

PHIL 341: Contemporary Moral Issues
Fall 2003
Syllabus
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A. Administrative Information

Instructor: Professor Robert Streiffer

Lectures: M, W, F, 1111 Humanities 2:25 – 3:15

Philosophy Office: 5123 Helen C. White Hall; 263 – 9479

Bioethics Office: 1411 Medical Sciences Center; 262 – 7490

Office Hours: Monday 3:30 – 4:30 in my Philosophy Office, and by appointment

E – Mail: rstreiffer@wisc.edu, Home page: <http://philosophy.wisc.edu/streiffer/>

Teaching Assistant: Shahin Izadi

Office: 5170 Helen C. White

Office Hours: M, W 1:00 – 2:00

E-mail: sizadi@wisc.edu

Phone: 262-2603

Discussion Sections:

DIS 301	3:30 – 4:20	Wednesday	2101 Humanities
DIS 302	12:05 – 12:55	Thursday	4281 HC White
DIS 303	1:20 – 2:10	Thursday	2241 Humanities
DIS 304	2:25 – 3:15	Thursday	4281 HC White
DIS 305	1:20 – 2:10	Friday	228 Education

B. Books (Available from the UW Bookstore)

- *Just and Unjust Wars*, by Michael Walzer. New York: Basic Books. 1977.
- *Exploitation*, by Alan Wertheimer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- *Improving Nature: The Science and Ethics of Genetic Engineering*, by Michael J. Reiss and Roger Straughan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E. B. White (Recommended)
- *A Rulebook for Arguments*, by Anthony Weston (Recommended)
- There will be a reader available from Bob's Copy Shop in University Square.

C. Course Descriptions

This course will examine four areas of contemporary moral controversy.

- (1) Just war theory: When, if ever, it is just to engage in a war? Is war merely "politics by another means," is pacifism correct in thinking that lethal violence is never justified, or is the truth somewhere in between? Once at war, what kind of behavior is permissible? How should we think about blockades, economic sanctions, nuclear weapons, and the use of terrorism?
- (2) Exploitation: People object to many kinds of commercial surrogate motherhood, student athletics, and using poor people as subjects in human experimentation in developing countries on the grounds that they are exploitative. But what exactly does it mean to say that something is exploitative? Are those activities really exploitative? Is it possible for there to be mutually beneficial exploitation, and if so, what should our moral reaction be?
- (3) Abortion: Does the fetus have a right to life from the moment of conception? If it does, does that mean that abortion is always impermissible, or is it still possible to justify abortions on the grounds of the pregnant woman's right to privacy or her right to self-defense?

- (4) Biotechnology: As will become evident, some of the concerns about biotechnology trace back to concerns about abortion. Does the use of recombinant DNA techniques to modify microorganisms, plants, animals, or humans, violate fundamental constraints on how we should respect nature? Are genetically engineered foods safe to eat? Are they safe for the environment? Should animals be genetically engineered to be used as disease models for human benefit? What about just to make them tastier to eat? Is it ever permissible to genetically engineer human beings, and if so, what moral principles should guide such engineering?

D. Objectives

In addition to exploring the kinds of questions mentioned above, the course has two more general goals:

1. To improve your familiarity with the arguments and theories prominent in the literature on these areas.
2. To improve your ability to think analytically and critically about the ethical issues in these areas.

E. Requirements:

1. Read all of the assignments. Read them carefully and read them critically. Most of the assignments are short, but they are very dense. Many of them will require that you read them more than once in order to fully understand the argument.
2. Attend all the lectures. If necessary, I will take attendance and make attendance count as part of your grade. You will be expected to show familiarity with the lecture material in your papers.
3. Attend and participate in the discussion sections (worth 10% of your grade).
4. Write three 1500 word (5 pages) papers (each worth 30% of your grade). No joint papers will be accepted. Paper topics will be handed out in class. Papers handed in after the first 5 minutes of class on the due date will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., from an AB to a B). After that, the penalty is one letter grade per day. Any non-emergency extensions must be requested prior to the due date, and will be granted only in rare circumstances. I will fail any papers not in compliance with the UW rules governing plagiarism, which you can find at <http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct.htm>. Other penalties may also be used, if appropriate.

F. Paper Dates:

	Assigned	Due
1	Friday, Oct 3	Wed, Oct 15
2	Monday, Oct 27	Mon, Nov 11
3	Wed, Nov 26	Wed, Dec 10