

Contemporary Moral Issues

Fall 2013, Section 008

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:30-11:30; Thursday 2:45-4:00.

Course Description:

This course introduces students to several current debates about moral issues, including consumerism, eating meat, prostitution, pornography, and abortion. The course will also familiarize students with the basic commitments of the most influential ethical systems used to evaluate those issues.

Course Objectives:

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify several difficult and disputed moral controversies.
2. Identify some of the main positions taken regarding these moral controversies.
3. Identify and critically analyze the main arguments for these positions.
4. Critically evaluate and argue cogently for their own views on these controversies.
5. Identify important moral principles and apply them in the context of arguments regarding moral questions or controversies.
6. Recognize and articulate the role that various moral principles or positions may be playing in decisions, actions taken both by individuals and by society.

Required Texts:

1. Baird, Robert M. and Stuart E. Rosenbaum. *The Ethics of Abortion: Pro-Life vs. Pro-Choice* Third Edition. Amherst: Prometheus, 2001.
2. Sapontzis, Steve F.. *Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating MEAT*. Amherst: Prometheus, 2004.
3. Schwartz, David T.. *Consuming Choices: Ethics in a Global Consumer Age*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010.
4. Spector, Jessica. *Prostitution and Pornography: Philosophical Debate about the Sex Industry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Course Requirements:

2 Critique Papers (30%):

For two of the four topics covered in this class, students will choose an article (or chapter) with which they disagree. The student may disagree with the thesis of the article or with one of the arguments made in that article. The student will write a 3-page paper (no more; no less) providing reasons why the author's perspective or argument is incorrect. The student may

construct counter-examples, present substantiated empirical data (with documentation), question assumptions, and point out flawed reasoning in order to substantiate her argument.

One Position paper (25%):

Students will choose one of the four topics covered in this class (on which they do not write a critique paper) on which to present their own ethical stance. Students may take either side of the debate or maintain an intermediate position. The student will write a 5-6-page paper presenting arguments and reasons for thinking that their position is an ethical one. Students will also consider a possible counter-argument to their view and provide a response to it. I strongly urge students not to put this assignment off until the end of the semester. Rather, they should choose a topic on which they have strong ethical intuitions or beliefs or one on which they would like to develop their own view.

2 Abstracts (20%):

An abstract is a summary of the thesis and central arguments of an essay. Prior to turning in their first critique paper and their position paper, students will submit a 200-word abstract of the paper they intend to submit. In order to do so, they must already have a thesis and outline of the paper developed. Students should take into account any comments they receive from the instructor on their abstract as they improve their final draft of the paper. Students will lose points for failing to respond to these suggestions and critiques from the instructor.

Pop-Quizzes II (15%):

We will have regular reading quizzes to encourage students to engage in careful reading of the texts before class. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

Attendance/Participation (10%):

This course is strongly discussion based and I expect high levels of interaction from my students. Careful reading of the texts and regular attendance is essential for achieving this goal. Because not all students are equally comfortable speaking in front of groups, ample opportunity will be provided for interaction with the material in “small group discussion” format. Reticent students will lose significant participation points.

Extra Credit:

Post the thesis of one of the articles (on the topic on which you choose not to write a paper) on some form of social media and invite responses (blog, fb, twitter, etc.). Provide a copy of the comments and a one-page evaluation of them. 5 percentage points will be added to your position paper grade.

Grading Scale:

A	90-100	Student demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the material. Student's work significantly exceeds expectations.
B+	87-89	
B	80-86	Student demonstrates solid working knowledge of the material. Student's work exceeds the minimum requirements.
C+	77-79	
C	70-76	Student demonstrates a minimum satisfactory knowledge of the material. Student's work meets minimum requirements.
D+	67-69	
D	60-66	Student demonstrates a significantly deficient understanding of the material. Student's work comes short of requirements.
F	Below 60	Student does not demonstrate significant comprehension of the material. Student's work falls far short of requirements.

Academic Integrity and Classroom Decorum:

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind will not be tolerated in this class. Any student caught plagiarizing, signing in for another student, copying another student's work will receive an automatic 0 on the assignment, possibly an F for the course, and will be reported.

Students are expected to show the utmost respect for their fellow students and the instructor. Arguments may be respectfully criticized, but the person and character of others may not be attacked in the process. Causing unnecessary noise during class fails to respect the learning goals of the other students. As a result, students eating and drinking in class are expected to do so discretely. Please silence cell phones before the beginning of each class period. Texting and instant messaging in class is strictly prohibited, as it is distracting not only for the student engaging in the activity, but also for those around him or her. While electronic devices such as laptop computers and e-readers are permitted, the instructor reserves the right to ask students to discontinue use if it becomes obvious that use of the device is not contributing to the learning goals of the class. Students who fail to comply will be asked to leave for the day and will face whatever attendance penalties may apply.

Late Policy:

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated in the schedule. Assignments will be counted late 15 minutes after the beginning of class time on that day. Papers will be marked down 5 points for each day past the due date. Students may turn in papers at the professor's office prior to the date due. Students **may not** turn in papers by email unless they have received prior permission from the instructor. Exceptions to this policy will be made only in the case of a documented good reason.

Tentative Schedule

(This schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class. Students who are absent are responsible for finding out if any changes have been made)

Date	Assignments and Class Topic
8/22	Introduction: Ethical Questions, Systems, and Considerations; Syllabus review
8/27	Ethical Consumerism: Schwartz pp. 1-20
8/29	Caveat Emptor?: Schwartz pp. 21-45
9/3	Consumer as Causal Agent: Schwartz pp. 47-67
9/5	Consumer as Complicit Participant: Schwartz pp. 69-84
9/10	A Practical Consumer Ethic: Schwartz pp. 85-102; Consumerism Abstract Due
9/12	A Practical Consumer Ethic: Schwartz pp. 103-113
9/17	Movie: Food Inc.
9/19	Argument for Vegetarianism: Sapontzis pp. 70-80 Consumerism Paper Due
9/24	The Conscientious Carnivore: Sapontzis pp. 81-91
9/26	The Right Not to be Eaten: Sapontzis pp. 92-107
10/1	Utilitarian Arguments: Sapontzis pp. 108-123
10/3	Sexual Politics of Meat: Sapontzis pp. 248-260; Eating Meat Abstract Due
10/8	Paradox of Ethical Vegetarianism: Sapontzis 261-271
10/10	Contextual Moral Vegetarianism: Sapontzis 272-283
10/15	Stripping as a System of Prostitution: Spector 40-49 Eating Meat Paper Due
10/17	Fall Break: No Class
10/22	What's Wrong with Prostitution?: Spector 50-79
10/24	Taking Money for Bodily Services: Spector 175-190

10/29	Taking Money for Bodily Services: Spector 191-108
10/31	Equality and Speech: Spector 80-97; Prostitution and Porn Abstract Due
11/5	Women and Pornography: Spector 296-309
11/7	Men in the Sex Industry: Spector 349-357
11/12	A Defense of Abortion: Baird 241-256 Prostitution and Porn Paper Due
11/14	Nature as Demonic: Baird 257-271
11/19	Why Abortion is Immoral: Baird 309-327
11/21	Asymmetric Value and Abortion: Baird 328-343
11/26	An Appeal for Consistency: Baird 280-294 Abortion Abstract Due
11/28	Thanksgiving Break: No Class
12/3	Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: Baird 167-178
12/5	Our Bodies, Our Souls: Baird 179-192
12/9	12:30pm Abortion Paper Due