, do not use someone’s ideas without acknowledgment, and work on your assignments alone!

*Students with a disability are encourages to contact me and Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.*

**Schedule (subject to change):**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Class Date | Topic | Reading |
| June 23 | **Class introduction** |  |
| June 24 | **Arguments and changing your mind** | Eliezer Yudkowsky, “[Professing and Cheering](http://lesswrong.com/lw/i6/professing_and_cheering/),” [“Making Beliefs Pay Rent](http://lesswrong.com/lw/i3/making_beliefs_pay_rent_in_anticipated_experiences/),” and “[Fake Explanations](http://lesswrong.com/lw/ip/fake_explanations/)” |
| June 25 | **Basic ethical theory** | Curtis Brown, “[Utilitarianism](http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/intro/utilitarianism.html),” and “[Kant’s Ethics: Some Key Ideas](http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/intro/kant_ethics.html)” |
| June 26 | **The moral status of animals** | Peter Singer, “Practical Ethics” Ch. 3 |
| June 30 | **The moral status of animals** | Carl Cohen, “Do Animals have Rights?” |
| July 1 | **Global Poverty** | Peter Singer, “[Famine, Affluence, and](http://www.utilitarianism.net/singer/by/1972----.htm)  [Morality](http://www.utilitarianism.net/singer/by/1972----.htm)” |
| July 2 | **Global Poverty** | Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics” |
| July 3 | **Global Poverty and Effective Altruism**  **(Short Paper Assigned)** | Toby Ord, “[The Moral Imperative Towards Cost-Effectiveness](http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/sites/givingwhatwecan.org/files/attachments/moral_imperative.pdf)” & GiveWell.org, “[Giving 101: The Basics](http://www.givewell.org/giving101)” |
| July 7 | **Ethical career choice** | Benjamin Todd, “[The Worst Ethical Careers Advice in the World](http://80000hours.org/blog/183-the-worst-ethical-careers-advice-in-the-world)” & Excerpts from William MacAskill, “Replaceability, Career Choice and Making a Difference” |
| July 8 | **Ethical career choice** | Benjamin Todd “[In Which Career Can You Make the Most Difference?”](http://80000hours.org/blog/314-in-which-career-can-you-make-the-most-difference) & Jess Whittlestone “[Biases: How they Affect your Career Decisions, and What to do About them?”](http://80000hours.org/blog/165-biases-how-they-affect-your-career-decisions-and-what-to-do-about-them) |
| July 9 | **Abortion** | Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” |
| July 10 | **Abortion**  **(Short Paper DUE)** | Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” |
| July 14 | **Children** | Saul Smilansky, “Is there a Moral Obligation to have Children?" |
| July 15 | **Sexual ethics** | Thomas Mappes, “Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person” |
| July 16 | **Performance-enhancement in sports** | Sigmund Loland, “The Ethics of Performance-Enhancing Technology in Sport” |
| July 17 | **Transhumanism and posthumanism** | C. Christopher Hook “Transhumanism and Posthumanism” |
| July 21 | **The far future** | Nick Bostrom, “Astronomical Waste” |
| July 22 | **Moral Uncertainty** | George Sher, “But I Could be Wrong” |
| July 23 | **Legal Punishment** | Banks, “The Purpose of Legal Punishment” |
| July 24 | **Final Exam** |  |