PHIL 237 Contemporary Moral Issues

Winter 2015
MWF 1:35 PM-2:25 PM
Adams Building AUD

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Office hours: Monday, 2:30 PM-4:30 PM

This course is an introduction to contemporary debates and research in applied moral philosophy or ethics. Through the semester, we will have a chance to familiarize ourselves with a number of specific moral issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, war, terrorism, torture, executive compensations, questions of socio-economic inequalities more broadly, and questions raised by the development of artificial intelligence. Contemporary life comes with its fair share or moral challenges, to say the least. In this course, we will have a chance to reflect upon some of them.

As a second objective, the course aims to familiarize students with the methods of ethics. Students will develop the ability to apply rigorous philosophical thinking and argumentation to real-world issues and debates. Hopefully, the readings, lectures, and discussions will allow us to see contemporary moral challenges in a new, and more systematic light.

Readings

All required readings and documents will be posted in myCourses.


Schedule

There will usually be two lectures and one conference per week. The dates below are for lectures only. Conferences will start in the third week of the course, each student must sign up for a conference in Minerva.

Week 1  Introduction
        Hugh LaFollette (2007), “Reading Philosophy.”
Part I. Theoretical foundations

**Week 2**
Deontological ethics, consequentialism and virtue ethics I
Jan. 15  John Stuart Mill (1863), Chap. II, “What is Utilitarianism?”

**Week 3**
Deontological ethics, consequentialism and virtue ethics II

Part II. Bioethics

**Week 4**
Abortion

**Week 5**
Euthanasia

Part III. Political violence

**Week 6**
War

**Week 7**
Terrorism

**Week 8**
Torture
Feb. 22  Alan Dershowitz (2002), “Should the Ticking Bomb Terrorist Be Tortured?”

*Study Break*

Part IV. Socio-economic inequalities

**Week 9**
Executive compensations
Mar. 7   Jeffrey Moriarty (2005), “Do CEOs Get Paid Too Much?”

Week 10  Economic inequality

Week 11  World Poverty
Mar. 21  Peter Singer (1972), “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”.
Mar. 23  Peter Singer (2011), Chap. 8, “Rich and Poor.”
          Resources Dividend.”

Week 12  What is equality?

Part V. Artificial intelligence

Week 13  The future of work
Apr. 4   Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind (2015), The Future of the Professions: How
          Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts, excerpts.
          Future, excerpts.

Week 14  Conclusion
Apr. 13

Evaluations

- Participation in conferences: 10%
- Midterm writing assignment, announced on Feb. 1, due on Feb. 15: 20%
- Final writing assignment, announced on Mar. 30, due on Apr. 11: 30%
- Final exam, date and location TBA: 40%

The writing assignments must be submitted electronically in myCourses. Further
instructions will be provided when the assignments are announced. Any assignment handed
in late without medical excuse will be penalized by one third of a grade (e.g. from B+ to B)
per calendar day of lateness.

In accordance with McGill University’s Charter of Student’s Rights, students in this course
have the right “to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded.”

Teaching assistants

Students must first contact their teaching assistant for any question: practical functioning of
the course, content and materials taught, evaluations and grading, and so on.
Statement of academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all instructors and students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see http://www.mcgill.ca/files/integrity/Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf for more information).

References


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