

Alex Madva

### Introduction to Contemporary Moral Problems

This is an introductory course in applied ethics. We will study how general ethical principles can be applied to particular, real-world conflicts. We will begin with a brief analysis of prominent ethical theories and subsequently discuss pressing moral problems such as war, abortion, animal rights, drug legalization, gender and race discrimination, and others. We will critically examine the arguments for and against each position, and question how, if at all, they are grounded in broader ethical theories. The fundamental question is whether a philosophical approach can help to resolve these issues—or at least bring more clarity to debates that are often obscured by political rhetoric and “sound-byte” arguments.

#### Required Texts

All readings will be available in a Course Reader and on the course website

#### Course Schedule and Readings

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#### **Week 1** Introduction: Moral Arguments, Theories, and the Specter of Relativism

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#### **Weeks 2-3** Animals

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Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, selections

Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, selections

Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People”

Carl Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research”

Mylan Engel, “Fishy Reasoning”

#### **Week 4** The Environment

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Garrett Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, selections

Richard Stroup and John Baden, with David Fractor, “Property Rights: The Real Issue”

Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich, “Risks, Costs, and Benefits”

#### **Weeks 5-6** Censorship and Offensive Speech and Behavior

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Justice Antonin Scalia, majority opinion in *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul, Minnesota*

Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too*, selections

Johnathan Rauch, “Kindly Inquisitors: The New Attacks on Free Thought”

Max Weisbuch, Kristin Pauker, and Nalini Ambady, “The Subtle Transmission of Race Bias via Televised Nonverbal Behavior”

Robert Lynch, “It’s Funny Because We Think It’s True”

Susan Hurley, “Imitation, Media Violence, and Freedom of Speech”

#### **Weeks 6-7** Abortion

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Justice Harry Blackmun, majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade*

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

Jane English, “Abortion and the Concept of a Person”

Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral”

Jennifer Saul, “Abortion”

Alexander R. Pruss, “I Was Once a Fetus: That Is Why Abortion Is Wrong?”

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**Week 8**      Multiculturalism

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Lila Abu-Lughod, "Saving Muslim Women or Standing with Them?"

Lila Abu-Lughod, "Against Universals: The Dialects of Women's Rights"

Jennifer Saul, "Feminism and 'Respect for Cultures'"

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**Week 9**      War

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Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, selections

Mahatma Gandhi, "Non-Violence in Various Aspects"

Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, selections

Richard A. Posner and Gary Becker, "Preventive War"

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**Week 10**      Interrogation and Detention

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Carl Von Clausewitz, *On the Nature of War*, selections

Jeremy Bentham, *of Torture*, selections

David Luban, "Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb"

Justices Anthony Kennedy and Antonin Scalia, Majority and Dissenting Opinions in *Boumediene v. Bush*, selections

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**Week 11**      Drug Legalization

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Milton Friedman, "An Open Letter to Bill Bennett"

William J. Bennett, "A Response to Milton Friedman"

Ethan A. Nadelmann, "The Case for Legalization"

James Q. Wilson, "Against the Legalization of Drugs"

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Ch.2, "The Lockdown"

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**Week 12**      Racial Profiling

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Mathias Risse and Richard Zeckhauser, "Racial Profiling"

Judge Shira Scheindlin, opinion in *Floyd v. City of New York*, selections

Glaser, *Suspect Race*, Ch.5, "The Effects of Racial Profiling: Costs and Benefits"

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**Week 13**      Affirmative Action

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Antonin Scalia, "The Disease as a Cure"

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Majority Opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, selections

John Jost et al., "The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt: A refutation of ideological and methodological objections and executive summary of ten studies that no manager should ignore."

Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, selections

Jerry Kang and Mahzarin Banaji, "Fair measures: A behavioral realist revision of affirmative action," selections

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**Week 14**      Economic Equality

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John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, selections

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, selections

Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*, Chs.1, 5, selections

Elizabeth Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?"

Robert Reich, *Supercapitalism*, selections