

Course Outline Contemporary Moral Problems

Course Description:

In this course, students will be introduced to a selection of issues in applied ethics. Broadly speaking, applied ethics is an area of philosophy that applies normative ethical theories and moral principles to cases and particular issues. In the first section of this course, students will familiarize themselves with philosophical methodology and the basics of moral theory. In the remainder of the course, students will apply what they learn in the first section to select moral issues. Issues that will be addressed include abortion, euthanasia, public health and vaccination, genetic enhancement, the death penalty, gun ownership, the use of animals as food, experimental subjects, and zoological exhibits, preservation of wilderness and species, and climate change.

Course Texts:

I am aware of the financial impediments posed by acquiring materials for class. To remove this potential barrier to your academic success, all readings are free-to-use and made available electronically.

Course Reading Schedule:

Day 1: Introduction

Day 2: Reading and Writing Philosophy; University Resources

Reading: 1,000 Word Philosophy, “How to Read Philosophy”

Reading: Harvard Writing Center, “A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper”

Day 3: Logic, Arguments, and Philosophical Methodology

Reading: Tom Regan, “Introduction to Moral Reasoning”

Day 4: Moral Relativism

Reading: James Rachels, “The Challenges of Cultural Relativism”

Day 5: Utilitarianism

Reading: J.J.C. Smart, “Act-Utilitarianism and Rule-Utilitarianism”

Day 6: Deontology

Reading: Immanuel Kant, “The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals”

Day 7: Virtue Ethics

Reading: Rosalind Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics”

Day 8: Trolleyology and Self-Driving Cars

Reading: Patrick Lin, “Why Ethics Matter for Autonomous Cars”

Day 9: Abortion

Reading: Mary Anne Warren, “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion”

Day 10: Abortion

Reading: Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”

Day 11: Euthanasia

Reading: Dan Brock, “Voluntary Active Euthanasia”

Day 12: Euthanasia

Reading: Daniel Callahan, “Physician-Assisted Dying: Self Determination Run Amok”

Day 13: Vaccination and Public Health

Reading: Jessica Flanigan, “A Defense of Compulsory Vaccination”

Day 14: Organ Commodification and Donation

Reading: Michael Gill, “Presumed Consent, Autonomy, and Organ Donation”

Day 15: Genetic Enhancement

Reading: Frances Kamm, “Is There a Problem with Enhancement?”

Day 16: Legalizing Recreational Drugs

Reading: Douglas Husak, “Four Points About Drug Decriminalization”

Day 17: Factory Farming

Reading: Alistair Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People”

Day 18: Humane Farming

Reading: Jeff McMahan, “Eating Animals the Nice Way”

Day 19: Vegetarianism/Veganism

Reading: William Stephens, “Five Arguments for Vegetarianism”

Day 20: Animal Experimentation

Reading: Andrew Knight, “Weighing the Costs and Benefits of Animal Experimentation”

Day 21: Zoos and Aquariums

Reading: Dale Jamieson, “Against Zoos”

Day 22: Animal Companions

Reading: Keith Burgess-Jackson, “Doing Right by Our Animal Companions”

Day 23: The Preservation of Wilderness

Reading: Thomas Hill, “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments”

Day 24: The Preservation of Species

Reading: Holmes Rolston, III, “Duties to Endangered Species”

Day 25: Global Poverty

Reading: Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Day 26: Immigration

Reading: Joseph Carens, “Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders”

Day 27: Gun Ownership

Reading: Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Own a Gun?”

Day 28: The Death Penalty

Reading: Paul Cassell, “In Defense of the Death Penalty”

Day 29: Climate Change

Reading: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations”

Day 30: Climate Change

Reading: Stephen Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm”