

Philosophy 1400.001
10-11:50 M-Th
Env 391

Benjamin Dunn
Office: Env 372
Hrs: MW 8-10
bendunn@tx.rr.com

Philosophy 1400: Contemporary Moral Issues

Course Description: First, you will be required to use your brain in this class (if this is a first for you, you might want to consider the use of some protective headgear). All joking aside, much of philosophy requires critical thinking and analysis of complex ideas. This of course, is only half of the equation. Philosophy in general and this course in particular, is much more than simply reading critically. Sometimes we will have to decipher or decode technical philosophical jargon like what does Kant mean by *categorical imperatives*, or what does it mean to *universalize a maxim*? Other times we may have to do a little interpreting to discover what a philosopher is really getting at. For example, does Socrates really mean he would be willing to “die many times over” simply to have the opportunity to question famous people in Hades? The point here is that philosophical thoughts and ideas exist on many different levels, often within the same article, and it is up to us to comb through these many layers if we are ever to arrive at any sort of truth. This involves a certain amount of questioning. We must be actively engaged with the text, but in many cases, we will also question the text itself. That is, we must ask, why do we still read these ancient writings-- are they still relevant today? Can I find examples of Aristotelian virtues in society today? Finally, how is this relevant to the way that I live?

Slightly less abstract description: We will begin this course with selected readings that cover the major ethical theories (Kant, Aristotle, Relativism, Utilitarianism). After we have a basic understanding of ethical theory, we will spend the rest of the course reading and examining contemporary moral issues such as issues of equality, war, pornography, and environmentalism.

Course Requirements: Students are expected to keep up to date with all of the assigned readings and exercises. Regular attendance is also required. (Please note that attendance is not the same as participation!) Your grade in this course will be based on daily reading quizzes, a midterm exam an oral presentation and one 3-6-page essay.

Required text: The text for this course is *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues* 5th edition by Barbara MacKinnon, Thomson and Wadsworth 2007.

Final Word and Policy: Remember that this is a summer course. That means we have a lot of material to cover in a very short amount of time. There is a lot of reading in this course and if you fall behind it will be very difficult to get caught up. As a rule, I do not accept any late or unfinished work. I do not offer make-up quizzes or exams, and there will be no extra credit. Please note that I also take issues of academic honesty very seriously (plagiarism), if you have any questions regarding this consult the student handbook.

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------|-----|
| <u>Grade scale:</u> | Daily quizzes | 20% |
| | Midterm exam | 25% |
| | Presentation | 25% |
| | Essay | 30% |

Readings:

Week I

7/9: Intro to course and syllabus

7/10: Intro p. 2-12, 470-477

7/11: Relativism, p. 18-28

7/12: Utility, p. 49-70

Week II

7/16: Kant p. 72-93

7/17: Virtue p. 109-121

7/18: Get caught up/ review

7/19: Midterm exam over ethical theory

Week III (Begin presentations)

7/23: Pornography p. 220-226, 230-241

7/24: Equality p. 244-260, 260-268

7/25: Legal Punishment p.300-312, 321-326

7/26: Environmental p.329-343

Week IV

7/30: Env cont. p.343-348 and Leopold handout

7/31: Genetics p.387-403

8/01 Genetics cont. p.403-416

8/02: War p. 419-430, 436-442

Week V

8/06: Globalization p.444-463

8/07: 470-477 Overflow

8/08: 470-477 Overflow

8/09: **Final Essay Due** in class

8/10: Semester ends

In-Class Presentation Requirements

(Modified from Peter Suber, Philosophy Department, Earlham College)

Overview

Your task is to give a presentation on the day's reading. In your presentation you should provide an overview of your topic and then more thoroughly present important points.

When the presentation is over you will lead a class discussion.

Total time per group should be around 30 minutes.

You are explicitly responsible for a portion of the presentation and will be evaluated independently of your fellow presenter. While you are presenting your topic with a cohort, you will turn in your own presentation summary.

Leading discussions will

- a) give you practice in public speaking,
- b) give you a chance to pick out the topics you think are important,
- c) share your ideas with the whole class (not just the professors), and
- d) highlight the challenges of leading a good discussion.

Presentation Summary

On the day of your presentation, you will turn in a typed short outline/summary of the issues you'll be discussing along with a plan for your discussion afterwards. Make sure that your summary includes a moderately detailed elaboration of (1) key terms and distinctions and (2) questions that you will use to focus discussion after making your initial presentation.

The summary should be around 2 typed pages.

Presentation Tips

- **Aim for depth over breadth.** Don't simply list all the topics that you can discuss (there's no depth here). Decide what the important points are using your own standards of importance. Master the detail and lay out key points.
- **Tell us on which topics you've chosen to focus.** This will help orient us. Then when you start to give fine-grained detail on those topics, we'll know what to do with them.
- **Find the key terms and define them. Find the key distinctions and explain them. Find the key arguments and present them. Decide what's primary and what's secondary, and focus on what's primary.** The point is to help us understand, not to offer your own views in place of another's. Criticism should come out (if at all) in the discussion phase. The presentation is all about what the issues are.
- You may consult your notes, of course, but please **do not read your presentations**. That is not only dull for your audience; it forecloses the opportunity to practice public speaking.
- **Don't assume that discussions lead themselves**, or that your fascinating subject matter guarantees success. Do not simply ask questions and hope that someone answers them. Plan the discussion. What topics do you want to cover? In what order? What will you do if nobody says anything? Use your own experience in good and bad discussions as a guide. What tends to silence people? What kinds of questions are intimidating, off-putting, unanswerable, patronizing? What kinds invite good discussion? How do you build on previous comments and help the class to do so?
- **Help your peers who are presenting and leading discussion;** they will be nervous but knowledgeable. Listen closely, speak voluntarily, follow up points of interest.
- **Be creative!** Do something different. Make it interesting. Use the board, use a computer, use props, use dramatization. Use your imagination. There's lots of room for creativity in this assignment. (Try to make sure that your innovations enhance, or at least don't detract from, the content.)

- **You DON'T have to be experts who lecture or who have all the answers.** If after a while you feel under pressure to expound or make clear, then something has gone wrong. Back out of it rather than give in to it. This should be a discussion.

- **Remember all the bad discussions you've had to sit through.** Don't repeat their mistakes!

- In both the presentation and discussion portions of the hour, **address the class, NOT ME.**

- **I will not instantly bail you out a bad discussion.** There is some instruction in living with the consequences of poor preparation, backing out of a bad question, or dealing spontaneously with a tired or unmotivated class. I will try not to intervene unless I think we have already taken the benefit of that instruction and are wasting time. Apart from that kind of intervention, I will love to participate. I will try to say much less than usual in order to give you a chance to shape the discussion.

Presentation & Discussion Evaluation

| Student | Topic | Date |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|
|----------------|--------------|-------------|

For the Speaker's Experience Level—

5 = Excellent

4 = Above Average

3 = Satisfactory

2 = Should Improve

1 = Unsatisfactory

| | Rating | | | | | Comments |
|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| PREPARATION (Research, rehearsal) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| ORGANIZATION (Purposeful, clear) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| COMPLEXITY (Too Specific, too general, just right) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| KEY IDEAS/KEY TERMS (Defined, undefined) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| NERVOUSNESS (calm, confident, shaky, frightened) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| FACIAL EXPRESSION (Animated, friendly, deadpan) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| POSTURE (Poised, balanced, positive) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| VOICE VOLUME (Ideal, too loud, too soft) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| SPEAKING RATE (Excellent, too fast, too slow) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| EYE CONTACT (visual bonds) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| LANGUAGE (Understandable, appropriate) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| DISCUSSION (Focused, self-sustaining) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |