Contemporary Moral Issues (Phil 140)

Syllabus, Spring 2009

Mon/Wed 12:00-12:50; SHM 2102

This course explores currently debated issues concerning life and death. It introduces you to philosophical reasoning on controversial topics including abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment. The course aims to help you to develop your ability to understand, evaluate, and construct arguments in the realm of applied ethics.

Go to Schedule

Teaching Assistants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jason Christie</th>
<th>Logan Fletcher</th>
<th>Andrew Knoll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sections</td>
<td>0103, 0107, 0108</td>
<td>0101, 0102, 0109</td>
<td>0104, 0105, 0106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>Skinner 1121</td>
<td>Skinner 1118A</td>
<td>Skinner 1107A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>301-405-5841</td>
<td>301-405-5747</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jason.christie1@gmail.com">jason.christie1@gmail.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:loganf@umd.edu">loganf@umd.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:knoll.andrew@gmail.com">knoll.andrew@gmail.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Office Hours</td>
<td>Tues. 12-1:30 or by appointment</td>
<td>Wed. 1-3</td>
<td>Tues. 1-3</td>
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Web page:

http://www.philosophy.umd.edu/Faculty/SKerstein/cmispring2009syllabus.html

This page will contain links to outlines of lectures, sample exam questions, paper topics, and so forth.

The web page is the official syllabus for the course. Changes in schedule and readings will be noted on it. You are expected to consult it regularly.

Texts:

All readings are available as PDF files on the ELMS (Blackboard) site for this course. There is no textbook.

Requirements:

Three examinations (including a final), two 3-page papers, and quizzes

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<th></th>
<th>6 during semester</th>
<th>15% of grade</th>
<th>4 best scores count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>February 16</td>
<td>15% of grade</td>
<td>On Intro - Part 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>due March 6</td>
<td>15% of grade</td>
<td>topics to be announced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>15% of grade</td>
<td>On Parts 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>April 22</td>
<td>15% of grade</td>
<td>topics to be announced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>Tuesday, May 19 8:00-10:00 am</td>
<td>25% of grade</td>
<td>On Parts 5-8</td>
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Academic integrity:

- The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any
unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination." The Pledge statement should be handwritten and signed on the front of your exams and papers. Students who fail to write and sign the Pledge will be asked to confer with the instructor.

- The Student Honor Council identifies four types of academic dishonesty: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes dishonesty of these four types. Please consult the Student Honor Council Website or speak to the instructor or a teaching assistant if you would like any clarification (e.g., regarding what constitutes plagiarism).
- The teaching assistants and I take incidents of academic dishonesty very seriously. We will forward to the office of judicial programs any cases of it that come to our attention.

**Discussion sections:**

- They are an integral part of this course. You are expected to attend them. (Note that several quizzes will be given in discussion sections.)
- If your teaching assistant judges that you have performed well in discussion sections and your grade is on a borderline, then your assistant may push it upward.

**Exams:**

- Exams will test your comprehension of material presented in readings, lectures, and discussion sections. They may contain true/false or multiple choice questions, and they will contain essay questions. Please note that you will be expected to understand details from the readings even if these details are not covered specifically in lectures.
- If you have a university-approved excuse for missing an examination, you may take a make-up. However, you must alert your teaching assistant (by email or phone) that you will be absent prior to the exam, unless unusual circumstances prevent you from doing so.

**Grading:**

- Your final grade will depend on the percentage you earn of the total points possible in the class: A+: 98-100; A: 94-97; A: 90-93; B+: 87-89; B: 84-86; B-: 80-83; C+: 77-79; C: 74-76; C-: 70-73; D+: 67-69; D: 64-66; D: 60-63.
- There will be no opportunities for extra credit. (But recall that if your teaching assistant judges that you have performed well in discussion sections and your grade is on a borderline, then your assistant may push it upward.)
- Failure to complete an assignment will result in your receiving no points (a zero) for that assignment.
- If you wish to contest your grade on a paper or exam, you must do so within two weeks of that assignment's being graded and made available to you. You must meet first with your teaching assistant. If you still do not find your grade reasonable, you may consult with Professor Kerstein. However, you should keep in mind that he will assign you the grade he believes you deserve, even if it is lower than that originally assigned to you by your teaching assistant.

**Papers:**

- Paper topics will be distributed approximately 7 days before the papers are due.
- Unless accompanied by a university-approved excuse, papers will be penalized one full grade for each school day they are late. For example, if your paper is due on Monday, you may turn it in on Tuesday, but then the highest grade you could receive on the paper would be a B+.
- Papers will not be accepted via email.

**Quizzes:**

- The two lowest of your six quiz scores will be dropped from your final grade. Only university approved excuses will enable you to make up a missed quiz.
- If you wish to make up a missed quiz, you must inform your teaching assistant no more than one week after the date the quiz was given, unless extraordinary circumstances, e.g., extended illness, prevent you from doing so. It is your responsibility to determine whether a quiz was given during a session you did not attend.
- Quizzes, which last approximately 5 minutes, focus on details of the reading for the day of the quiz or prior readings in the part of the course with which we are concerned on the day of the quiz. Suppose, for example, that we are on Part 3 of the course, namely Abortion. On one session during our study of this topic, we might have a quiz. That session might be a Friday discussion. The quiz will focus either on the reading for this session (if there is any) or some prior reading regarding abortion. You are responsible for doing the readings assigned for a particular day before coming to class.
- The dates for quizzes will not be announced in advance. Quizzes will often be given at the very beginning of class (including at the beginning of discussion sections). If you arrive late and miss all or part of a quiz, you will not be permitted to make it up, unless, of course, you provide a university approved excuse for your lateness.
Religious Observances:

- You will not be penalized for any absence that results from religious observance.
- However, it is your responsibility to inform your teaching assistant in advance of any intended absences for religious observance. (You should notify him or her by February 4th.)

Students with Disabilities:

- Students with disabilities should inform the instructor of their needs as soon as possible so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

Schedule:

(Readings might be altered as the course progresses. If there are any changes, they will be posted on the course web page and announced in class.)

Introduction

Jan 26: Introduction
Jan. 28: Arguments

1: Animal Rights

Feb. 2: Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal"
Feb. 4: Carl Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research"

2: Relativism and Objectivism

Feb. 9: Ruth Benedict: "Anthropology and the Abnormal"
Feb. 11: James Rachels: "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Sample Exam Questions
Feb. 16: Exam 1

3: Abortion

Feb. 18: Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion" 302-307 (II and the "Postscript on Infanticide")
Feb. 23: Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"
Feb. 25: Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" continued

Paper 1 Topics
March 2: Judith Jarvis Thomson: "A Defense of Abortion"
March 4: Judith Jarvis Thomson: "A Defense of Abortion" continued

March 6: Paper 1 due in discussion sections

4: Euthanasia

March 9: James Rachels: "Active and Passive Euthanasia"
March 11: Dan W. Brock: "Voluntary Active Euthanasia"

Spring Break
March 23: Leon Kass: "Is There a Right to Die"?

March 30: Exam 2

5: Capital Punishment

April 1: Immanuel Kant on retributivism: selection from the Metaphysics of Morals and "Woman Blinded by Spurned Man Invokes Islamic Retribution"

April 6: Jeffrey Reiman: "Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty"

April 8: Jeffrey Reiman: "Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty" continued

6: World Hunger

April 13: Peter Singer: "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

April 15: James R. Otteson, "Limits on Our Obligation to Give" [Skip Section III]

Paper 2 Topics

April 20: Singer vs. Otteson continued

7: Organ Shortage

April 22: Paper 2 due and Arthur Matas: "The Case for Living Kidney Sales: Rationale, Objections and Concerns"

April 27: Kantian Condemnation of Commerce in Organs [No reading]

8: Enhancement

April 29: Class canceled

May 4: Michael Sandel: "The Case Against Perfection"

May 6: Frances Kamm: "Is There a Problem with Enhancement?" (You will not be tested on section II of this essay. Skip reading this section if you like.)

May 11: Julien Savulescu: "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children"

May 19 (Tuesday), 8:00-10:00 AM, Final Exam

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