

Georgetown University  
Liberal Studies Program  
Spring, 2017

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### Ethical Problems In Contemporary Society

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to basic moral concepts. The course examines the relationship between moral teachings and the broader theological or philosophical framework in which they occur, analyzes positions taken by religious moralists on particular issues, and compares those positions with those of secular thinkers. The course does not develop any particular theological position; it focuses on representative religious and secular thinkers and attempts to analyze their worldviews and their positions on selected issues.

The course begins with a discussion about the relation of religious beliefs and moral convictions, including arguments for and against moral absolutes, and offers an introduction on normative ethical systems and community-based views of ethics. It then deals with moral interpretations of sexuality, especially in relation to the genesis of human life. The course then moves directly to discussions of abortion and war and concludes with a discussion of euthanasia and suicide. As a foundation course in the MALS Program, the course will place a premium on developing a number of academic skills, including the ability to analyze texts with care, to write constructive essays on controversial subjects, and to present and defend one's positions in a seminar setting.

Books: All materials will be made available on Blackboard

#### Requirements

All students are expected to attend class regularly, to read the assignments carefully and critically, and to come to class prepared to discuss them. Written work for the course will consist of five, seven page papers dealing with topics in the various sections of the course. The papers will be due one week after the conclusion of the section of the course dealing with the subject in question. The purpose of the papers will be to analyze and constructively critique the positions found in the readings. In addition, students will be asked to summarize essays and initiate seminar discussions on the topics they explore. Grades for the course will be based on the five written assignments, and on participation in class discussions. Students are expected to adhere to the Georgetown University Honor System in all their course assignments.

Office Hours: By appointment, whenever convenient to the student.

#### Disabilities Statement

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing

documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

### Instructional Continuity Due to Unforeseen Disruptions

If weather or other events prevent on-site classroom instruction, we will “convene” by telephone on the affected Saturday. Details will be provided at the first class.

### Honor Code

This course is governed by the University Honor Code – In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in my academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown Community, as we live and work together

### Learning Goals and Outcomes

Graduate Liberal Studies offers a course a study which engages students in reading, research, reflection, discussion, and writing. The two general goals of the program are to analyze and assess human values (who are we and what ought we to do) and to undertake such study in an interdisciplinary fashion. The program thus draws from the social sciences as well as from those fields generally defined as the humanities (e.g. theology, philosophy, literature, and art), recognizing that the moral dimension of human life embraces social, political, and economic relationships as well as personal choices.

More explicitly, each course engages the student in examining one or more of the following topics or similar topics as they are treated in various disciplines: -What it means to be human; - What gives ultimate meaning to human life; -What contributes to human flourishing; -Where human life is heading; -What constitutes the social dimension of humanity; -What enables genuine community; -How are human beings related to nature and creation as a whole; - Elements of personal ethics; -Principles of social justice and social ethics.

This course will pursue the above stated goals and objectives through the lens of the topics outlined on this syllabus. Students will experience accelerated learning in said topics via a model of independent study complemented by collective participation. The material is also presented with an eye towards preparing students to engage these or other liberal arts topics thoughtfully, critically, and deeply via a final written thesis.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

I Ethical Theory

- January      17: Paul Taylor, Principles of Ethics, Chs. 1, 2: “What is Ethics?” and “Ethical Relativism”
- January      24: John Stuart Mill, “On the Connection Between Justice and Utility” and Immanuel Kant, “Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals.” Also, Taylor, Chs. 4, 5: “Utilitarianism” and “Ethical Formalism”
- January      31: Aristotle, Selections from his Nicomachean Ethics, Hauerwas and Burrell, “From System to Story...” Also, Bernard Mayo, “Virtue or Duty?” and Carol Gilligan, “Woman’s Place in Man’s Life Cycle.”

II Sexual Ethics

- February      7: Pope Paul VI, Humanae Vitae(1968), Carl Cohen’s “Sex, Birth Control and Human Life.” Also the Ramsey Colloquium, “The Homosexual Movement” and Michael Levin, “Why Homosexuality is Abnormal,”
- February      14: Richard Mohr, “The Case for Gay Marriage, John Corvino, “Why Shouldn’t Tommy and Jim Have Sex?” Also, Richard A. Wasserstrom, “Is Adultery Immoral?”, Frederick Elliston, “In Defense of Promiscuity” and Hadley Arkes, “The Jujitsu of Same-Sex Marriage”
- February      21: John Witte, “The Case Against Polygamy,” Thomas Nagel, “Sexual Perversion,” Immanuel Kant, “Duties Toward the Body in Respect of Sexual Impulse” and “Crimina Carnis” and Robert Solomon, “Sex and Perversion.”

III Abortion

- February      28: John Noonan, “An Almost Absolute Value in History,” Also, Donald Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” Pope Paul VI, “Respect for Life in the Womb,” and Harry J. Gensler, The Golden Rule Argument Against Abortion.”
- March            7: No class - Spring break
- March            14: Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” and Sissela Bok, “Who Shall Count as a Human Being?: A Treacherous Question in the Abortion Debate.” Also, essays by Michael Tooley, “A Defense of Abortion and Infanticide” and Mary Anne Warren, “The Personhood Argument in Favor of Abortion”

IV War

- March      21: Materials on Just War Theory (Moseley), Michael Walzer, “Moral Judgment in Time of War,” and James Turner Johnson, “Threats, Values, and Defense: Does the Defense of Values by Force Remain a Moral Possibility?” Also, John Howard Yoder, “The Tradition and the Real World.”
- March      28: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Love, Law, and Disobedience,” Laurie Calhoun, “The Terrorist’s Tacit Message,” and Haig Khatchadourian, “Terrorism and Morality.” Also, Hamner Hill, “Can Just War Theory Survive the War on Terror?” and Jan Narveson, “A Critique of Pacifism.”

V Euthanasia

- April      4: Gilbert Meilaender, “Euthanasia and Christian Vision,” Pope John Paul II, “Euthanasia.” Also, Stephen G. Potts, “Objections to the Institutionalization of Euthanasia,” and Rabbi Daniel Roberts, “Ask Your Ancestors and They Will Tell You.” Film: “Who Should Survive?”
- April      11: Lisa Cahill, “A ‘Natural Law’ Reconsideration of Euthanasia,” James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” and Baruch A. Brody, “A Non-Sequentialist Argument for Active Euthanasia.” Also, Film: “The Terri Schiavo Case”
- April      18: John Hardwif, “Is There a Duty to Die?” Alan Verhey, “Integrity, Humility, and Herois: May Patients Refuse Medical Treatment?” and Gloria Maxson, “Whose Life Is It, Anyway? Ours, That’s Whose!”

Note: Assignments may be modified as the semester progresses