

Phil 106: Philosophy and Contemporary Issues

Rocky 210

Tuesday/Thursday 12:00PM-1:15PM

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Office Hours: Thursday 4:45PM-6:45PM, Rocky 206

Course Summary: This is an introductory course in applied ethics. We will study how general ethical principles can be applied to real-world conflicts, and how our views about real-world conflicts can enrich our understanding of general ethical principles. We will discuss pressing moral problems such as the environment, animal rights, abortion, censorship, gender and race discrimination, and others. 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 Readings: All readings available online, primarily on Moodle

Course Grading and Requirements: Participation (20%), Papers (55%), Final Exam (25%)

Attendance & Participation (20%): This includes attendance, participation, in-class assignments, and a peer-review workshop. **Attendance is mandatory, as is arriving on time.** Excused absences require signed documentation from a doctor or dean. **Participation and preparation are crucial.** There are a variety of ways to participate, including: actively contributing to discussions, demonstrating reflection on the readings, listening carefully to others’ contributions (not dominating discussion), and showing respect toward classmates. There will be a peer-review workshop to prepare for your second paper, giving you the opportunity to receive written feedback and practice giving constructive criticism. The workshop will count for ¼ of your participation grade (5% of your final grade). There may also be a number of pop quizzes and other in-class tasks to make sure you are keeping up with the assignments.

All cell phones must be on silent and put away, and computer use must be limited to class purposes (taking notes, required readings, etc.). You may lose your computer privileges if you use your computer for other purposes.

2 Papers: 1st: 3 pages (20%) due 10/3
 2nd: 5 pages (35%) rough draft due 11/7; final draft due 11/21

Final Exam (25%) during final exam period: This closed-book exam will include 3 sections: I) Passage Identifications: identify the author of 10 out of 13 passages; II) Textual Analysis: paraphrase, explicate, and explain the broader importance of 5 passages (out of the same 13 from Sec. I); III) Essay: write a full essay responding to 1 of 2 prompts.

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity. Students in need of ADA/504 accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated in this course. Students caught plagiarizing will receive an F in the course and be referred to the Dean of Studies. I will not make any “judgment calls” to ascertain whether instances of plagiarism are intentional. A handout entitled “Plagiarism and Academic Integrity” will be distributed again with the first paper assignment, and signed by each student. See also Vassar’s guide on “Originality and Attribution”: deanofthecollege.vassar.edu/documents/originality/.

Note: Use of secondary sources for papers in this class must be cleared by me in advance.

Tentative Course Schedule and Readings

- **Note:** the reading schedule is approximate and subject to change

Week 1: Tuesday 9/2: Hello

Thursday 9/4: Non-human Animals

Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, selections

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

Week 2: Tuesday 9/9: Animals cont.

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

Mylan Engel, “Fishy Reasoning”

Thursday 9/11

Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People”

Week 3: Tuesday 9/16: The Environment

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

Marion Hordequin, “Climate, Collective Action, and Individual Ethical Obligation”

Thursday 9/18

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

Week 4: Tuesday 9/23: Animals and the Environment

J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair”

Mark Sagoff, “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce” (1st half)

Thursday 9/25

Sagoff (2nd half)

Elizabeth Anderson, “Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life”

Week 5: Tuesday 9/30: Writing Workshop

Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”

Thursday 10/2: Environment cont.

Janna Thompson, “A Refutation of Environmental Ethics”

Friday 10/3: 1st Paper Due

Week 6: Tuesday 10/7: Abortion

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

Thursday 10/9:

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

Week 7: Tuesday 10/14: Abortion cont.

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

Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral”

Thursday 10/16: Abortion cont.

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

Jennifer Saul, “Abortion”

10/17-10/26: NO CLASS fall break

Week 8: Tuesday 10/28: Relativism and Multiculturalism

James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Thursday 10/30

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

Week 9: Tuesday 11/4: Relativism and Multiculturalism cont.

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

Thursday 11/6: Censorship and Offensive Speech and Behavior

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chs. II-III, selections

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

Friday 11/7: Rough draft of 2nd paper due

Week 10: Tuesday 11/11: Censorship and Speech cont.

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"

Thursday 11/13: Censorship, Prejudice, and Violence

Freakonomics, "[Who Runs the Internet?](#)" from minute 25 to end

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"

Friday 11/14: Comments on peer's draft due

Week 11: Tuesday 11/18: Peer-Review Workshop

Thursday 11/20: Racial Profiling

Raymond Kelly (NYC Police Commissioner), "The NYPD: Guilty of Saving 7,383 Lives"

Mathias Risse and Richard Zeckhauser, "Racial Profiling"

Friday 11/21: Final draft of 2nd paper due

Week 12: Tuesday 11/25: Profiling cont. (NO CLASS THURSDAY FOR THANKSGIVING)

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

"Racial Profiling": *skim* Peter Shuck ("Point") vs. *focus on* Karin Martin and Jack Glaser ("Counterpoint")

Week 13: Tuesday 12/2: Affirmative Action

Antonin Scalia, "The Disease as a Cure"

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

Thursday 12/4

John Jost et al., "The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt"

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

Week 14: Tuesday 12/9: Makeup and Review for Final