CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES

LDSP 390, Section 7
PHIL 220, Section 1

Spring 2004

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Terry L. Price
E-mail: tprice@richmond.edu
Phone: 287-6088
Office: Jepson Hall, Room 129
Office Hours: TR 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ethicists and philosophers spend a lot of time thinking about the content of moral principles, asking what kinds of actions are morally permissible, good, or right. This preoccupation with the moral status of actions is despite the fact that much of our history’s most morally reprehensible behavior has been connected to questions about the scope of moral principles, not their content. Here, we need only reflect upon the institution of slavery in the United States, the treatment of Jews (and others) in Nazi Germany, and the policy of apartheid in South Africa. We might also think about our own society’s treatment of women. Arguably, the central moral crisis in these cases was not over whether, for example, enslaving or killing people is generally morally problematic. Rather, it was over which individuals are protected by the moral prohibitions against these behaviors. In effect, the critical question was one about the moral status of Blacks, Jews, and women: “do they fall within the scope of moral principles?”

This is a course about moral status. How do we determine which individuals have it to the extent necessary to be protected by morality? To answer this question, we will consider four contemporary moral issues: animal rights, the death penalty, affirmative action, and genetic testing. For each issue, we will focus specifically on the claims to moral status for the individuals at the center of the controversy. What is the moral status of animals? Have convicted killers relinquished their moral status? Does justice require that we adopt social policies of inclusion, e.g., affirmative action, in response to past mistakes about moral status? Finally, how do advances in genetic technology come to bear on our understanding of the moral status of unborn offspring as well as on our treatment of individuals who might be excluded from insurance or employment as a result of these advances?

The course begins with Peter Carruther’s book-length argument for the claim that animals do not have moral status. He makes his case by way of an examination of standard moral theories, giving particular attention to Kantian or Rawlsian contractualism and to utilitarianism. This book’s careful appeal to moral theory thus explains its early placement in the course. An “application of moral reasoning” requires that we have something to apply. So, as stated in the undergraduate handbook, this course aims not only to “clarify, organize and sharpen our ideas about moral concerns of everyday life,” but also to “examine and critique prominent moral theories.” The second and third
books in the course offer arguments for and against the death penalty and affirmative action, respectively. Louis Pojman makes a retributivist argument that builds on "the forfeiture of the criminal's right to life," and Jeffrey Reiman claims that punishing murderers less harshly than justice would allow actually contributes to a proper respect for the moral status of humans more generally. Albert Mosely defends affirmative action on the grounds that it empowers "those groups that have been adversely affected by past and present exclusionary practices," whereas Nicholas Capaldi holds that affirmative action is an impediment to the full inclusion of Blacks in American society. The course concludes with a book (by Allen Buchanan et al.) that "pushes the limits of theories of justice...by calling into question...the assumption that the most fundamental problem is how to distribute fairly the burdens and benefits of a society—understood as a single, cooperative framework in which all members are active and effective participants." Here too, the problem the book seeks to address is ultimately one of membership is the moral community.

This course is designed for rigorous discussion of the issues, which means that all participants bear equal responsibility for understanding and evaluating the ideas conveyed in the readings. To facilitate this process, each student will be asked to prepare weekly papers on the readings and on the implications that these readings have for a determination of moral status. Please note also that we begin and end on time.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**


**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

Grades will be determined as follows:

1. Class Contribution 20%
2. Weekly Essays 20%
3. Midterm Examination 20%
4. Term Paper 20%
5. Final Examination 20%
Weekly essays provide exegesis, critique, and development of the arguments in the readings for the week. They will take the following form: 1 single-spaced, typed page, consisting of at least 600 words, per week for 10 weeks. The class will be divided into two groups, with the essays from students in one group due by 5:00 p.m. on Monday and from students in the other group by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday. I appeal to these essays to organize class discussions, and I often ask students to speak directly from their papers as an impetus to our discussions. I use exams primarily to assess mastery of the texts (e.g., their arguments, distinctions, and assumptions) and, as a small part of the final, to integrate various elements of the course. The term paper will require students to sustain an argument that is both grounded in their own best thinking about a central issue of the course and informed by the moral theories to which they will have been introduced over the semester.

Please note that the Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System as sanctioned by the School of Arts and Sciences. Every piece of written work must have the honor pledge and the student’s signature on it. The pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.” Work submitted without the honor pledge will be considered incomplete and, thus, may be subject to the late penalty (see below).

A WORD ON DEADLINES AND SCHEDULED EXAMS

The instructor takes deadlines and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any difficulties that arise should be brought to his attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. No late work will be accepted, unless accompanied by a completed and approved request form. The form can be found attached to this syllabus. Please note that computer problems never constitute an acceptable excuse.

SCHEDULE (Subject to Change as the Course Progresses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T 1/13</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 1/15</td>
<td>Moral argument and moral theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carruthers, Chapter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 1/19</td>
<td><strong>Weekly Essay 1 (Group A)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 1/20</td>
<td>Utilitarianism and contractualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carruthers, Chapter 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W 1/21</td>
<td><strong>Weekly Essay 1 (Group B)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 1/22</td>
<td>Utilitarianism and animal suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carruthers, Chapter 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 1/26</td>
<td><strong>Weekly Essay 2 (Group A)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 1/27</td>
<td>Utilitarianism and the harm of suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carruthers, Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
W 1/28  Weekly Essay 2 (Group B)

R 1/29  Contractualism and animals
        Carruthers, Chapter 5

M 2/2  Weekly Essay 3 (Group A)

T 2/3  Animals and rational agency
        Carruthers, Chapter 6

W 2/4  Weekly Essay 3 (Group B)

R 2/5  Contractualism and character
        Carruthers, Chapter 7

M 2/9  Weekly Essay 4 (Group A)

T 2/10 Animals and conscious experience
       Carruthers, Chapter 8

W 2/11 Weekly Essay 4 (Group B)

R 2/12  For the Death Penalty
        Pojman, Chapter 1

M 2/16 Weekly Essay 5 (Group A)

T 2/17  For the Death Penalty
        Pojman, Chapter 1
        Why the Death Penalty Should be Abolished in America
        Reiman, Chapter 2

W 2/18 Weekly Essay 5 (Group B)

R 2/19  Why the Death Penalty Should Be Abolished in America
        Reiman, Chapter 2

M 2/23 Weekly Essay 6 (Group A)

T 2/24  Reply to Jeffrey Reiman
        Pojman, Chapter 3

R 2/26  No Class

M 3/1  Weekly Essay 6 (Group B)

T 3/2  Reply to Louis P. Pojman
        Reiman, Chapter 4
R 3/4  Midterm Examination—in Class

M 3/8
M 3/15  Weekly Essay 7 (Group A)
T 3/16  Affirmative Action: Pro
        Mosley, Chapter 1
W 3/17  Weekly Essay 7 (Group B)
R 3/18  Affirmative Action: Pro
        Mosley, Chapter 1
        Affirmative Action: Con
        Capaldi, Chapter 2
M 3/22  Weekly Essay 8 (Group A)
T 3/23  Affirmative Action: Con
        Capaldi, Chapter 2
W 3/24  Weekly Essay 8 (Group B)
R 3/25  Response to Capaldi
        Mosely, Chapter 3
M 3/29  Weekly Essay 9 (Group A)
T 3/30  Response to Mosely
        Capaldi, Chapter 4
W 3/31  Weekly Essay 9 (Group B)
R 4/1   The Meaning of Genetic Causation
        Sober, Appendix 1
M 4/5   Weekly Essay 10 (Group A)
T 4/6   Eugenics and Its Shadow
        Buchanan et al., Chapter 2
W 4/7   Weekly Essay 10 (Group B)
R 4/8   Genetics and the Morality of Inclusion
        Buchanan et al., Chapter 7
F 4/9  Term Paper due by 5:00 p.m. (Jepson Hall, Room 125)
M 4/12  Weekly Essay 11 (Group A)
T 4/13  Genes, Justice, and Human Nature
        Buchanan et al., Chapter 3
W 4/14  Weekly Essay 11 (Group B)
R 4/15  Why Not the Best?
        Buchanan et al., Chapter 5
M 4/19  Weekly Essay 12 (Group A or B)
T 4/20  Reproductive Freedom and the Obligation to Prevent Harm
        Buchanan et al., Chapter 6
R 4/22  Summary and Discussion
R 4/29  Final Examination—in Class from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
REQUEST FOR EXTENSION/MAKE-UP

1. Today’s Date:

2. Original Assignment Date:

3. Reason for Extension/Make-up:

4. Proposed Due Date/Make-up Date:

5. Instructor Signature:

6. Your Signature:

Submit this form with the completed assignment (e.g., paper, make-up exam, etc.). This form will not be accepted if incomplete (e.g., if #5 is blank).