

Contemporary Social and Moral Problems in the U.S.

PHILOSOPHY 2367

FALL 2013 OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Instructor: Dr. Lindsay Rettler,

Time and Location: Wed/Fri 8:00-9:20 am, 259 Hagerty Hall

Contact: rettler.2@osu.edu

Office Hours: Wed 9:30-10:30 am, Fri 10:30-11:30 am, 214 University Hall

Course Description

This is an intensive writing course in the philosophy of applied ethics. After an introduction to basic logic, and some normative ethical theories, we'll launch into discussing a variety of particular ethical problems, including abortion, gun control, legalization of marijuana, and climate change. Many of you probably already have opinions about the issues we're covering; in this class you'll be learning to defend such opinions with careful reasoning and respond to objections. At the end of the semester you should have a better understanding of how to identify and articulate arguments in ethics, as well as how to critically evaluate them. You'll also develop your writings skills, especially in the area of structured arguments.

This course satisfies the following GE Requirements:

GE Diversity: Social Diversity in the US

GE Writing and Communication: level 2

Required Texts

- *What's Wrong? Applied Ethicists and Their Critics* (2005), 2nd edition, (eds.) David Boonin and Graham Oddie, Oxford University Press.
- Additional articles that I will supply via Carmen.

Course Requirements

Participation, 10%

The class is primarily based around discussion of the arguments presented in the text. You are expected to come to class regularly and participate in class discussion. The articles we're reading can be difficult and dense and you will almost certainly not get what you need out of them by simply reading them by yourself. You should take notes on what you read, write down any question you have, and be prepared to talk about the readings in class.

One Exposition Paper, 2-3 pages, 10%

This paper will test your ability to interpret and articulate one or more arguments from the articles were reading. You'll extract an author's argument and carefully summarize it in your own words. This skill is crucial to master before launching into criticism of an argument.

Two Critical Papers, 4-5 pages, 20% each (40% total)

In these papers you'll articulate the argument of a particular author and then critically engage with that argument. You should spend approximately half of the paper reconstructing the author's argument and the other half developing your critique.

Final Paper Draft, 7-10 pages, 15%

This is a full draft of your final paper (more instructions below). You should write it as though it were the real thing, because that is how I will be grading it. If you turn in a sketchy outline or a series of claims about what you plan to argue you will fail this assignment. I expect that all of the paper drafts will benefit from constructive feedback, so you will modify this draft in response to my comments and turn it in as your final paper. If you do not modify your draft at all, you will receive the same grade for the final copy as you receive for the draft less one partial grade (e.g. your A on the draft becomes an A- on the final if you don't update it in response to feedback). Part of the point of this draft is to learn how to incorporate philosophical feedback and respond accordingly, so I suggest you do your best to seriously alter your paper in response to my criticisms.

Final Paper, 7-10 pages, 25%

In this paper you will argue for your preferred position on one of our topics. You need to clearly present the arguments in favor of your view, show that you understand how people might object to it, and explain how you can respond to their objections. Make sure to engage and reference the authors and arguments we've read in class, but do your best to go beyond them in some significant way. Make your *own* contribution.

Administrative Issues**Late Assignments**

All papers are due at the beginning of class, with the exception of the second critical paper and the final paper, which must be uploaded to Carmen by 11:59pm on their due dates. Please upload your files as either a PDF or a Microsoft Word document. Late papers will be penalized one partial grade per day starting with the due date. I understand that emergencies happen, so come talk to me if you encounter a problem that prevents you from turning in your papers on time. If, however, you do not bother to make arrangements with me within 24-hours of the due date there is no way to avoid the penalty. Note: you must turn in all assignments to pass the course. There is no extra credit.

Classroom Conduct

We are discussing topics in this class that are difficult and controversial. They can also be very personal. You have no idea how the people in the room may be personally connected to these issues. Because of this we all need to be very careful how we conduct ourselves. Of course people will disagree—one of the goals of the class is to explore such disagreement in a critical and structured manner. However, in presenting your own thoughts make sure you speak with respect and professionalism. Make sure you've listened carefully to what others are trying to say before you jump in. Anything that might be perceived as insulting or a personal attack will not be tolerated.

Office Hours

I am always available during office hours to discuss any questions about the course material or philosophy in general. You will benefit the most if you come talk to me early on about anything confusing and if you discuss written work at least several days before its due. I'm also happy to answer questions via email. If my scheduled office hours don't work for you, please contact me to schedule a different time.

Academic Integrity

I will enforce Ohio State's policy on academic integrity and report all academic misconduct. You are responsible for making yourself aware of the relevant policies and procedures in the undergraduate catalog. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. Please find the student code of conduct at: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>.

Accommodation for Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform me as soon as possible of your needs. Please contact the Office of Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodation: <http://www.ods.osu.edu>.

Course Outline

- Reading must be completed before class on the day it is listed.
- Page numbers listed in parentheses are from *What's Wrong?* 2nd Edition.
- All readings not in *What's Wrong?* are found on Carmen.
- There will be no class during finals week because there is no final exam.
Use that week to work on revising your final paper.

ARGUMENTS AND LOGIC

W 8/21 Introduction

F 8/23 What's Wrong with Arguing? (1-24)

W 8/28 James Pryor: Some Good and Bad Forms of Arguments

James Pryor: Vocabulary Describing Arguments

James Pryor: How to Read Philosophy

ETHICAL THEORIES

F 8/30 Applied Ethics and Ethical Theory (24-30)

Richard Field (1999): Ethical Relativism

ABORTION

W 9/4 Don Marquis: Why Abortion is Immoral (58-69)

F 9/6 Gerald Paske: Abortion and the Neo-Natal Right to Life (70-75)

Alistair Norcross: Killing, Abortion, and Contraception (76-82)

Peter McInerney: Does a Fetus Already Have a Future Like Ours? (83-84)

James Pryor: How to Write A Philosophy Paper

W 9/11 Judith Jarvis Thomson: A Defense of Abortion (85-98)

F 9/13 Baruch Brody: Thomson on Abortion (99-100)

Francis Beckwith: Arguments from Bodily Rights (102-107)

EXPOSITION PAPER DUE

KILLING IN WAR

W 9/18 Robert Fullinwider: War and Innocence (33-39)

F 9/20 Lawrence Alexander: Self-Defense and the Killing of Noncombatants (40-43)

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

W 9/25 James Bedau: The Case Against the Death Penalty

F 9/27 Louis Pojman (2004): Why the Death Penalty is Morally Permissible

Ernest van den Haag (1985): The Death Penalty Once More

GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE AND PRIVACY

W 10/2 David Friedman (2005): The Case for Privacy

Marlinspike, Moxie (2013): Why 'I Have Nothing to Hide' is the Wrong Way to Think about Government Surveillance (wired.com/opinions)

F 10/4 James Taylor (2005): In Praise of Big Brother ***CRITICAL PAPER 1 DUE***

GUN CONTROL

W 10/9 Sam Harris (2013): Why I Own Guns (theweek.com)

F 10/11 Sean Faircloth (2013) Response to Harris: Why More Guns Won't Make Us Safer (theweek.com)

Jeff McMahan (2013): Why Gun 'Control' Is Not Enough (opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com)

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

W 10/16 Albert Mosley: The Case for Affirmative Action

F 10/18 Louis Pojman: The Case Against Affirmative Action

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

W 10/23 U.S. News: Should Gay Marriage Be Legal Nationwide? Read the 2 'NO' articles

F 10/25 U.S. News: Should Gay Marriage Be Legal Nationwide? Read the 2 'YES' articles
14th Amendment **CRITICAL PAPER 2 DUE**

LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

W 10/30 Intelligence Squared online debate: Legalize Drugs (watch up to 1:03:33)

F 11/1 Intelligence Squared online debate: Legalize Drugs (watch the rest)

PAPER WORKSHOP

W 11/6 James Pryor: How to Write a Philosophy Paper (again)

F 11/8 *No Class*

CLIMATE CHANGE

W 11/13 Martino Traxler: Fair Chore Division for Climate Change (601-616)

F 11/15 Stephen Gardiner: Ethics and Global Climate Change (617-618)

FINAL PAPER DUE

CHARITABLE GIVING

W 11/20 Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence, and Morality (131-141)

FINAL PAPER RETURNED IN CLASS

F 11/22 John Arthur: World Hunger and moral Obligation (142-145)

Michael Slote: Famine, Affluence, and Empathy (146-154)

W 11/27 *No Class – Thanksgiving Break*

F 11/29 *No Class – Thanksgiving Break*

Th 12/5 **FINAL PAPER REVISION DUE**

(upload to Carmen by 11:59pm)