Course Description and Goals

This course is an introduction to moral philosophy.

Our primary objectives are to:
• develop some basic—but very important—philosophical skills, especially the ability to read and write philosophy, and why we might need to do so.
• arrive at working conceptualizations of: ‘ethics’, ‘values’, and specific moral terms such as ‘good’
• identify the ethics and values of scenarios, ethical theories and ethical concepts
• be able to apply ethical theories in a critical way

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Preparation

This course will cover the three branches of ethics: meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. How it will do so, though, is yet to be determined. In the first days we will decide on an applied moral issue and from there we will proceed to examine that issue in order to determine its moral elements, the underlying moral concepts (metaethics), and how common moral theories would address the issue (normative ethics). We will choose one of the following organizing issues: personal life i.e. sexuality, virtue; justice i.e. punishment, world hunger; or liberty and equality i.e free speech, discrimination. The semester will be organized around one of these issues. We will, in reading about, writing about, thinking about, and talking about this issue attempt to examine all of the possible moral standpoints without becoming indecisive, while not becoming dogmatic about our own ethical views.

Texts

Readings will be determined after we decide on a focused moral problem. We will make use of some or all of the following:
• LaFollette, H. “Ethics in Practice”
• Williams, B. “Morality: An Introduction to Ethics”
• “Readings in Metaethics”, a course pack

Example schedule/agenda:

Topic: Justice; Subtopic: World Hunger
Readings: LaFollette, Part IV World Hunger and International Justice; Williams, Chapter on Utilitarianism; Rachels “The Right Thing To Do”; articles specific to weekly topics

Metaethics (guided by chosen topic Justice)

Justice and Concepts, Weeks 1-4:
Week 1: Justice
Week 2: Autonomy
Week 3: Equality
Week 4: Obligation

Normative ethics (Justice in theories)

Justice and Moral Theories, Weeks 5-7:
Week 5: Utilitarianism
Week 6: Care Ethics
Week 7: Duty Ethics

Applied Ethics (Applying ethics to Hunger), Weeks 8-10
Week 8: Hunger, what is it?
Week 9: Justice and Hunger
Week 10: From theory to action

Other weeks, recap, reflection, reevaluation through objections

Evaluation

Article Summaries 30%

Students may select any two articles that they will summarize and react to from among readings that will be provided in the second week.

Participation 10%

Note that while having regular attendance is necessary for getting high marks in this area, it is not sufficient. Perhaps the easiest way to ensure a grade of A in participation is to ask questions during lecture on a regular basis. Another way to ensure an A is to bring written commentaries on the assigned readings to class and either hand them in, or read them.
Take-home exams 45%

A total of 3 take-home exams will be assigned, worth 15% each. Exams will be posted on the course web page at least one week before they are due. Each exam will include several different types of problem, and will typically require students to write one or more short essays.

Final exam 15%

A comprehensive final exam, to be taken at the designated final exam time. To repeat, the final exam will be comprehensive, and it will be given at the designated time.

Course Commitments

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person) in writing, with your name, ID number, and e-mail contact. Where possible, this should be done in advance of the missed work or event, but otherwise, just as soon as possible after the due date, and certainly no longer than one week later. Note: if appropriate documentation of your inability to meet that in-course requirement is necessary, the course instructor, or delegate, will request it of you. Such documentation will rarely be required for course components representing less than 10% of the course grade. Such documentation will be required, however, for Academic Consideration for missed end-of-term work and/or missed final examinations. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.

My policy for late assignments in this course is the following: Unless I have granted an extension, late assignments will be penalized 5% for every day they are late. If students come and see me before the assignment is late, and if they have a good reason for their lateness, I will often grant deadline extensions of two or three days—but only a couple of times a term per student. Assignments handed in late without an adequate excuse will usually be given a grade of 0%. Answers to the assignments will be posted on the course website a week after their due date, so no student can be granted an extension of more than seven days except in very exceptional circumstances.

DROP DATE

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is... For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar.
COPIES OF OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS
Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments; you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

STUDENTS REQUIREING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:
Resources are available to you if you require additional support in the course (e.g. if you have a learning disability or are dealing with other issues that are impacting on your ability to meet the course requirements). I encourage you to come and discuss this with me and to contact the appropriate university resource. The Centre for Students with Disabilities...