

Philosophy and Contemporary Issues  
PHIL 106

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Course Description:

The vast majority of us make ethical decisions on a regular basis. Often, we do so without putting much thought behind our choices. The purpose of this class is to get you thinking consciously about what considerations should be taken into account when deciding how to act ethically. We will do this through two related routes. First, we will spend much of our time discussing some of the most widely accepted theories of ethicists, both historically and at present. Second, we will also spend much of our time considering some of the pressing moral issues of our time—issues that, knowingly or not, both affect and are affected by us on a regular basis. These two routes are closely related because in many cases, the ethical theory that one accepts can result in significantly different upshots for many ethical problems we face today. (For a look at the ethical theories and topics we will be discussing, see the schedule of readings below.)

The goal of the course is not to convince you that one view or another is correct, but rather to get you thinking about the reasons you have for accepting the ethical beliefs that you have, as well as developing the skills to be able to analyze whether those reasons are good. By “good” here is meant a number of things—accords with your other ethical beliefs, doesn’t rely on factually incorrect assumptions, doesn’t entail implausible consequences, considers other reasonable views and objections, etc. Each of these features of a reasonable ethical view will be discussed at length as the semester goes on. It must be emphasized, though, that ethics is not just about giving your opinion, but about being able to support your opinion with well-reasoned and plausible argumentation.

ACE Information:

This course meets ACE Requirements 8 and 9:

ACE 8. Explain ethical principles, civics, and stewardship, and their importance to society.

ACE 9. Exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an issue.

Course Requirements:

50% of your grade will be centered around your final paper, which will be divided up into three assignments:

The 2-page Article Summary, worth 10% of your final grade (Due XXX)

The Paper Outline, as well as a meeting with me to discuss said outline, worth 15% of your final grade (Due XXX, with the meeting sometime within three days before or after XXX)

The Final Paper itself, worth 25% of your final grade (Due XXX)

The other 50% of your grade is based on the following:

The Final Exam, which will be completed partially in class (on XXX) as well as partially as a take home (Due XXX), worth a total of 25% of your grade.

In-class Participation, worth 10% of your grade. If you miss more than two classes, your participation grade will automatically be reduced by 2 percentage points for every further day that you miss. (However, attendance alone will not give you a good participation grade.)

Reading Quizzes, testing your knowledge of the assigned readings, worth 15% of your grade.

Textbook: Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford University Press. (Available at the bookstore.)

Other readings will be made available on Blackboard.

Schedule of Readings and Due Dates (Subject to Change)—Readings should be done before class:

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapters 9 and 10

Singer, Selections from *The Life You Can Save*.

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapter 12

McNaughton and Rawling, "Deontology"

Pogge, "World Poverty and Human Rights"

Satz, "What Do We Owe the Global Poor?"

O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems"

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapter 11

Wilson, "Rights"

Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapters 15 and 16

Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapter 17

Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights"

Singer, "Unsanctifying Human Life"

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapter 13

Held, excerpts from *The Ethics of Care*

Fox, "The Moral Community"

Steinbock, "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality"

Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapter 14

Schaefer, excerpts from *Racial and Ethnic Groups*

Cudd and Jones, "Sexism"

Beauchamp, "In Defense of Affirmative Action"

Rawls, excerpt from *A Theory of Justice*

Nozick, excerpt from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Cohen, excerpt from *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, "Illusions about Private Property and Freedom"