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PHL 210E.01: Moral Philosophy - Introductory Ethics

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Philosophy 210E: Introductory Ethics
Fall 2013
Professor Deborah Slicer
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O.H.: tba

This is an introductory course in ethics for philosophy majors and minors. 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 if and how these theories are practical we will test their application to some contemporary moral issues: capital punishment, civil disobedience, and duties to rescue. 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

8/26 Hello and Business
8/29 "The Value of Philosophy," Bertrand Russell (x); "Reflections on Suffering," Bertrand Russell (x)
9/2 Labor Day, No Class
9/4-9/11 Crimes and Misdemeanors, film
9/16 "The Principle of Utility," Jeremy Bentham (x)
9/18-9/30 *Utilitarianism*, J.S. Mill
10/2 "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Peter Singer (x); "World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer," John Arthur (x)
10/7 "A Critique of Utilitarianism," Bernard Williams (x); "The Experience Machine," Robert Nozick (x)
10/9 No Class
10/14-10/23 *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant
10/28-11/4 Dead Man Walking, film; "Capital Punishment," Rachels (x)
11/11 Vets' Day, No Class
11/6-11/20 *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle
11/27 Thanksgiving, No Class
12/2-12/4 Weapons of the Spirit, film
12/6 Last day wrap up

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 or book to class with you.

Requirements

- 1.) 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
- 2) 1 20 minute presentation on an assigned topic=15 points
- 3.) Comprehensive final exam= 25 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>) .