

**INTRODUCTORY HANDOUT  
CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES**

**PHILOSOPHY 162**

**SPRING, 2009**

**revised 5/12/2009**

Professor: Richard Arneson.

Further information about the course (readings not in course texts at the Bookstore, class notes, advance information on exams, etc.) will be posted at the course webpage available at this link

<http://webct.ucsd.edu>

You should check the course web page at this site regularly throughout the quarter.

Lecture/discussion MW 5:00-6:20 p.m. in York Hall 4080A.

The final exam for this course will take place on June 12, 2009 from 7:00-10:00 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 a person—oneself or another—either deliberately or as a side effect of what one does? Several of the issues to be discussed involve the extent and stringency of moral requirements of beneficence: duties on the part of well off people to help worse off people either within their own nation or around the globe. Several of the issues to be discussed are concerned with the legitimacy of interference with the liberty of action of individuals who are not wrongfully harming others. The issues to be discussed include controversies about what individuals and governments ought to do.

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 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 apply just war theory to issues such as terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and reprisals. We look at critics of contemporary just war theory. We also examine the morality of individual self-defense, regarded as analogous to collective self-defense against aggression.

In weeks four through five we look at the issue of global poverty and what, if anything, the affluent are obligated to do towards its relief. If some people are better off and some worse off, and the worse off are below some threshold minimum threshold of decent quality of life, are the better off required to give aid to the needy? In the assessment of what we owe one another by way of protection against poverty and destitution, to what extent is it permissible, or perhaps even mandatory, to give priority to helping fellow countrymen over distant needy strangers? We also consider to what extent the ordinary economic operations in developed nations might plausibly be regarded as harming the global poor (in which case, a duty to compensate for harm caused might be the appropriate moral focus, rather than the charitable duty to give aid).

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.

Next we take up the question, should the manufacture, sale, and use of recreational drugs that are dangerous to the user be a criminal offense? The discussion focuses on so-called "hard" drugs such as heroin and cocaine, but one might also consider whether criminal prohibition of marijuana, or for that matter of alcohol and cigarettes, is morally permissible, mandatory, or forbidden.

In week 8 we examine the practice by states of controlling immigration to the territory they control by controlling entry at the border. We consider an argument for open borders by Joseph Carens and an argument by Christopher Wellman to the opposed conclusion that a nation state has a wide moral liberty to control at its discretion who is allowed to enter its territory.

Finally, we survey arguments for and against "welfare state" policies: government policies that provide stable aid to poor people and others in comparable predicaments.

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. (In some cases, the assigned reading takes one position and the associated class lecture suggests alternative perspectives.) 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.

Students are expected to come to class having read the readings for that day and prepared to talk about them. Talking through the issues in your own voice helps deepen your understanding. It's also a good reality check—often when one thinks one understands an issue or problem, trying to explain it in one's own words reveals one's initial confidence was mistaken.

**COURSE TEXTS:** Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (1999 edition); Deen Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*; Douglas Husak and Peter de Marneffe, *The Legalization of Drugs*; and David Schmidtz and Robert Goodin, *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility*. Further readings will be downloadable from the course web page.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** Regular participation in class discussions including one short (five minute) presentation; a takehome midterm exam, a writing assignment (a six-eight page essay on a topic from a list of specified topics), and a regular final examination. The final exam will comprehend all course materials including required readings (but NOT recommended readings), lectures, and class handouts.

There will be about 20 minutes or more of discussion at the start of each class. The focus of discussion will be a question or questions on some portion of the reading, posed in advance of class. A class presentation explains some significant point in the reading and raises a question or criticism regarding it. You make the presentation to the class and at the same time turn in a one-page (maximum length) statement of your discussion point. You may satisfy the class presentation requirement as just described or alternatively by turning in a two-page (maximum length) class presentation statement by email to me prior to some class meeting. (You likewise have the option of participating in regular class discussion by sending me (by email) questions or comments on the readings for any given class prior to that class meeting.)

**GRADING:** Twenty per cent of your overall grade will be based on class participation, 20 per cent on the midterm takehome exam, 25 per cent on the writing assignment, and 35 percent on the final exam.

If you are taking the course on a PASS/NOT PASS basis, you must achieve a C minus or better grade on the final exam and a C minus or better average on all other course work in order to receive a PASS grade, with one exception: If you have an A minus or better average on coursework up to the final exam, you will have earned a PASS grade for the course without being required to take the final exam.

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.

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

## **SCHEDULE OF LECTURE & DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS**

Week 1. March 30-April 5.

MON: Introduction; morality and warfare. Reading: Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, chapters 1-3.

WED: Just war. Reading: Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, chapters 4-6; also Jeff McMahan, "Just Cause for War" (the McMahan essay is available at the course web page). Recommended reading: Gerald Doppelt, "Walzer's Theory of Morality in International Relations" (available from course web page).

Week 2. April 6-12.

MON: Fighting justly. Reading: Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, chapters 8-9.

WED: Sieges and blockades, terrorism, guerrilla war, and reprisals. Reading: Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, chapters 10-13.

Week 3. April 13-19.

MON: [Please note: this class will have to be rescheduled; probably for Tuesday or Thursday evening, this same week.] Just war revisionism. Reading, Jeff McMahan, "The Ethics of Killing in War"; also R. Arneson, "Just Warfare Theory and Noncombatant Immunity" (both readings available at course web page).

WED: Supreme emergency; terrorism again. Reading: Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 228-232 and chapters 15-16; Robert Fullinwider, "Terrorism, Innocence, and War"; also David Luban, "The War on Terrorism and the End of Human Rights" (Fullinwider and Luban readings available at the course web page).

Week 4. April 20-26.

MON: Duties to distant strangers. Reading: P. Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Poverty" (available at course web page); also Singer, "Outsiders: Our Obligations to Those beyond Our Borders," in Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance*; and Garrett Cullity, "Asking Too much" (Cullity reading available at course web page).  
WED: Limits on duties to aid. Reading: Liam Murphy, "The Demands of Beneficence" (available at course web page); also R. Arneson, "Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence?" in Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance*.

Week 5. April 27-May 3.

MON: Priority to fellow countrymen. Reading: Richard Miller, "Cosmopolitan Respect and Patriotic Concern" and T. Hurka, "The Justification of National Partiality" (excerpt) (both available at course web page); also R. Miller, "Moral Closeness and World Community," in Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance*. Recommended reading: David Miller, "National Responsibility and International Justice," in Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance*. Further recommended reading: Richard Miller, "Beneficence, Duty, and Distance," available at course web page.

WED: The duty not to harm and the global poor. Reading: T. Pogge, "'Assisting' the Global Poor,"; also David Miller, "National Responsibility and International Justice" (both readings in Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance*). Recommended: Onora O'Neill, "Global Justice: Whose Obligations?" (also in Chatterjee).

FRI: **Takehome exam due** in Arneson's faculty mailslot, 7<sup>th</sup> floor, H & SS, 5:00 p.m., or by email.

Week 6. May 4-10. (Sunday, May 10 is Mother's day.)

MON: Suicide and Physician-assisted suicide. Reading: D. Velleman, "A Right of Self-Termination?"; also Paul Weithman, "Of Assisted Suicide and 'The Philosophers' Brief'" (both readings available at course web page). Recommended readings: Leon Kass, "Why Doctors Must Not Kill"; also Daniel Callahan, "When Self-Determination Runs Amok" (both available at course web page).

WED: More on suicide and physician-assisted suicide. Reading: Dan Brock, "Voluntary Active Euthanasia"; also Frances Kamm, "Physician-Assisted Suicide, the Doctrine of Double Effect, and the Ground of Value"; also Gerald Dworkin, "Sex, Suicide, and Doctors" (all three readings available at course web page).

Week 7. May 11-17.

MON: Hard recreational drug prohibition. Reading: "For Drug Legalization," chapters 1-5 in Husak & de Marneffe, *The Legalization of Drugs*.

WED: Hard drug recreational prohibition. Reading: Peter de Marneffe, "Against Drug Legalization," chapters 6-8 in Husak & de Marneffe, *The Legalization of Drugs*.

Week 8. May 18-24.

MON: Immigration and border control. Reading: Joseph Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders" (available at course web page).

WED: Immigration and border control. Reading: Christopher Wellman, "Immigration and Freedom of Association."

Week 9. May 25-31.

MON: **NO CLASS. MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY.**

WED: The welfare state: For and Against. Reading: David Schmidtz, "Taking Responsibility," pp. 1-96 in Goodin & Schmidtz, *Social Welfare & Individual Responsibility*.

FRI: **Writing assignment due in Arneson's mailslot, 7<sup>th</sup> floor, HSS Bldg.**

Week 10. June 1-7

MON: The welfare state: For and against. Reading: Robert Goodin, "Social Welfare as a Collective Social Responsibility," pages 97-195 in Goodin & Schmidtz, *Social Welfare & Individual Responsibility*.

WED: The welfare state: For and against; conclusion of discussion. Reading: same as for prior two classes.

**Arneson's office hours: Tuesdays 1-2 and Thursdays 2-3 in HSS 8057. Office phone 534 6810. Email [rarneson@ucsd.edu](mailto:rarneson@ucsd.edu)**