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PHL 110E.01: Introduction to Ethics

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Philosophy 110E: Introductory Ethics
Spring 2011
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O.H.: tba

This is an introductory course in ethics. There are no prerequisites. We want to get at the bottom of the judgments we make about what is morally right and wrong. Specifically, what kind of reasons can we give for those judgments and prescriptions? We will study in depth three secular, western moral theories that we frequently appeal to in order to justify the moral claims we make: theories about virtuous character, Kantian and rights theories, and utilitarianism. We'll also look at critiques of these three theories. In order to understand how these ideas are applied and how satisfying they really are, we will test their application to some contemporary moral issues: capital punishment, duties to the environment, duties to rescue, and perhaps euthanasia/physician assisted suicide. In addition to our reading, we'll watch three films that explore the application of these principles. By the end of the semester, if nothing else, you should be more conscious and articulate about the moral judgments and prescriptions that you, family, friends, politicians, and religious authorities make.

Schedule

1/25	Hello and Business
1/27	"The Value of Philosophy," Bertrand Russell (x)
2/1	"Reflections on Suffering," Bertrand Russell (x)
2/3-10	Crimes and Misdemeanors, film
2/15	"The Principle of Utility," Jeremy Bentham (x)
2/17-24	<i>Utilitarianism</i> , J.S. Mill
3/1	"Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Peter Singer (x); "World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer," John Arthur (x)
3/3	"A Critique of Utilitarianism," Bernard Williams (x); "The Experience Machine," Robert Nozick (x)
3/8-15	<i>The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Kant
3/17-24	Dead Man Walking, film; "Capital Punishment," Hugo Adam Bedau (x)
3/29-4/14	<i>The Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Aristotle
4/4-4/8	Spring Break
4/19-26	Weapons of the Spirit, film
4/28	"Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," Thomas Hill (x)
5/3	The physician assisted suicide debate/euthanasia in the 2011 Montana legislature. More coming on this!
5/5	Last things
5/12	Comprehensive final exam, 1:10-3:10, in our usual classroom

Texts:

Utilitarianism, J.S. Mill
The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant
The Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle

“Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” (x)

“Grammar Guide” (x)

(x)= essays on e-reserve on the philosophy department web site. Go to “Current Syllabi and Course Materials.” Print these, mark them up as you read, and **always** bring the assigned essay and book to class with you.

Requirements

1.) 4 pop quizzes at the beginning of class. There will be NO make-up quizzes. 5 pts/each = 20 points total.

2.) 5 1-2 page papers on assigned topics. I’ll actually give you 6 assignments. So that means you can drop your lowest score if you write all 6. NO make-up assignments. These are due at the beginning of class. I will NOT accept a paper once class has started. 12 pts/each=60 points total (It’s possible you’ll have both a quiz and a paper due the same week.)

3.) Take-home comprehensive final exam due 5/12 by 3 p.m. 20 pts.

Law and Order

1.) Attendance and participation—I will take attendance sporadically. If attendance is good and you’ve participated in discussions, and if you have a borderline grade at the end of semester, I’ll boost your final grade. If your attendance has been poor, I won’t boost the grade. Be forewarned: Readings for this class are very difficult. If you don’t come to class and take good notes, chances are good you’ll fail it. So read diligently and have a conversation with what you’re reading, come to class regularly, take very good notes, find a study partner or two, and see me whenever you’re confused.

2.) I consider the following rude and unacceptable: ringing cell phones, open lap tops, reading the newspaper or working on something other than class materials in class, whispering to your neighbor, texting, coming into class late or leaving early (unless you’ve okayed this with me), in other words anything that keeps you or other students from giving me your full attention. I’ll call you out for these things just once. After that, I simply drop you from the class. Please just be considerate, responsible adults, and we’ll get on fine.

3.) See the University of Montana Student Conduct Code re. cheating, etc.
(<http://www.umt.edu.SA>) .