

# PHIL 341: Contemporary Moral Issues, Fall 2006

## Robert Streiffer

### A. General Course Description

After a brief introduction to ethical theory and ethical reasoning (1 week), we will examine in detail several areas of contemporary moral controversy: just war theory (4 weeks); commercial surrogate motherhood (1 week); euthanasia (1 week); animal use (1 week); abortion (2 weeks); and modern biotechnology (4 weeks). The course combines large-class lectures three times a week with small group discussions once a week. Lecture format will include straight lectures, Socratic exchanges, and PowerPoint presentations; active participation is always encouraged. Small group discussions will be a chance for students to debate the material with their classmates, and to reflect on how the theories discussed in class relate to current events. Written work for the class consists of three, six page papers. Lecture and discussion attendance is required.

### B. Administrative Information

Instructor: Professor Robert Streiffer

Lectures: MWF, 6104 Social Sciences, 11:00 – 11:50

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

Bioethics Office: 1411 Medical Sciences Center; 262-7490

Office Hours: Monday 12:00 – 1:00 in my philosophy office, and by appointment

E – Mail: [rstreiffer@wisc.edu](mailto:rstreiffer@wisc.edu), Home page: <http://philosophy.wisc.edu/streiffer/>

Teaching Assistant: Mark Anderson

Office: 5174 Helen C. White

Office Hours: M 12:00 – 1:00; Th 3:30 – 4:30

E-mail: [mbanderson1@wisc.edu](mailto:mbanderson1@wisc.edu)

Discussion Sections:

DIS 330	12:05 – 12:55	Wednesday	228 Education
DIS 331	12:05 – 12:55	Thursday	2261 Humanities
DIS 332	1:20 – 2:10	Thursday	2101 Humanities
DIS 333	2:25 – 3:15	Thursday	2241 Humanities

### C. Materials (Books are available form the UW Bookstore)

- *Just and Unjust Wars*, by Michael Walzer. New York: Basic Books. 1977.
- *Improving Nature: The Science and Ethics of Genetic Engineering*, by Michael J. Reiss and Roger Straughan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- There will be a reader available from the Letters and Sciences Copy Shop in the Humanities Building.

### D. Learning Objectives

The course has three general goals:

1. To improve your familiarity with the facts, concepts, theories, and arguments from the relevant empirical, ethical, and philosophical literature.
2. To improve your ability to think about and discuss the ethical issues in these areas.
3. To improve your ability to take an ethical argument, recast it in valid argument form, and critically evaluate it.

By the end of the course, students should be able to achieve the following more specific goals with respect to the views of the philosophers we read in this class on the following topics. Students should also have made progress in developing their own views on these topics.

1. Just War Theory
  - a. Explain and critically evaluate the standard arguments for and against moral realism.

- b. Explain and critically evaluate just war theory's account of what kinds of wars are permissible.
  - c. Explain and critically evaluate how just war theory understands the doctrine of non-combatant immunity, and how that doctrine has implications for particular tactics within war.
- 2. Commercial Surrogate Motherhood
  - a. Explain what happened in the Mary Beth Whitehead case.
  - b. Explain and evaluate the argument that commercial surrogate motherhood is wrong because it is exploitative.
  - c. Explain and critically evaluate the argument that commercial surrogate motherhood is wrong because it constitutes baby selling.
- 3. Euthanasia
  - a. Explain the distinctions some have drawn between killing and letting die, active and passive euthanasia, and euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.
  - b. Explain and critically evaluate Rachel's argument that, if passive euthanasia is sometimes justified, so too is active euthanasia.
  - c. Explain and critically evaluate Sullivan's argument that active euthanasia is always wrong.
  - d. Explain and critically evaluate Brock's argument that voluntary active euthanasia is sometimes permissible
- 4. Animal Use
  - a. Explain and critically evaluate the utilitarian argument against animal use.
  - b. Explain and critically evaluate the animal rights argument against animal use.
- 5. Abortion
  - a. Explain and critically evaluate the main views regarding the moral status of the fetus.
  - b. Explain and critically evaluate the argument that many abortions are permissible even if the fetus has a right to life.
  - c. Explain and critically evaluate the argument that the right to an abortion is protected by state neutrality.
- 6. Modern Biotechnology
  - a. Explain and critically evaluate the unnaturalness argument against genetic engineering (GE).
  - b. Explain and critically evaluate the doomsday argument against genetic engineering.
  - c. Explain and critically evaluate the main ethical arguments for and against rBGH and rHGH.
  - d. Explain and critically evaluate the main ethical arguments for and against GE crops.
  - e. Explain and critically evaluate the main ethical arguments for and against GE animals.
  - f. Explain and critically evaluate the main ethical arguments for and against of human embryonic stem cell research, of creating human/animal chimeras, and of so-called therapeutic cloning.
  - g. Explain and critically evaluate the main ethical arguments for and against so-called reproductive cloning.

## E. Requirements

1. Read all of the assignments before the lecture. Since the readings form the basis of the intellectual content of this course, read them carefully and read them critically. Although the average amount of reading per class is not very much, many of the readings are quite dense and will require that you read them more than once in order to fully understand the argument. Current scholarship on study skills suggests that most students should spend three hours outside of class studying for every hour of class, and that students who do well spend even more time.
2. Read the news articles passed out in class. These will give you opportunities to reflect on the relevance of the readings and the lectures to recent or current events. They will also provide additional topics for discussion during the discussion sections.
3. Attend all of the lectures. My lecture style includes many opportunities for students to respond to the arguments under discussion, and you will find that being an active listener and participant will

greatly increase the amount you learn from this class. Current scholarship on study skills strongly suggests that students who actively listen and respond to lectures learn much more from them.

4. Attend and participate in all the discussion sections.
5. Write three papers, 1750-1850 words (6 pages) in length. See the schedule for dates.

#### F. Grading Plan:

The breakdown for grades is as follows:

Lecture Attendance	10%
Discussion section attendance	15%
Discussion section participation	15%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Paper 3	20%

I use the following grading scale, with your final grade rounded to the nearest letter grade:

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalent
A	4
AB	3.5
B	3
BC	2.5
C	2
D	1
F	0

1. Attendance: The TA will be taking attendance for the lectures and discussion sections. You are entitled to 2 unexcused absences from the lectures and 1 unexcused absence from the discussion sections without any penalty. Any excused absence for reasons other than an emergency must be cleared by the TA in advance of the class missed. For all excused absences, you must send the TA an e-mail stating the date and the reason so that he will have a record of it when it comes time to calculate your final grade. Any unexcused absences over the ones to which you are entitled will affect your attendance grade for lecture or discussion as follows:

1 absence	B
2 absences	C
3 absences	D
4 absences	F
5 absences	Fail the class

2. Discussion section participation: The TA will grade your participation both in terms of quality and quantity:

Excellent participation	A
Good participation	B
Poor participation	C
No participation	F

3. Papers: You must hand in all of the papers as complete papers in order to pass this course. You may not elect to opt out of a paper and receive an F on it. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers handed in during class but after the beginning of class will be bumped to the next letter grade or half-letter grade down (e.g., from an A to an AB, from a C to a D.) After that, the penalty is one full letter grade per 24 hours. 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 academic misconduct, found at

<http://www.wisc.edu/students/resources/misconduct.htm>. The UW Writing Center also has helpful guidelines on avoiding plagiarism at [http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QPA\\_plagiarism.html](http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html). Ignorance of what counts as plagiarism is not an acceptable defense. More severe penalties may also be used, if appropriate. Although you are encouraged to discuss your papers with friends and classmates, no group work is allowed.

In a philosophy class, your grade is not determined by the details of the substantive view you defend (i.e., you won't get penalized for disagreeing with my views or the author's conclusions); rather, you will be graded on how well you articulate and defend your view and how well you relate relevant parts of the readings and lectures to the paper topic.

### **G. Additional Class Policies**

Academic misconduct: Please note that the imposition of any penalty for any kind of academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism, trying to get credit for a class you didn't attend, cheating on an exam, etc.) results in a permanent note that goes into your academic file, and that UW will disclose the fact that you were penalized for academic misconduct to interested parties who request that information. See <http://www.wisc.edu/students/resources/misconduct.htm> for UW's policy.

Exceptions to the rules: I will not grant anyone an exception to the rules outlined in this syllabus unless that exception is granted to everyone. This means, for example, that since I can't allow everyone the option of rewriting their paper (since doing so would require my TA to work more hours than required by his contract), I can't allow anyone the option of rewriting their paper.

Classroom Etiquette: You are expected to behave in ways that are appropriate and respectful to the professor, the TA, and the other students. This includes, but is not limited to

1. Arriving on time. Students who walk into the classroom late create a distraction.
2. Refraining from private conversations with classmates during lecture or discussion.
3. Being patient and courteous to other students when they ask a question or make a comment.
4. Expressing disagreement with the comments of others in a respectful manner.
5. Removing sunglasses and hats.
6. Staying awake.
7. Refraining from reading any non-course-related material.
8. Refraining from packing up until class is completely over.
9. Turn any beepers or cell phones off when entering class.
10. I reserve the right to restrict the use of laptops in class if I believe they are creating a distracting learning environment.

### **I. Outside Resources for Help**

The Writing Center has several classes and numerous handouts on academic writing. They will also do provide individual writing instruction. Appointments can be made by stopping in at 6171 Helen C. White or calling 263-1992. Their web site is [www.wisc.edu/writing](http://www.wisc.edu/writing). They can be much more effective if you approach them early in the writing process.

Study Skills: UW, as well as many other universities, have on-line materials available on how to improve your study skills as an undergraduate, and I encourage you to take a look at the URLs below and try to benefit from them.

<http://guts.studentorg.wisc.edu/SS/sshome.htm>  
[http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/uac/resources/study\\_skills.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/uac/resources/study_skills.html).

Guides to reading philosophy can be found at:

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/reading.html>  
<http://commhum.mccneb.edu/argument/summary.htm>