

Ethics and Social Issues

PHIL 210-01

Spring 2013

Selected academic essays general articles and other materials on a variety of pressing and controversial ethical issues connected with distributive and retributive justice, abortion, euthanasia, personal autonomy, and preferential practices are examined in the light of classical and modern ethical theories and models.

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Hall

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Class Meets: Wednesdays, 9:30-12:20 in DeKalb 308

Office Hours: Dekalb 103. After class (Wednesday 12:30-2:30) and by appointment.

Course Website: Our course will use the LMS (Learning Management System) extensively. This is accessed through my.pratt.edu. Please be sure that you can access this site. Contact me immediately if you have any problems.

Readings: All readings are in .pdf format on LMS. If you ever have difficulty downloading a reading, please contact me.

All readings are mandatory unless noted otherwise. Where more than one reading is assigned, I recommend reading them in the order in which I have posted them.

Always bring the week's assigned reading to class, whether printed out or on computer or electronic device.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. For each unexcused absence after the first, your final grade will be lowered by "one step," e.g., from an A- to a B+.

Evaluation:

Paper 1:	20%
Paper 2:	25%
Midterm Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	25%
Discussion Forums:	5%
Participation:	5%

Grading

100-97%	A+	89.99...-87%	B+	79.99...-77%	C+	69.99...%-60%	D
96.99...-93%	A	86.99...-83%	B	76.99...-73%	C	<59.99...%	F
92.99...-90%	A-	82.99...-80%	B-	72.99...-70%	C-		

The lower boundary for each letter grade is the cut-off. (The cut-off has to come somewhere.) So, I don't generally round grades up.

Papers: Papers will address the readings and issued discussed in class. They should respond to assigned topics (which will be distributed at least two weeks in advance) and should be between 1500 and 2500 words in length (roughly, between 5 and 8 pages double spaced).

They should be submitted to me as an attachment by email.

Papers should be in .doc or .docx format.

More guidelines for writing the papers will be made available along with the paper topics.

Policy on late papers and extensions: Papers turned in late will initially be penalized “one step,” and then an additional step for every additional 48 hours that the paper is late. Extensions will only be provided where they are sought with good cause at least one week in advance (e.g., the paper is due during your “week from Hell,” when everything else is due), or in extraordinary circumstances (e.g., hospitalization, zombie attack, etc.). Since the papers are relatively short and will be assigned at least two weeks in advance, last minute extensions will not be provided, even if you have suddenly come down with a cold or the flu.

Citation and Plagiarism: No outside research will be required for these papers; in fact, I strongly recommend that you don’t do any. However, if you do use material or borrow ideas from sources other than the assigned readings, you *must* cite these: either with a footnote or a parenthetical citation. This includes internet sources. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and will result in receiving no credit for the assignment. Blatant plagiarism may also result in failing the class and in having the incident recorded on your academic transcript. (A warning: it is relatively easy for me to spot plagiarism and, when the source is on the internet, very easy to confirm. Considering the issue from a purely prudential point of view, I cannot imagine a situation where the risk you take by plagiarizing could be worth it.)

There are only two exceptions to this rule about citation. *First*, you do not have to cite sources from which you draw background information that is “common knowledge.” For example, if you are writing a paper about abortion and want to mention what year *Roe v. Wade* was decided, you don’t have to cite the encyclopedia where you find that fact. On the other hand, if you were to consult an encyclopedia that has an extended discussion of philosophical arguments and objections (not just background about persons or events), then that should be cited.

Second, you do not have to cite class notes or class discussions. We will consider everything that takes place in class as our common intellectual property. However, if you are borrowing an idea distinctly suggested to you by a classmate, it is polite (albeit not absolutely required) to acknowledge the debt in parentheses or in a footnote (e.g.: “I am indebted to Jon Rick for this point”).

Proofreading and Collaboration: Having others proofread your paper is permissible and, indeed, encouraged. You may discuss your paper with classmates and other students, but you must do the writing by yourself. Your paper should not be identical in structure to a classmates. Papers that resemble one another too closely will be penalized. (Unless you feel like you have received a large amount of help, this collaboration does not need to be cited).

Exams: There will be two in-class exams. They will feature a combination of short-answer and essay questions. Study guides will be provided at least one week in advance.

Discussion Forums: There is a Forum associated for each class with assigned reading. Before each class, you should post either a short question or objection relating to the day's reading or, alternatively, respond to a comment made by a classmate. All of your objections or comments should cite reasons for the view you hold; in this class, we are not interested in one another's simple prejudices. These postings need to be at least two or three sentences in length, but they can be longer.

An Example Exchange:

TOPIC: THE RIGHT NOT TO EXIST

Allen: "Quinsby claims that children have a right to be born without disabilities. He believes this right follows from the more general right not to be harmed. That is, since it would be wrong to blind another person, Quinsby reasons that it is wrong to give birth to a blind child. He argues that this means: first, that mothers ought to avoid behavior that causes harm to their fetuses; and second, where we know a fetus would be born disabled, that the fetus has a *right to an abortion*. The first claim seems reasonable to me. But the second seems mistaken. How can a person have a right not to exist? If the person did not exist, then who would be the right-holder?"

RE: THE RIGHT NOT TO EXIST

Beth: "Allen criticizes Quinsby's 'Right to be Aborted' argument, because he thinks it makes no sense to say that a person has a right not to exist. Although I agree with Allen that Quinsby's argument is problematic, I disagree with his criticism of it. If Quinsby really had claimed that someone can have a right *never* to have existed, then that would have been absurd. But that isn't what Quinsby is arguing for. He is arguing for the right to *cease* to exist. This is no more mysterious than the right of a person suffering from a terminal illness to end his own life. I think Quinsby's argument is mistaken for a different reason. Although it makes sense to say that it is worse to be disabled than not-disabled, it seems like most of us would choose to have been born with a disability as opposed to not having been born at all. So I doubt it is really in the fetus's interest to be aborted."

Credit will be awarded so long as your comment shows serious engagement with the reading. Comments that are mere digressions on matters only tangentially related to the reading will not receive credit. (I will let you know if one of your posts has not passed muster).

To receive full credit for this portion of the grade, you need to post ten times. (There are twelve opportunities for posting, so that means you are free to miss two posts. No extra credit for extra posts.)

For a post to receive credit, it must be submitted at least one hour before class. (That way I have a chance to look at them before class). No late submissions will be accepted under any circumstances. (Or, rather, the circumstances will have to be exceptional enough to get your dean involved: e.g., hospitalization, zombie attack, etc.).

Participation: Three hours is a long time to just sit and listen. The class will go by a lot more quickly if you participate. Moreover, it's 5% of your final grade. Someone who never participates will (logically) not get any credit for participation. *Someone who always participates, shows proper classroom etiquette, and demonstrates familiarity with the week's readings will receive full credit.* People who fall somewhere in between those two poles will receive credit in due proportion.

Classroom Etiquette: A course like "Ethics and Social Issues" raises special challenges in classroom etiquette. Because most people feel strongly about at least some of the issues we will address, it is easy for tempers to flare in discussing them. For this reason, it is important to make a sincere effort to show respect for your classmates, especially when you disagree with them. At the same time, we can't think freely if we don't feel allowed to speak freely, so you shouldn't worry about *what* you say offending someone, so long as the *manner* of what you say is respectful.

In general, it is best if we approach issues in class with the mindset, not of competitors in a debate, but as fellow seekers for the truth. A good philosopher will be happy to change his views if someone shows him good reasons for doing so.

It is also better if you keep your comments relatively short. Your classmates will likely get annoyed with you if you are often long-winded. For the purposes of time-management, I may (like a good NPR talk-show host) occasionally have to cut you off or help you state your point more concisely.

Finally, a part of classroom etiquette is being engaged and listening when others are speaking. It is, for example, bad manners to sleep, text, or surf the web during class and doing so will negatively impact your participation grade.

Thursdays 9:30-12:20	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT
16-Jan	<i>Introduction to Ethics and Social Issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hugh LaFollette, "The Ethical Impulse" • Stephen Darwall, "Theories of Ethics"
23-Jan	<i>Liberalism, Moralism, & Paternalism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Stuart Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>, chs. 1, 4, 5
30-Jan	<i>Pornography and Control of Offensive Behavior</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joel Feinberg, <i>Offense to Others</i>, chs. 7-8 • Catharine MacKinnon, "Pornography: On Morality and Politics"
6-Feb	<i>Abortion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" • Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
13-Feb	<i>Euthanasia and Advance Directives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ronald Dworkin, <i>Life's Dominion</i>, chs. 7-8
20-Feb	<i>Duties to Animals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tom Regan, "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism"
24-Feb (Sun)	FIRST PAPER DUE	***
27-Feb	<i>Environmental Ethics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional: Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" • J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair" • Robert Elliot, "Faking Nature"
6-Mar	MIDTERM EXAM	***
13-Mar	<i>Spring Break</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go Home, or • Go Skiing, or • Go to Beach, or • Go to Europe, or • Get some sleep
20-Mar	<i>Distributive Justice and the Ethics of Capitalism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (selections) • Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (selections)
27-Mar	<i>Equal Opportunity and Preferential Practices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Nagel, "Equal Treatment and Compensatory Discrimination" • Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Preferential Hiring"
3-Apr	<i>Immigration and Citizenship</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Walzer, "Membership" • Joseph Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders"
10-Apr	<i>Affluence and Global Poverty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" • Garrett Hardin, "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor"
17-Apr	<i>Punishment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cesare Beccaria, <i>Of Crimes and Punishments</i> • Immanuel Kant, "The Right to Punish" • Alan Goldman, "Paradox of Punishment"
24-Apr	<i>Ethics of War</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Walzer, <i>Just and Unjust Wars</i> (selections)
28-Apr (Sun)	SECOND PAPER DUE	***
1-May	FINAL EXAM	***