

PHI 2603 ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Dr. Nicholas Power

Course Overview:

We are all moral beings (even if we don't always act that way). We each feel shame and resentment, give out praise and blame, and share guilt. Starting from these assumptions this course will attempt to do the following:

- (1) Explore what it is that we do when we make moral judgements about an act, person, policy, or institution
- (2) Examine some of the more pressing social issues of our times such as the sanctity of life and one's 'right to die', and our responsibilities to the poor, to animals, and to future generations
- (3) Introduce, via our reflections on these issues, the major ethical theories of Western thought, including those based on Natural Law, Duty, or Divine Command, as well as Utilitarian and Contractarian theories
- (4) Confront some of the more fundamental issues with questions such as 'Is immoral behavior always stupid behavior?'; 'Are ethical rules relative to a specific culture or time, or even to an individual person?'; 'Are ethical standards subjective?'; 'What is the connection between morality and law or politics?'; etc.

Above all, however, we want to come to appreciate that some moral viewpoints are better than others; that conflicting moral judgments are not simply a matter of opinion; and that personal (moral) opinions are only as persuasive as the reasons (that is, the facts plus reliable means of arguing from the facts) upon which they are based. How well your writing, your contribution to the class all reflect a genuine appreciation of these principles will go a long way to determining your success in this course

Required Texts:

Peter Singer: *Practical Ethics*, 2nd Edition

Daniel Bonevac: *Today's Moral Issues*, 3rd Edition

Homework and Exams:

As this is a **Gordon Rule class**, it is required that each student writes 6000 words. You will be required to write three 'micro-essays' (about 3 pages in length) which will be assigned as the class progresses and which are meant to test your understanding of the assigned material. There will be weekly 'spot quizzes' meant to motivate you to read the assigned materials and to develop your reading comprehension skills. Also, you will participate in a group which will lead the class discussion of some issue to be chosen (or at least approved) by the instructor. There will be two exams: one Mid-term and one Final

Grading Policy: The grade in this course will be determined as follows:

Spot Quizzes	25%
Micro-essays	25%
Mid-term and Final Exam	25%
Group Performance	25%

Attendance:

Class attendance will also affect your grade; unfortunately, only in a negative way. 'Role' will be taken and chronic attendance/tardiness problems will hurt; more than 5 unexcused absences may result in my asking you to leave the course. Your absence from a class meeting devoted to group preparations or presentations will result in your grade for that presentation dropping by two-thirds of a grade. If unable to attend class, make sure your work is turned in on time. Late work (if not accompanied by the appropriate excuse) is generally not accepted. Your grade on a micro-essay will drop by one-third of a letter grade (i.e., from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc.) for each calendar it is late and one full letter grade for each class meeting it is late. These essays will not be accepted at all if they are more than one full week late.

All University policies concerning **withdrawal** from the course, **plagiarism** and other forms of cheating, etc. are in full effect. Consult your *Student Handbook* for details.