

Syllabus

Philosophy 162: Contemporary Moral Issues

Spring 2011
M / W / F 11-11:50
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Office Hours: M / W 1-2
Office location: HSS 8089

Course Description

Moral problems confront us every single day of our lives. Should you spend your disposable income on the next and best version of *Dead Space* or should you donate it to charity? Do we have *any* moral obligations to strangers? If so, which ones and why? What is it that makes one person responsible for her actions and another not responsible?

Moral philosophy, at its best, gives us a framework—a method—that we can use to help us address these issues and arrive at conclusions that are consistent with most of our background beliefs and moral intuitions or that gives us arguments for changing those beliefs and intuitions.

In this course we are going to examine, in some depth, arguments central to three moral controversies confronting contemporary society. We will begin the course by asking questions about the moral status of non-human animals. We do things to non-human animals that would be objectionable to do to other human beings. We eat animals, we perform sometimes painful or lethal experiments on them, we breed and genetically engineer them, we hunt them for sport, and we keep them as pets. Are any of these actions justifiable? To answer that question we'll need to answer a more fundamental question: what makes something have moral status? Answering this question will let us decide whether which non-human animals, if any, have moral status and whether it is equal to a human's status.

The next issue we'll cover revolves around our duties to people in need. Do the wealthy have any obligations to give aid to the less well off? Do our obligations to others vary by distance or nationality or relationship? We all, at least currently, live in one of the wealthiest counties in the world. Do we have any obligations to provide aid, either directly or through our government, to the poor around the world? If so what kind of moral imperative is this? Is it a moral requirement to give *charity* or do we, in a stronger sense, *owe* this aid to others?

We'll end the quarter by looking at moral issues stemming from recent advances in genetic engineering. Transhumanism, for example, is the view that human beings have a moral imperative to use technology to modify the species. What kinds of genetic alterations should we, as a society, permit? Sex selection? Trait selection (height, athletic performance, intelligence, eye color)? Is there a morally relevant difference between genetic alterations meant to treat an illness versus those designed to enhance human performance? Should genetic alterations be available to everyone or only those that can afford them? What kinds of social and political implications would having populations of enhanced and un-enhanced individuals have? Are these acceptable consequences?

Requirements

Students **MUST** complete **all** assignments in order to receive a passing grade in the course (even if you're taking the course P/NP).

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation	10%
Response Papers (3 total)	15%
Midterm Exam	35%
Final Paper (~8 pgs)	40%

Late Assignments

Late assignments will not be accepted without prior notification of and an okay from me. This means giving me at least **48** hours notice that you will not be able to turn in a paper on time. You must have a significant reason for turning a paper in late.

If a paper will be turned in late it is subject to a penalty (out of fairness to students that do turn their papers in on time) unless evidence of significant illness or other hardship is presented. Please come see me if you have any questions or concerns regarding the policy over late papers.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office. I am requiring that all students submit their assignments to turnitin in order to minimize the temptation to plagiarize. Papers not submitted to turnitin will **not** be graded. In order to register on turnitin please use the following information:

class ID: 3842787

Password: Phil162SP11

You will need to create an account in order to be able to submit assignments. Feel free to ask me for help with this. If you aren't familiar with the policy on plagiarism please take a few minutes to read what UCSD has to say about it:

<http://www-senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm>

Course Materials

In the interest of saving you money and making sure everyone has access to course materials, you do not have to buy anything for this course! All course texts will be available online via the library course reserves website or the course's google group page:

reserves.ucsd.edu

My name is listed under the Philosophy department on the course reserves site. Please make sure to download and read materials **before** they're discussed in lecture. The quarter goes by so quickly that it is almost impossible to catch up if you fall behind so please try not to! In addition, material not available elsewhere will be posted to our class **google group**:

<http://groups.google.com/group/phil-162-sp11>

Office Hours

I will hold two office hours every week (listed at the top of the syllabus) and am available by appointment also. Please don't hesitate to ask for other meeting times if you can't make my office hours. Spending time in office hours is a great way to get your questions answered and practice real time moral deliberation!

Tentative Schedule

Below you will find a tentative reading schedule. I've tried to keep readings short and accessible; this reading list is subject to modification.

I. Human animals, Non-Human animals

Week 1

- M** Introduction / Course Expectations
- W** Moral Theories Primer
John Stuart Mill Utilitarianism chapter 2
- F** Moral Theories Primer
John Rawls A Theory of Justice selections [sec. 15, 24, 26]

Week 2

- M** Peter Singer "All Animals Are Equal"
- W** Tom Regan "Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights"
- F** Ingmar Persson, "A Basis for (Interspecies) Equality," (link on google group)

Week 3

- M** Immanuel Kant "We have only indirect duties to animals"
- W** Elizabeth Anderson "Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life"
- F** Peter Carruthers "Against the Moral Standing of Animals" (link on google group)

*****At least one response paper should be based on material from section I*****

II. Beneficence and the Needy

Week 4

- M** Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"
- W** Garrett Cullity, "Asking Too Much"

F Liam Murphy “The Demands of Beneficence”

Week 5

M Larry Temkin “Thinking About the Needy, Justice, and International Organizations”

W Jan Narveson “Is World Poverty A Moral Problem for the Wealthy?”

F Thomas Pogge “Assisting' the Global Poor”

III. Genetic Engineering

Week 6

M-F Screening of Gattaca in class

Week 7

M Genes, Intervention, Transhumanism: why we should care (no new readings)

W Michael Sandel “The Case Against Perfection”

F Jonathan Glover “Future People, Disability, and Screening”

Week 8

M Jeff McMahan “Causing Disabled People to Exist and Causing People to be Disabled”

W Ronald Dworkin “Playing God: Genes, Clones, and Luck”

F Buchanan, Brock, Daniels and Wikler “Why Not the Best?”

Week 9

Final Essay Prompts Handed Out

M Buchanan, Brock, Daniels and Wikler, “Positive and Negative Genetic Interventions”

W Nick Bostrom “Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective”

F Francis Fukuyama “Transhumanism;” Richard Norgaard “Posthuman Enough?”

Week 10

M Memorial Day Observance – Classes Canceled

W Tim Bayne and Neil Levy “Amputee by Choice”

F Patrone “Disfigured Anatomies and Imperfect Analogies”