

Philosophy and Current Issues

The class will focus on a number of ethical topics of current interest, in particular world hunger, war, affirmative action, rights to sexual privacy, gay rights and marriage. Each of these issues presents various choices between different and even conflicting individual and social policies. The class will focus on reasons for and against adopting various courses of action, and will explore the cogency of the reasons offered. Students will work out their own positions and hopefully, come to better understand opposing views.

In the course of examining these reasons, we will become more familiar with a very general distinction between various forms of ethical justification - the distinction between consequentialist justifications and non-consequentialist justifications. We will explore how various of the positions with respect to the above issues are amenable to either form of justification.

Readings for the class will encompass both classic texts and current articles from philosophy journals. These will sometimes be quite dense, and require some work to understand. *You may need to read them twice, once before and once after the lecture.*

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Requirements: One mid-semester written exam, one final exam, two short papers (5-6 pages each), as well as homework assignments and in-class exercises mostly related to the readings, assigned at my and the TA's respective whims. Students will be responsible for knowledge of all of the reading and all of the lecture material, and these homeworks will be designed to check that. Both exams will involve essays, the topics for which you will know ahead of time.

Grading: The exams will count for 20% of the course grade, each paper will count for 25%, and the homework/class exercises will count for 10%. Homework will be graded in accordance with how seriously it appears to have been taken. Ordinarily this means full credit for serious efforts (whether correct or not) and no credit if the assignment appears to have been taken less than seriously. Class participation may be taken into account in borderline cases and also where students regularly miss sections. Due dates for the first test and first paper are listed in the schedule below. The second paper due date will be negotiated by you with your TA depending on which topic you choose to address. The final exam will be at the regularly scheduled final exam time for this class.

Difficulty: This course is an introductory course in the sense that it presupposes no specialized background knowledge. On the other hand, *many students find the reading and the work assignments quite difficult.* The readings have been chosen from classic sources, court opinions, and articles by professional philosophers writing for other adults of similar ability. That is typical for philosophy courses at all levels, but many of you will need to work hard at understanding the material presented. *Plan on spending an average of two hours outside of class for every one hour in class doing the reading and assignments.* On average (and assuming college level reading abilities), this class should take you six hours outside of class each week though weeks in which major assignments are due should take more. Both the tests and the papers will require you to write coherent and well-reasoned essays. You are encouraged to take advantage of the professor's and TA's office hours.

Readings: Readings will be from the Course Packet - available from the bookstore and from public domain materials available on the internet. For these later readings we expect you to download and print out the materials so that you have them available to consult in class. I have listed URLs for these readings at the relevant points in the schedule below, and I will put an HTML copy of this syllabus on the web at <http://www.geocities.com/mvr1.geo/106stuff/106sylFall2003.html> so that you can click on links to make things easier. I'm also going to try to put a PDF version at <http://www.geocities.com/mvr1.geo/106stuff/106sylFall2003.pdf>. There is always a possibility that URLs may change or that there is a typo. Should that occur it is your responsibility to

find alternate locations to obtain the materials for yourselves, but let me know and I will try to help. I have decided to distribute these readings in this way so as to save you money as including them in the course packet would likely have raised the cost of the packet substantially.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

- 8/25/03 Introduction
- 8/27/03 Philosophical Argument, Ethical Arguments, and Reading Philosophy.

World Hunger: What, if any, obligation or reason do we have to help feed the thousands and thousands of people starving in the world today? We will notice that people can have different ideas about what to do either because they disagree about the moral principles which give us obligations to others, **or** because they disagree about what the results of various policies would be.

- 9/3/03 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality," Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 1, No. 3, (Spring 1972) pp. 229-243, in packet.
- 9/8/03 Garrett Hardin, "Living on a Lifeboat," Bioscience (1975) pp.561-568 by the American Institute of Biological Sciences, in packet.
- 9/10/03 Onora O'Neill, "Lifeboat Earth," Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 4, No. 3, (Spring 1975) pp. 273-292, in packet.
- 9/15/03 World hunger and the empirical world - no reading, but start the Mill.

Moral Theories: Utilitarianism, Consequentialism, and varieties of Non-consequentialism: This is the most theoretical portion of the class, in which we look at general theoretical approaches to ethical issues. We will look at two kinds of general moral theory. One kind, those theories that are consequentialist, requires us *always* to bring about as much impartial good as possible. By impartial good, we mean good whose value does not change depending on the agent's relation to the outcome brought about. Non-consequentialist theories, on the other hand, say that we should *not always* bring about as much impartial good as possible, either because we sometimes have personal obligations which put constraints on what we can do to bring about overall good, or because the notion of impartial good does not always make sense. Utilitarianism is one kind of consequentialist view. It says that happiness or pleasure is the only impartial good, and that we should all do our best to bring as much happiness into being as possible. So we will start by looking at two classical formulations of utilitarian theories.

- 9/17/03 Excerpt from Jeremy Bentham's, excerpts from Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789) (the first and fourth chapters - The principle of utility and Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to be measured.) available on the web at <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/bentham/morals.pdf> read pp 14-18 and 31-34) or <http://www.la.utexas.edu/labyrinth/ipml/ipml.toc.html> read chapters 1 & 4. (The first is a pdf and the second in HTML.)

John Stuart Mill, chapter 2 of Utilitarianism(1861) . This one is available on the web at www.library.adelaide.edu.au/etext/m/m645u/ or at <http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/poltheory/mill/util/index.html> .

- 9/22/03 Bernard Williams, excerpt from Utilitarianism: For and Against (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1973), in packet.
- 9/24/03 Robert Nozick, Excerpt from Anarchy, State and Utopia (New York; Basic Books, 1974), in packet.
- 2/29/03 Phillipa Foot, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," Mind 94 (1985) pp. 196-209, in packet.
- 10/1/03 W. D. Ross, The Right and the Good, chapter 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930) pp. 16-22, in packet.

10/06/03 **First Exam** - on Hunger and moral theory topics

War: Are there situations in which entering or starting a war is just, and if so what criteria would have to be met before entering or starting a war is justified? Students will write a paper discussing a particular war and arguing whether our participation in it was or is justified or not.

- 10/08/03 No reading/ lecture on wars and on Pacifism.
- 10/13/03 Jonathan Glover, chapter 19 of Causing Death and Saving Lives, (Penguin, 1977) pp. 251-269, in packet.
- 10/15/03 Jeffrie G. Murphy, "The Killing of the Innocent," The Monist 57, no. 4 (1973), in packet.
- 10/27/03 Elizabeth Anscombe, "War and Murder," in Nuclear Weapons: A Catholic Response, ed. by Walter Stein, (Merlin Press Ltd.) 1961 pp.45-62, in packet.
- 10/29/03 James F. Childress, "Just War Theories," Theological Studies, 39, (1978) pp.427-445, in packet.
- 11/03/03 Michael Walzer, "Supreme Emergency," chapter 16 of Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations, (Basic Books, 1977) pp. 251-268, in packet.

Compensatory Preferential Hiring and Admissions: Are programs which compensate for racial and sexual discrimination by favoring members of discriminated against groups required by, allowed by, or prohibited by considerations of justice?

11/5/03 Introduction to topic - Lecture/discussion.

First Papers Due - at start of class.

11/10/03 Introduction to Issue and recent legal history.

11/12/03 Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Preferential Hiring," Philosophy and Public Affairs, (Summer 1973) pp. 364-384, in packet.

11/17/03 Robert Simon, "Preferential Hiring: A Reply to Judith Jarvis Thomson," Philosophy and Public Affairs, (Spring 1974) pp. 312-320, in packet &
Robert Fullinwider, "Preferential Hiring and Compensation," Social Theory and Practice, (Spring 75) 307-320, in packet.

11/19/03 George Sher, "Justifying Reverse Discrimination in Employment," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, (Winter 1975) pp. 159-170, in packet.

Privacy Rights/Gay Rights: Do adults have a right to be free of governmental interference with consensual sexual activities? What could justify such a right? Should such rights (if any) include a right to marry a person of one's choosing? Are people entitled not to be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, and does such entitlement include a right to legal recourse should such discrimination occur?

11/24/03 *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 106 S. Ct. 2841, 478 US 186 (1986) - US Supreme Court Opinion and dissents available on the web at: <http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/cases/478us186.htm> (The site divides the case into seven or eight separate pages which you have to click through, all of which need to be printed out and read to get the whole case.) If that link does not work, try [http://www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/historic/query=\[Group+478+U.S.+186:\]\[\[Level+Case+Citation:\]\[\[Group+citemenu:\]\)/doc/{@1}/hit_headings/words=4/hits_only?](http://www2.law.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/foliocgi.exe/historic/query=[Group+478+U.S.+186:][[Level+Case+Citation:][[Group+citemenu:])/doc/{@1}/hit_headings/words=4/hits_only?)

12/01/03 John Stewart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter 4 available on the web at: <http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/poltheory/mill/ol/ol.c04.html> . Look at the index at <http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/poltheory/mill/ol/index.html> to find other chapters. Also review Bentham.

12/03/03 Lord Patrick Devlin, "Morals and the Criminal Law," from The Enforcement of Morals, (Oxford University Press) 1965. pp. 1-25, and H. L. A. Hart, "Immorality and Treason," The Listener, July 30, 1959, both in packet.

12/08/03 Lawrence vs. Texas, US Supreme Court case, available on the web at the US Supreme Court website. The specific URL for the case is: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/26jun20031200/www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/02pdf/02-102.pdf> . Another version is available at <http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-102.ZS.html> but you have to get all of the opinions of the different judges by clicking different links.

12/10/03 Ralph Wedgwood, 'The Fundamental Argument for Same-Sex Marriage', Journal of Political Philosophy 7 (1999), 225-242.