Introduction to Morality and Society Syllabus

Instructor: Keith Buhler

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Text:

The Moral Life, Pojman and Vaughn (Fifth Edition)

Description:

This course introduces you to deeper and more careful thinking about morality, society, good, and evil. Each unit will introduce a topic and encourage reflection on a literary or philosophical writing, which will be discussed in class. We will practice thinking philosophically about these topics and about our own lives. We will argue for and against each position, testing ourselves and the argument. In this way, we will not only think abstractly but may see our own moral failings, become more self-aware, more humble, and more moral.

Goals:

- To practice thinking philosophically by examining, understanding, and critiquing complex arguments.
- To become familiar with major ethical theories, such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, commonsense intuition, divine command theory

- To reflect on our own lives, thoughts, and actions and become more virtuous, thoughtful, and wise human beings in the pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty.

Scope and Sequence:

The course is broken into 4 Units of 3-4 weeks each: Unit 1. The Nature and Purpose of Morality (weeks 1, 2, 3; Unit 2. Moral Theory (weeks 4, 5, 6, 7); Unit 3, What is Worthwhile (weeks 8, 9, 10); and Unit 4 Applied Ethics (weeks 11-16). Each unit consists of three components. (1) Reading and weekly quizzes, (2) Discussion in class, (3) Writing.

Grades:

You will be graded on reading, participation, and papers, plus applicable extra credit. The best way to earn an 'A' is to read carefully, participate in and out of class, and write well.

Assessment category	%
Readings (weekly quizzes)	25%
Participation	25%
Disputation Papers	50%
Extra Credit	0-5% max

I. Outline:

The Outline (*subject to minor changes.*) tells you the reading, topic for each day. All readings are from Pojman, *The Moral Life* unless otherwise noted.

Week 1 Introductions

W Jan-11: Syllabus day (no reading)

F Jan-13: Pojman, Introduction (pp. 1-5)

Week 2 The Nature and Purpose of Morality

M Jan-16: Chapter 1 "Lord of the Flies", and "On the Nature and Purpose of Morality", Thomas Hobbes "On the State of Nature" (10-49)

W Jan-18: Chapter 1, and "Moral Law" handout

F Jan-20: Discussion (Buhler)

Week 3 Good, Evil, and Relativism

M Jan-23 Chapter 2, Introduction, Melville "Billy Budd", Dostoyevsky "Why is there evil?", Styron "Sophie's Choice", Hallie "From Cruelty to Goodness", (51-76)

W Jan-25 Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil", Taylor "on the Origin of Good and Evil" (90-128)

F Jan-27 Chapter 3 Introduction; Herodotus "Custom is King", Benedict "The Case for Moral Relativism", Rachels "Why Morality is Not Relative" (130-152)

Week 4 Utilitarianism

M Jan-30 (Unit Paper 1, Nature of Morality Due by Midnight)

M Jan-30 Part II, Chapter 4 Introduction; "Seaman Holmes and the Longboat", Bentham "Classical Utilitarianism", Mill "Utilitarianism refined" (191-205)

W Feb-1 Nielsen, "A Defense of Utilitarianism" and Williams, "Against Utilitarianism" (205-234)

F Feb-3 Discussion (Group 1)

Week 5 Deontological Ethics

M Feb-6 Chapter 5, Introduction; "Immanual Kant" and "Kant's Theory" (237-259) W Feb-8 "Does Morality Depend on Religion?" and "Divine Command Theory" (294-300) F Feb-10 Discussion (Group 2)

Week 6 Virtue Ethics

M Feb-13 Chapter 6, Introduction; Aristotle, "Virtue Ethics" and MacIntyre "the Virtues", (314-346) W Feb-15 "Sermon on the Mount" (388-391) and "Stoic Catechism" (415-425) F Feb-17 Discussion (Group 3)

Week 7 Feminist Ethics

M Feb-20 Chapter 7, Introduction; "Feminist Ethics" (439-456) W Feb-22 "The Need for More than Justice", and "Ethics of Care" (465-490) F Feb-24 Discussion (Group 4)

Week 8 Egoism

M Feb-27 (Unit Paper 2, Moral Theories Due by Midnight)

M Feb-27 Chapter 8, Introduction; Plato, "Ring of Gyges" and Rand, "In Defense of Ethical Egoism" (495-513)

W Mar-1 Chapter 8, Pojman, "Egoism and Altruism" and "Critique of Ethical Egoism" (521)

F Mar-3 Discussion (Group 5)

Week 9 The Meaning of Life

M Mar-6 Chapter 9 Introduction; Voltaire, "Good Brahmin", Epicurus "Hedonism" (534-545)

W Mar-8 Camus "Life is Absurd", and Pojman "Religion gives meaning to life" (545-557)

F Mar-10 Discussion (Russell 569-571) (Group 6)

Easter Break

M Mar-13 *Easter Break*

W Mar-15 *Easter Break*

F Mar-17 *Easter Break*

Week 10 Autonomy

M Mar-20 Chapter 10, Introduction; King "I have a dream", "Experiment in Autonomy" (573-593)

W Mar-22 Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (593-601); Vonnegut "Harrison Bergeron" (612-617)

F Mar-24 Discussion (Group 7)

Week 11 Sexual Ethics M Mar-27 (Unit Paper 3, Moral Issues Due by Midnight)

M Mar-27 Chapter 11, Introduction; Kant, "On the Place of Sex", McMurtry "Monogamy: A Critique", and Bayles, "Marriage, Love, and Procreation" (619-635)

W Mar-29 Levin "Homosexuality is Abnormal", Corvino "A Defense of Homosexuality" (664-688)

F Mar-31 Discussion (Group 8)

Week 12 Abortion

M Apr-3 Chapter 12, Introduction; Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" (689-709) W Apr-5

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (710-727) F Apr-7 Discussion (Group 9)

Week 13 Euthanasia

M Apr-10 Chapter 13, Introduction; Brock "Voluntary Active Euthanasia" (760-780)

W Apr-12 Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia" (781)

F Apr-14 Discussion (Group 10)

Week 14 Animal Rights

M Apr-17 Chapter 14, Introduction; Orwell "Shooting an Elephant" (793-800)

W Apr-19 Singer "All Animals are Equal", Cohen "The Case Against Animal Rights" (801-820)

F Apr-21 Discussion (Group 11)

Week 15 Globalism

M Apr-24 (Unit Paper 4, Moral Problems due by Midnight)

M Apr-24 Chapter 16, Introduction; Hardin "Living on a Lifeboat" (852-871)

W Apr-26 Murdoch, "A Critique of Lifeboat Ethics" (872-887)

F Apr-28 Discussion

Finals Week

M May-1 Unit Paper 5, Final Paper (Revision) Due by midnight

W May-3 Reflections Due by 11:59PM online.

F May-5 Extra Credit due by 11:59PM online.

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