INTRODUCTORY HANDOUT  PHILOSOPHY 162  WINTER, 2005
CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES
Professor: Richard Arneson. Teaching Assistant: Michael Tiboris.  
Further information about the course will be posted at the course webpage  
http://philosophy.ucsd.edu/Courses
then click on Winter 2005, scroll down to Philosophy 162, then click again.  
You should check this web page regularly for news about this course.  
Lecture/discussion MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m. in Peterson Hall 104.  
The final exam for this course will take place on Wednesday, March 16, from  
11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. If you enroll in this class, you must be free to take a  
regular final exam for this course at this time.  

This course examines some current ethical controversies. Several of these issues  
involve the morality of killing. Under what circumstances (if any) is it morally  
permitted, or morally required, to cut short the life of another person either  
deliberately or as a side effect of what one does?

The first topic is just war theory. There are two questions here. One is, under  
what circumstances is it morally legitimate for one nation (or other political  
group) to wage war on another nation? The second question is, in waging a just  
war, what are the moral constraints on what it is permissible to do to enemy  
combatants and noncombatants? Do these constraints hold absolutely or do they  
give way in "supreme emergencies" or whenever the benefits of violating them  
are sufficiently great? Do these just warfare ideas developed many centuries  
ago make sense in modern times? To explore these questions, we look at a  
variety of issues including self-defense, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, reprisals,  
and nuclear weapons.

The next topic is suicide, euthanasia or mercy killing, and physician-assisted  
suicide. Most people think suicide is sometimes morally acceptable, but if so,  
when? What marks the difference between admirable and immoral suicide? Do  
we have a duty to stay alive except in exceptional circumstances, or is each  
person's choice to stay alive or not her own business and nobody else's? Is it  
sometimes morally acceptable to kill a person for her own good? Is it sometimes  
morally acceptable to kill a person against her will for her own good? Should  
medical doctors help people commit suicide or perform euthanasia? In  
considering these questions we explore both what people morally ought to do  
and what the law morally ought to be.

In weeks 6 through 9 we look at the issue of poverty and what, if anything, the  
nonpoor are morally obligated to do towards its relief. If some people are better  
off and some are worse off, and the worse off are below some minimum  
threshold of decent quality of life, under what circumstances, if any, are the  
better off morally required to give aid to the needy? What are the limits of such
obligations to aid the needy? Are there obligations to aid the needy that a morally legitimate state would enforce, or would such enforcement exceed the proper business of the state? We examine these questions first within the confines of a single nation state and then in a global context. One question that arises here is, to what extent we have obligations to those near and dear to us that take priority over duties to distant needy strangers.

In week 10 we switch gears again and examine a quite different topic. As we learn more about the genetic basis of personality and conduct, and as we come in the future to acquire greater ability to control and alter the genetic sources of who we are, questions arise about how to draw the line between morally desirable and undesirable genetic manipulations. Questions about what we owe to one another take on new shapes in a future world in which we have far greater power than at present to alter native talents and disabilities.

The issues to be discussed in class are ones that are seriously controversial (not only in philosophy classes).

In class we seek principles that explain and justify the responses each of us has to a wide range of cases after critical reflection. We examine readings that take sharply opposed stands on the issues under discussion.

The goals of the course are to improve our skills at interpreting philosophical texts and assessing their arguments, to understand a variety of approaches to controversial moral issues, and to gain a more reflective understanding of our own moral values.


COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Students are expected to come to class having read the required readings for that day and prepared to talk about them. Talking through the issues in your own voice helps deepen your understanding. Classes will be about one-half lecture and one-half discussion. In addition, Michael Tiboris will organize a weekly discussion meeting, which will provide most enrolled students a valuable opportunity for focussed discussion.

Graded assignments: two short writing assignment, five to seven pages in length, topics to be assigned in class, and a regular comprehensive final examination. On your exams and the writing assignment you will be graded according to the clarity of your prose, the cogency of your arguments, and the soundness of the understanding of course materials that you exhibit. The final
examination will comprehend all course materials including required readings, lectures, and handouts distributed in class. (This means that merely recommended readings will **NOT** be covered on the final exam. They are listed in case you should want to explore the topic further, and as a resource if you write a paper on that topic.)

**GRADING:** If you are taking the course on a **PASS/NOT PASS** basis, you must get (1) a C- or better on the final examination as well as (2) an overall C- average on all course work in order to achieve a **PASS** grade, with one exception: If you have an A- or better average on the midterm exam, writing assignment, and adequate participation in class discussion and are enrolled on a **PASS/NOT PASS** basis, you need not take the final exam in order to earn a **PASS** grade.

Each of the two writing assignments will count for 30 percent and the final examination will count for 40 percent of your overall course grade.

Only medical excuses certified by a note from your physician or a comparable certified excuse will be accepted for late submission of the writing assignments or to justify the assignment of an Incomplete course grade.

**SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, DISCUSSIONS, AND READINGS**

**Week 1. January 3-9.**

**Week 2. January 10-16.**
FRI: Just warfare; the doctrine of noncombatant immunity. Reading: Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, chapters 8-9; also E. Anscombe, “War and Murder,” in Cal Copy reader.

**Week 3. January 17-23.**
MON: HOLIDAY. NO CLASS.


Week 5. January 31-February 6


MON: Reading: D. Velleman, “A Right of Self-Termination?”, available through course web page; also. J. Hardwig, “Is There a Duty to Die?”, in Cal Copy reader.


Week 7. February 14-20.


FRI: Duties to distant strangers. Reading: P. Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” accessible through course web page; also Singer, “Outsiders: Our

MON: HOLIDAY. NO CLASS.

FRI: The negative duty not to harm and global justice. Reading: T. Pogge, “Assisting the Global Poor,” in *The Ethics of Assistance.*


**Arneson’s office hours:** Tuesdays 2-3 and Thursdays 12-2 in HSS 8057. Office phone 534 6810. Email rarneson@ucsd.edu