

PHIL. 240.H01 INTRODUCTION TO MORAL ISSUES

E.U.P., Spring 2015

MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m., Hendricks 201

Instructor: Stephen J. Sullivan, Ph.D

Office Hours: MW 9:30-10:30 a.m. (main campus); TTh 10:00-11:00, 3:00-4:00 (Porreco) and by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, which is approved for General Education credit in Core 6, we will critically examine a wide range of ethical theories, or accounts of the basic principles of morality. In the process we will take a look at seven concrete moral issues: abortion, recreational drugs, racial profiling, the rights of people with disabilities, male vs. female privilege, and white privilege. The only prerequisite is a willingness to think hard about the content and reasonableness of your own ethical views and to take alternative views seriously.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Like virtually all philosophy courses, this is a critical thinking course designed to promote clear thinking and careful, thoughtful reasoning. In particular, in accordance with the informal “prerequisite”, the course is primarily intended to enhance both your understanding of your own ethical values and your ability to express them in informed, intelligent ethical judgments. (The work you do in your mini-essay, debate, critical essay, and final-exam essay will reflect that understanding and ability.) To this end the course is also designed to acquaint you with a variety of important ethical theories and concrete, controversial moral issues. (Your mastery of these theories and issues will especially be assessed in the multiple-choice tests.)

The course is in no way intended to convert students to the instructor’s own views on the theoretical and practical ethical issues we explore, and he will strive to remain neutral in class on these issues. But this does not preclude occasional critical comments on specific arguments explained in lecture; for even if one argument for or against an ethical claim fails, another may succeed. If you ever think the instructor is being unfair to some position we consider, please let him know—in class or out of class.

REQUIRED READINGS (BESIDES THIS SYLLABUS!):

Assigned chapters from James Rachels and Stuart Rachels (editors), The Right Thing to Do, 6th edition (RTD) and James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 7th edition (EMP) --available at the campus store or (more cheaply?) from internet booksellers such as Amazon.com; note that these latest editions are indeed required due to significant differences from earlier ones, and that one copy of each will be on reserve at the front desk of Baron-Forness Library.

Two assigned articles online in Baron-Forness Library electronic reserve: Robert C. Mortimer, “Morality is Based on God’s Commands” (under Divine Command Theory) and Randall

Kennedy, “Suspect Policy” (under Racial Profiling)-- EUP website, Academics and Research, Library, Docutek, Electronic Reserves, Sullivan, Go, course, ssullivan (password), accept .

Assigned handouts on electronic reserve (the study-guide ones written by your instructor are most important)

Handouts distributed in class: lists of alleged white privileges, male/female privilege

Word to the wise: If you fall behind on the readings, you do so at your own peril. The assigned readings are not lengthy, but they are sometimes challenging (especially the RTD chapters). If you hate reading, you may struggle in this course; but don't be afraid to ask questions in class or outside of class.

REQUIRED WORK:

Mini-essay on your moral values (typed, doublespaced, one to two pages), worth 5%: due 2nd class (see page 7 for specific questions to answer)

Debate participation, worth 10%. Sign-up begins 1st class; topics include abortion, recreational drug use, racial profiling, torture, male vs. female privilege, and white privilege. If you are unable to appear in any debate, you must write a short (typed, doublespaced, 3-pp.) paper on one of the debate topics by the last day of Week 14 in which you explain the issue and defend a position on it.

Three multiple-choice tests, worth 15% each: W 2/18, M 3/30, F 5/1

Critical essay (typed, doublespaced, five pages), worth 20%: due F 4/17 (see page 7- 8 for details).

Final exam, worth 20%: F 10/8 12:30 (the essay question is given on pages 8-9).

Further points to note:

- (a) **There is a “six strikes means you’re penalized” attendance policy for unexcused absences: if you miss six classes (two full weeks) without a legitimate, documentable excuse then your final grade is reduced one full letter grade. The penalty is the same for every three classes after that.** (See “Grading Policies” below, p. 5, on legitimate excuses.)
- (b) Individual class participation may affect borderline final grades.
- (c) On extra-credit possibilities see “Grading Policies” below, pp. 6-7.

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1: W 1/21 – F 1/23

W: Introduction to the course; mini-essay assigned

F: Introduction to normative ethics; poll; MINI-ESSAY DUE

Rdgs.: EMP preface and Ch. 1 (RTD Ch. 1, a helpful overview, is optional), “Some Options in Normative Ethical Theory” handout

Week 2: M 1/26 – F 1/30

M: Metaethical prologue

Rdgs.: RTD, Ch. 2, “Metaethical Prologue” handout

W: Introduction to cultural relativism

Rdgs.: RTD pp. 2-3, EMP Ch. 2; “Relativism”, “No Offense”, and “Chinese Voices...” Handouts (optional is “America the Untethered” handout)

F: Arguments for relativism

Rdgs.: EMP, Ch. 2, “Relativism” and “Moral-Diversity Argument” handouts

Week 3: M 2/2 – F 2/6

M: Objections to relativism

Rdgs.: EMP, Ch. 2, “Relativism” and “Is Terrorism Wrong?” handouts (optional are “The Plight of Indian Widows” and “Afghanistan’s Dirty Little Secret”)

W: Introduction to divine-command theory

Rdgs.: RTD pp. 3-5, EMP Ch. 4 (except Section 4.3), “Divine-Command Theory”, “Biblical Passages... Relevant to Divine-Command Theory”, and “Trends in Religious Beliefs...” handouts (optional are “Golden Rule” and “Carl Sagan’s List...” handouts)

F: Arguments for D-C theory

Rdgs.: Mortimer article (on electronic reserve), “D-C Theory” handout

Week 4: M 2/9 – F 2/13

M: Objections to D-C theory

Rdgs.: EMP Sec. 4.2, “D-C Theory”, “Christian Jihad”, and “Moral Implausibility Problems for Deuteronomy” handouts

W: Introduction to abortion

Rdgs.: “The Morality of Abortion”, “Legal Status of Abortion...”, “Facts on Induced Abortion...”, “Human Fetal Development” handouts (optional are EMP Chs. 11-13 and corresponding handouts: “Marquis on Abortion”, “Thomson on Abortion”, “Mary Anne Warren’s Position on Abortion”)

F: Religion and abortion

Rdgs.: “Abortion, the Bible, and the Will of God”, “Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Abortion” handouts, EMP Sec. 4.4

Week 5: M 2/16 – F 2/20

M: Test review; introduction to Kantian ethics

Rdgs.: RTD pp. 17-18 and Ch. 7, “Kantian Ethics” handout

W: FIRST TEST (covering introduction to ethics, metaethical prologue, relativism, D-C theory, abortion)

F: ABORTION DEBATE

Week 6: M 2/23 – F 2/27

M: Kant’s universal-law principle

- Rdgs.: EMP Secs. 9.2 and 9.5, “Kantian Ethics” and “Family Circus” handouts
 W: Problem cases for the U-L principle (and application to abortion and gay sex, if time permits)
 F: Kant’s respect-for-persons principle and racial equality
 Rdgs.: EMP Ch. 10 (esp. Sec. 10.1), RTD Ch. 31, “Kantian Ethics” handout (optional are RTD, Ch. 39 and “Human Factor” handout)

Week 7: M 3/2 – F 3/6

- M: Problems for R-P principle
 Rdgs.: “Animal Abuse” and “Drawing the Wrong Conclusions...” handouts (optional are RTD, Chs. 14-16; Ch. 14 is especially recommended)
 W: Kant’s rigorism about moral motivation and his absolutism about lying
 Rdgs.: EMP Secs. 9.1, 9.3-9.4
 F: Kantian arguments concerning drug abuse and legalizing recreational drugs
 Rdg.: RTD Ch. 25

SPRING BREAK!

Week 8: M 3/16 – F 3/20

- M: The marijuana controversy
 Rdgs.: “Five Reasons Cops Want to Legalize Marijuana”, “How Does Marijuana Affect Your Brain and Body?”, “Sugary Drinks Linked to 180,000 Deaths Each Year” handouts (optional are “Pot-Smoking and the Schizophrenia Connection”, “Teen Marijuana Use May Show No Effect on Brain Tissue, Unlike Alcohol”)
 W: Introduction to racial profiling
 Rdgs.: “The Nature and Morality of Racial Profiling”, “When Is It Okay to Racially Profile?” handouts (optional but recommended are “Lowering Profiling’s Profile”, “Terror Fears...”, “Michael Brown and Disparity of Due Process” handouts)
 F: RECREATIONAL DRUG DEBATE

Week 9: M 3/23 – F 3/27

- M: Kennedy on racial profiling
 Rdg.: Kennedy’s “Suspect Policy” (on electronic reserve)
 W: RACIAL PROFILING DEBATE
 F: Test review, discussion of Brown killing in Ferguson, MO?
 Rdgs.: “Most White People in America...”, “Report: Gun Deaths of Police on Increase”, “Charles Barkley Says Ferguson Rioters Are ‘Scumbags’” handouts

Week 10: M 3/30 – F 4/3

- M: SECOND TEST (Kantian ethics, recreational drugs, racial profiling)
 W: Introduction to utilitarianism; APRIL FOOL’S DAY COSTUME/BAD TIE CONTESTS?
 Rdgs.: RTD pp. 12-14 and Ch. 3, “Utilitarianism” handout (optional are RTD Ch. 5 and EMP Sec. 13.4)
 F: Arguments for and against u-ism
 Rdgs.: EMP Chs. 7-8, “U-ism” handout (optional but recommended is RTD Ch. 4)

Week 11: M 4/6 – F 4/10

M: The Iraqi-father case; introduction to disability rights

Rdgs.: “Father’s Choice...”, and “...Would You Kill One Person to Save Five?” handouts; “Americans With Disabilities Act: Findings and Purposes” and “Current Conditions”

W: More on disability rights

Rdgs.: “ADA and Related Matters”, “Unemployment and Poverty...” handouts

F: Guest speakers with disabilities (if available)

Week 12: M 4/13 – F 4/17

M: Introduction to feminism and Gilligan’s feminist ethics

Rdgs.: EMP Ch. 11 (optional is RTD Ch. 10), “Carol Gilligan/Psychologist” and “Difference Feminism Regarding Ethics” handouts (optional are “Definition of Feminism” and “Listening For the Voices of Women”)

W: More on feminist ethics

Rdgs.: “The Male Privilege Checklist”, “Suggestions for Female Privileges in the U.S.” handouts, distributed in class

F: Male vs. female privilege; CRITICAL ESSAY DUE

Rdgs.: White Privilege checklist from McIntosh, distributed in class (optional are “How Bill O’Reilly Could Learn About White Privilege”, “Chris Rock is Right...”, “Pallor Games”)

Week 13: M 4/20 – F 4/24

M: Introduction to white privilege

W: GENDER PRIVILEGE DEBATE

F: “True Colors” DVD and discussion

Week 14: M 4/27 – F 5/1

M: WHITE PRIVILEGE DEBATE

W: Discussion of Garner killing in NYC and related matters

Rdgs.: “Indicting a Cop is Uncommon”, “The Cop Mind” handouts (optional: “Teacher’s Suit Settled” handout)

F: THIRD TEST (u-ism, disability rights, feminist ethics, gender privilege, white privilege)

Week 15: M 5/4

M: Exam review, course evaluations, questions(?) about instructor’s views

FINAL EXAM: F 5/8 12:30 p.m.

GRADING POLICIES:

Daily attendance will be taken. If you leave early without advance permission you may be marked absent. If you accumulate **six or more** unexcused absences (two full weeks of class) your overall course grade will be lowered by one full letter grade; similarly for every three absences after that. An absence is excused only if it is a documentable case of illness, family emergency, etc.; but everyone gets one free “flat-tire” excuse.

Arriving late is rude and often disruptive; if you are repeatedly late then your course grade may be lowered one-third of a letter grade or more. (But it's better to be late, especially if it's only by a few minutes, than to miss a class!) If you need to leave class early, let the instructor know in advance if possible (exception: you feel sick and/or need to get to the bathroom).

Cell phones must be turned off or put on vibrate mode when you enter the classroom.

Your instructor reserves the right to answer your phone for you should it go off in class.:

Texting during class may lead to expulsion from class. Good classroom manners require staying awake no matter how tired you are, or going elsewhere if this proves impossible. Hoods and hats that obscure a student's face may not be worn during class-time (though caps are normally permitted); likewise for sunglasses (without special permission).

The lateness penalty for the mini-essay and critical essay is one-third of a letter grade per day (including weekends and holidays); extensions are difficult but not impossible to obtain. Tests must be taken on the scheduled dates, except, again, in documentable cases of illness, etc. If you must take a test late then it may be a somewhat different one from the one your classmates took. If you miss a test without a legitimate excuse then your eventual grade on that test may be lowered significantly.

To count as having participated in a debate, you must speak at least once. If you take part in more than one debate, your official debate grade for the course will be the higher of your individual debate grades. If you fail to take part in any debate and fail to write a 3-page paper in its place, you get an F (zero) for that portion of your course grade.

Anyone who is caught cheating on a test will receive an F (zero) on it. Plagiarism on any extra-credit writing will disqualify the student from receiving any extra credit for the course.

Extra credit may be earned in any of the seven following ways (once per way):

- (a) If your side in your assigned debate wins, your lowest quiz grade will be raised five percentage points (four in the case of a tie).
- (b) If you serve as moderator in a class debate, your lowest quiz grade will be raised three percentage points (fewer if you do a lousy job, more if you do an excellent one).
- (c) If you participate in a debate to which you were not assigned, then your lowest quiz grade will be raised three percentage points (five if your side wins, four if it ties).
- (d) If you attend a movie, play, public lecture, sermon, etc. that is relevant to the course, and you summarize *and evaluate* its ethical content in two (typed, double-spaced) pages, your lowest quiz grade will be raised five points (more for especially thoughtful papers, less for short, superficial ones). Check with your instructor if you're unsure whether a movie, play, lecture, etc. is relevant.
- (e) If you write a letter to the editor of the EUP *Spectator* (voices.spectator@gmail.com), or a newspaper such as the Erie *Times-News* (letters@timesnews.com), in which you

take a public stand on an ethical issue, then your lowest quiz grade will be raised four points (more for an especially thoughtful letter). The letter should be sent by email (with a cc— preferably a blind cc--to ssullivan@edinboro.edu), and should include your full name and phone number, so that its authenticity can be verified by the paper. But it need not be published—something beyond your control—in order to count for extra credit.

(f) Similarly for a private letter to a politician, record-company executive, etc. The email address of the President, for example, is comments@whitehouse.gov .

(g) Usually my Moral Issues students have an interest in our holding a holiday-costume contest: for Halloween in the fall, April Fool's Day in the spring. There is a little extra credit just for participating, more for winning a prize (as determined by class vote).

We'll talk more about this as the holiday approaches.

All extra-credit written work must be turned in before Friday midnight in Week 14 (*not* on the exam date); if sent by email attachment it should be a Microsoft Word file (.doc or .docx) or Text file (.txt) or in rich text format (.rtf). (If your computer has Wordperfect, you can convert a document to Word by going File, Save As, then adding .doc to the document name.) Your lowest test grade cannot be raised above the 100% level; no additional extra-credit points will carry over to any other test.

OPENING MINI-ESSAY (1-2 pp. typed and doublespaced, due second class):

Answer the following questions:

- (a) What are your moral values? (Ask yourself what moral rules or principles you accept and would want to pass on to any children you do or might have; AND what qualities you think a morally good or virtuous person possesses.)
- (b) In your view, do the qualities of a good woman differ at all from those of a good man, and if so, how? I.e.: should we judge women and men by different moral standards, and if so, how?

CRITICAL ESSAY (5-ish pp. typed and doublespaced, due F 4/17):

You have three options for this essay:

- (a) Write a critical analysis of Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (RTD, Ch. 12).
- (b) Write a critical analysis of David Luben, "Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Time Bomb" (RTD, Ch. 23).
- (c) Write an essay on the ethics of public shaming in which you consider at least three of the following cases: Roman Polanski's alleged rape of a thirteen-year-old, Stephen Collins' admitted molesting of several minors (two under thirteen) , R. Kelly's alleged predation on mid-teen girls, Michael Jackson's alleged child-molesting, Casey Anthony's alleged

murder of her child, Bill Cosby's alleged commission of serial rape, William Garvey's alleged molesting of several preadolescent boys. What these cases (and related ones) have in common is that the alleged victimizers have never been legally punished for their alleged crime, nor have they (except for Collins) accepted responsibility for it. The question therefore arises whether society should impose (or in the case of Jackson, should have imposed when he was alive) an extralegal social punishment consisting in public shaming: ostracism and/or boycotting of their performances, records, etc. or of any organizations they run.

Concerning options (a) and (b), the following instructions apply:

--For present purposes, writing a critical analysis involves explaining the author's views as carefully and accurately as you can and then evaluating them—from your own perspective, of course—for reasonableness or correctness. Identify as best you can the author's *thesis* in the selection and his *arguments* for that thesis; be as fair as you can in explaining his position. Are the author's arguments persuasive, and why or why not? Do you have any objections to offer against the thesis itself?

--If you see connections between the issues in the selection you choose and any ethical theories we examine in this course, you are encouraged to call attention to them. This is not required, but it shows thoughtfulness on your part.

--Try not to quote the author too much; your essay shows more insight if you are able to express his or her ideas in your own words (though especially striking passages may be well worth quoting). **Be sure to use quotation marks whenever you do quote, and give page references for both quotations and paraphrases.** There is no need to use any special citation format when citing the author himself or herself; a parenthetical citation with author's name and page number is sufficient (e.g., 'Thomson, p. 103'). But if you use any other sources—which you need not do!-- you should indicate them in a full citation with or without a bibliography. It's preferable that you think these matters through for yourselves rather than do extensive research, but you can go beyond the text if you wish (especially when complex or controversial factual issues are involved).

Concerning option (c), I shall more to say in class and perhaps in a separate handout. For now I will just note that you will need to give proper citations of any sources you use as well as full bibliographical information about those sources.

Don't hesitate to let me know if you encounter any difficulties.

FINAL- EXAM ESSAY QUESTION:

Using the ideas you developed in your mini-essay (and any you have developed since then), tell me again what your **basic moral values** are, and what your **idea of a good person** is. If any of the ethical theories we have examined in this course has influenced how you think about those values, feel free to make use of it. Be sure to indicate what **motive(s)**, if any, you think a person **should** have for doing what is right. And give at least one **reason or argument** for thinking that

your overall ethical view is true. (If you are a moral skeptic in regarding all ethical beliefs as unjustified, then give an argument for your skepticism!)

In the course of your essay, tell me both which ethical theory of right and wrong you believe is the **best** one (and why) and which you believe is the **worst** one (and why). Don't pick any generic theory (generic relativism or generic natural-law ethics). Be sure to explain briefly but accurately what those theories say, and to give one possible **strong point** (supporting argument) and one possible **weak point** (difficulty) for each of them. (Again, if you are a moral skeptic you can find ways of using your moral tastes or preferences to answer these questions!)

Tips and cautions:

- (1) In explaining your moral values, try to be concrete and specific: don't stay solely at the level of abstract principles. For example: if you cite the Golden Rule, tell me what it says, and try to indicate by means of at least one example what it requires in practice. (If you're still not sure what to give in the way of concrete, specific values, at least state your positions on some controversial ethical issues.
- (2) Don't presuppose points made in class (for instance, "That case of the Iraqi father you talked about in connection with utilitarianism..."), but instead spell them out. Remember, you're trying to show you understand what you're writing about!
- (3) If you borrow an argument from an ethical theory in order to defend your own values, find a different argument or "strong point" for that theory if it's the one you call best. In other words: no "double dipping"!
- (4) You may treat Kant's universal-law and respect-for-persons principles as separate ethical theories of right and wrong, and/or combine each with rigorism or absolutism.
- (5) Your instructor places a premium on **thoughtfulness** in this essay. Also important is **accuracy** in explaining ethical concepts. In principle, every student can get an A on the essay if they take the questions seriously and do enough preparatory work!

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES:

If you have a disability requiring special accommodation, please let me know as soon as written documentation is available from the USI Counseling Center. Your instructor will work with you and the Disability Support Services staff to provide reasonable accommodations so that you have a fair opportunity to succeed in class.

