

## PRESENT MORAL PROBLEMS 131F Fall 2008

### Basic Information:

**Instructor:** Clare Palmer.  
**Teaching Assistant:** Martin Turner.  
**Offices:** Clare Palmer: Wilson 108. Martin Turner: Wilson 116.  
**Office Hours:** Clare Palmer: Thursday 2.30-3.30, and other times by appointment.  
Martin Turner: Tuesday/Thursday 3.15-4.15  
**E-mails:** Clare Palmer: [cpalmer@artsci.wustl.edu](mailto:cpalmer@artsci.wustl.edu)  
Martin Turner: [oregonmartin@yahoo.com](mailto:oregonmartin@yahoo.com)  
**Class times:** 1.00-2.30, Tuesday/Thursday in Duncker 101  
**Required books:** *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. James Rachels (McGraw, 2007)  
*Ethics in Practice* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Hugh LaFollette (ed.) (Blackwell, 2007).  
A couple of readings can be obtained from the web: addresses below.

### Course Outline and Weekly Readings:

#### Part I: Introducing Ethical Theories

##### Week 1

**August 28th:** Introduction to course, and introductory case studies.

##### Week 2

**Sept. 2nd:** Introduction to Utilitarianism

**Reading:** John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2 "What Utilitarianism Is". This is available in any number of places on the internet. One good site:  
[http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john\\_stuart/m645u/](http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john_stuart/m645u/)

**Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>:** Utilitarianism 2: some questions and problems

**Reading:** Rachels, Ch. 7 "The Debate over Utilitarianism" (100-116)

##### Week 3

**Sept 9th:** Introducing Kantian ethics

**Reading:** Rachels, Ch. 8 "Are there absolute moral rules?" (117-129)

**Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>:** Introducing Rights Theory

**Reading:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Online at  
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

##### Week 4

**Sept 16<sup>th</sup>:** Introducing Virtue Ethics

**Reading:** Rachels, Ch. 12 "The Ethics of Virtue."

**Sept. 18th:** Introducing the Ethics of Care

**Reading:** Rachels Ch. 11 "Feminism and the Ethics of Care."

##### Week 5

**Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>:** DVD – *Peter Singer: A Dangerous Mind*.

**Sept 25<sup>th</sup>:** No class: Take-home case study. See below.

I will be away on Thursday September 25<sup>th</sup>. On Tuesday 23rd, I will hand out a **take-home case study**. This will substitute for Thursday class time. I will collect these in on Tuesday September 30<sup>th</sup>; your answers to these will constitute 10% of your grade.

## Part 2: Moral Problems – readings now normally for Thursdays.

### Week 6

Sept 30th: Ethics and Abortion 1. **Take home case study hand in.**

Oct 2nd: Ethics and Abortion 2.

Readings: Don Marquis (137-147 in *Ethics in Practice [EIP]*) and Judith Jarvis Thompson (*EIP*, 117-125). These papers have been, and remain, extremely important in philosophical debates about abortion.

### Week 7

Oct. 7th: Ethics and Euthanasia 1.

Oct. 9th: Ethics and Euthanasia 2.

Readings: Look first at the short section in Rachel's book on Euthanasia. Then read Brad Hooker (*EIP* 62-71) and John Hardwig (*EIP* 91-102). If you have time, Velleman's paper is also interesting.

### Week 8

Oct. 14th: Ethics and Capital Punishment 1. **Critical review hand-in.**

Oct. 16th: Ethics and Capital Punishment 2.

Readings: Rachels' book has a short section on retributivism. Read this first, then the two pieces for and against capital punishment in *Ethics in Practice* by Pojman (544-553) and Reiman (554-561).

### Week 9

Oct. 21st: Review class.

Oct. 23rd: Mid Term Class Test.

Readings: There are no assigned readings this week, as you will be preparing for your test.

### Week 10

Oct. 28<sup>th</sup>: Economic Justice 1.

Reading: Rawls (*EIP* 565-577)

Oct. 30th: Economic Justice 2.

Reading: Nozick (*EIP* 578-590).

### Week 11

Nov. 4th: Ethics and Poverty 1: Do we have positive duties to assist the distant poor?

Readings: Peter Singer "Famine, Affluence and Morality" (*EIP* 572-581) and Garrett Hardin "Living in a Lifeboat" – not in the book but available on the web at [http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art\\_living\\_on\\_a\\_lifeboat.html](http://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art_living_on_a_lifeboat.html). You only need to read as far as the heading "The World Food Bank" in this article, though it might be useful to read the whole article.

Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>: Ethics and Poverty 2: Do we have negative duties to the poor?

Reading: Thomas Pogge (*EIP* 633-646)

### Week 12

Nov. 11th: Animals and Ethics 1.

Nov. 13th: Animals and Ethics 2.

Readings: Peter Singer "All Animals are Equal" (*EIP* 171-180) and R.G.Frey (*EIP* 192-204).

**Week 13**

*Nov. 18th:* Environment and Ethics 1.  
*Nov. 20th:* Environment and Ethics 2. **Essay due in.**  
*Readings:* Thomas Hill (*EIP* 680-690) Aldo Leopold (*EIP* 660-668)

**Week 14**

*Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>:* Free Speech & Pornography.  
*Reading* John Stuart Mill "Freedom of Thought and Discussion" (*EIP* 373-376) Susan Brison (*EIP* 377-386) and Andrew Altman (*EIP* 387-397)

*Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November: Thanksgiving*

**Week 15**

*Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup>:* Pornography (continued & concluded!)  
45 mins. review session  
*Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>:* Final class test

**There is no further final examination for this class.**

**FURTHER COURSE INFORMATION****Class format**

The classes will be a mixture of lecture and discussion, often using topical case studies. You should feel free to ask questions at any time and you are positively encouraged to join in discussion – hence the participation grade (see below). There will be readings for every class in the first part of the semester; then mostly for Thursdays later on. Check the syllabus each week to be sure. I will expect you to have done the readings each week, and I'll have 4 Quickie Random Reading tests in the course of the semester (worth 10% of the final grade for the course). These tests should be straightforward if you've done the reading and have shown up for class!

**Assessment**

The course has a number of forms of assessment:

1. 4 Quickie Random Reading tests, to encourage you to attend class and do the reading (10%)
2. One take-home case study to take an initial reading of how things are going (10%)
3. A hand-in critical review of one of the readings (10%)
4. A mid semester test with two essays (20%)
5. A longer essay (30%)
6. A final class test with (a) a case study and (b) an essay (20%)

This should test a number of different skills: recall, clear summarizing, researching, understanding texts, analyzing, criticizing and developing arguments; relating theory to practice.

**In general:**

*Length of coursework:* Keep to the assigned length. Work that is more than 1 page over length, unless permission has been obtained, will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (eg a B+ will become a B).

*Late work:* Late work means extra time, and gives an advantage over other students. Therefore work will be penalized by 1/3 of a grade for every 2 days or part of two days it is late. (So, up to 2 days late an A will become A-; 2- 4 days, B+ and 4-6 days, B). If you need an extension for medical or other personal reasons, please contact Clare or Martin.

*Taking the course on a Pass/Fail basis:* You need to get an average of C+ overall to pass.

*Grading:* Good grades are gained by papers that display a combination of the following:

- 1) A demonstration that you understand material you've read, that you've given it a charitable hearing, and that you can accurately summarize key points from it.
- 2) Where relevant, a concise and accurate account of empirical material. (This, though, should only constitute a small proportion of your paper.)
- 3) The skills of reconstructing, analyzing and critically evaluating authors' arguments; and (where relevant) reformulating them more successfully.
- 4) An ability to argue persuasively for your own view, which involves: marshalling relevant empirical information, explaining how it is relevant and supports your case, providing grounds for any claims that are made, considering counter-arguments to your own argument and showing why the counter-arguments do not succeed; making sure that your conclusions follow from premises.
- 5) Clear and concise writing, so that the reader can see immediately what you are trying to say; an introduction that sets up the piece of work, signposts so that the reader knows where the paper is going, & paragraphs that follow on from one another, so that the essay has a sense of flow and structure.

*To Avoid!:* Unsubstantiated claims; discussions of feelings/opinions where these are not backed up by evidence or argument; inaccurate or carpingly uncharitable reporting of other positions; generalizations (such as "People think that"); discussions that have no reference to the work of those who have already written in the field; careless/inaccurate reading of any case studies provided.

*And Note:* You **do not** have to agree with any position that you think the instructors may be taking to get a good grade. Your work is judged on the basis of the strength of the arguments you present, not the position you adopt.

*Referencing:* You should reference all sources used, including web sites and materials from the textbooks, both when you refer to them in your paper, and in detail at the end in a bibliography. The bibliography does not count towards your page total. Some suggestions about referencing format follow later in the syllabus.

### **Assignments:**

#### *1. Quickie Random Reading Tests (10%)*

There will be four of these randomly scattered through the semester. Each will have 10 questions, either with answers of a sentence or less, or multiple choice answers. We'll collect these in, grade them, and hand them back in the next class.

#### *2. September Case Study (10%) - 26<sup>th</sup> September*

This case study will be followed by a couple of questions: you should answer all of them. The case provides an opportunity to show that you've understood the ethical theories and can relate them to a particular case in practice.

#### *3. Critical Review (10%) - 14<sup>th</sup> October*

Critically review one of these articles set as a reading: Marquis, Thomson, Hooker, Hardwig or Velleman. I'll provide more details about this critical review nearer the date. But some basic guidance – you should:

- Pick out central arguments and summarize them clearly;
- Point out difficulties, problems and weaknesses in these arguments;

- Consider possible criticisms of the arguments;
- Evaluate the strength of these criticisms;
- Offer comment on the overall success of the article's arguments.

A critical review is **not just a summary** of the article you have read. If you write just a summary, however accurate, **you will not get above B-**. The aim of this assessment is for you to think critically about what is being argued, not only to present the argument, important though this is. This critical review should be **3 double-spaced sides** long. Reviews are always concise: keep to the page length.

#### 4. Mid-term class test (20%) – 23rd October

This 1.5 hour test asks you to answer two essay questions. More on this nearer the time.

#### 5. Longer Essay (30%) – 20<sup>th</sup> November

This essay should be 6 double-spaced sides long. You may choose between writing on poverty and ethics or animals and ethics. Essay questions, readings and other assistance will be given later in the semester.

#### 6. Final Class Test (20%) – 4<sup>th</sup> December

This 1.5 hour class test will contain a case study, and an essay question. Although the final class test will be oriented around the issues we've looked at in the second part of the semester, you will need to know material from the **whole course**, not just the second half of the semester, in order to answer the questions well. Again, more on this nearer the time.

### The Participation Grade

A small participation grade will be awarded to students who contribute (a) regularly and (b) helpfully to class discussion. This grade will take the form of a **one third additional grade on the second essay**. No student should be disadvantaged by this grade (since nothing is lost by not getting it) but it rewards students who have done the reading and help to keep the class discussions alive. There is a long tradition of verbal debate in Philosophy, and we want to encourage you to contribute to it!

### Dissatisfaction with Grades

Occasionally a student is unhappy with a grade. If this is you, please **do not** knock on my door, brandishing your paper or test, expecting an instant judgment; thinking about grades is a process that takes time and reflection! Write a brief account explaining why you think the grade is unfair. Submit this account, with the contested piece of work, to Mindy Danner in the Philosophy office for the attention of Clare Palmer. Either Martin or I, or both of us (depending on who marked it) will re-read the piece of work concerned and will provide feedback and a view on the grade. If you are still unhappy, I will give the contested paper to another colleague in Philosophy to evaluate. If you wish to do this, you must agree to abide by the decision of the colleague: **grades can go down as well as up by taking this route**. Note: we will not enter into discussions about the award of the participation grade.

### Referencing

You should reference your work carefully, even where you are using Rachels or one of the set readings. There are different referencing conventions, and you may choose to adopt any, as long as you adopt one! My recommendation is to name the author, date and page – eg (Jones 1997: 34) in the text, and then create a bibliography in which the full reference appears. So, for instance:

For a journal article: Jones, Peter (1998) "Growing Mushrooms in Inner Mongolia" *Journal of Mushroom Studies* vol. 4 no.3 pp 97-107

For a book: Jones, Peter (1997) *Mushrooms of Inner Mongolia* (London: Routledge)

For an article in a book: Jones, Peter (1999) "Growing Mushrooms in Inner Mongolia" in Smith, Rebecca (ed.) *Growing Mushrooms in Asia* (London, Routledge) pp. 97-107

For citing websites, you should still be able to identify author, but page and date may be less straightforward. Here you may only be able to use the author's name in-text. But please put the entire web address in the bibliography.

### **Useful Web Resources**

Most useful of all: Lawrence Hinman's Ethics Updates: <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/>

Two on-line encyclopedias of philosophy:

Stanford <http://plato.stanford.edu/> (This is an excellent resource, but quite high-level)

IEP <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep>

And an on-line philosophy dictionary: <http://www.philosophypages.com/dy>

The Philosopher's Index is a useful resource to search for topics/authors in journal articles and edited book collections. It can only be accessed from university computers, and only supports four users at a time: <http://library.wustl.edu/databases/about/phil.html>