



## PHIL140 Syllabus

<b>Course Title</b>	Contemporary Moral Issues
<b>Term</b>	TERM 4, 2005/2006
<b>Education Center</b>	PORTUGAL-LAJES
<b>Faculty Member</b>	Maria Marques - <a href="mailto:mmarques@faculty.ed.umuc.edu">mmarques@faculty.ed.umuc.edu</a>

### Faculty Contact Information:

M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Marques can be reached at this e-mail address:  
mmarques@faculty.ed.umuc.edu, any day of the week.  
I will try to reply to e-mails within 48 hours.

### Course Materials:

James Rachels (2003). Elements of Moral Philosophy, 4th ed. McGraw-Hill, ISBN 0072476907 and  
James Rachels (2003). The Right Thing to Do : Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy, 3rd ed. McGraw-Hill, ISBN 0072476915.

#### *Other materials:*

Simon Blackburn (2001) Being Good, Oxford UP  
Thomas Nagel (1987) What does it all mean?, Oxford UP  
Peter Singer, (1993) Practical Ethics, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cambridge UP  
Peter Singer, (1986), Applied Ethics, Oxford UP

### Course Description:

(Fulfills the civic responsibility requirement.) An exploration of how philosophical analysis can be a foundation for thinking clearly about moral issues. Problems approached analytically include such widely debated issues as abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, homosexuality, pornography, reverse discrimination, business ethics, sexual equality, and economic equity. Students may receive credit for only one of the following: HUMN 300 or PHIL 140.

### Course Goals/Objectives:

The goal of this course is to prepare you for mature discussion of current contemporary moral issues, to include:

- \* a facility in logical argumentation
- \* knowledge of the main ethical theories and their strengths and weaknesses

\* application of these theories to an informed discussion of current moral issues

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to

- \* distinguish argument from opinion
- \* construct arguments in support of a position, including responses to objections
- \* demonstrate knowledge of the following ethical theories by applying them to contemporary moral issues: utilitarianism, deontology, social contract theory, feminist ethics, and virtue ethics
- \* demonstrate critical knowledge of the moral issues covered
- \* demonstrate in writing your mastery of two moral issues

## **Course Introduction:**

Philosophy 140 Contemporary Moral Issues introduces the student to moral philosophy, first, by examining some perennial problems of moral philosophy itself; second, by looking at some standard theories of moral philosophy; and finally, by applying these theories to current moral issues. Throughout, the emphasis is on logical skills in argument.

This course consists of five themes:

- \* Theme 1: Philosophy and Philosophical Argument
- \* Theme 2: Ethics and Ethical Issues
- \* Theme 3: Ethical Theories
- \* Theme 4: Contemporary Ethical Issues I: Ethics of Destruction
- \* Theme 5: Contemporary Ethical Issues II: Justice

Formulating strong logical arguments is an essential part of philosophy. In both the exams and the writing assignments, you will be expected to develop an argument format that clarifies the issues, recognizes distinct conclusions and premises, and requires you to contend with objections and arguments for both sides. Good philosophical writing also emphasizes conceptual clarity and a sense of definition, supported by precise grammar and syntax. This usually requires rewriting and polishing a text several times.

## **Grading Information and Criteria:**

Grades will be determined as follows:

Online participation 10%  
Midterm examination 30%  
Project 30%  
Final examination 30%  
Total 100%

Grading Scale

The grading scale, based on 100 points, is:

A = 89-100 points  
B = 77-88 points  
C = 65-76 points  
D = 50-64 points  
F = 0-49 points

## **Project Descriptions:**

Every week students will be asked to produce a short paper (at least a half page) in response to the reading assignments of the week. This exercise is intended to engage you with the text and help you become comfortable with philosophical discourse.

The main project for this class is the completion of a 10-page paper dealing with a major contemporary moral issue. In the paper you should provide more depth and detail than is possible in class discussion or exams. The paper should be in the form of an argumentative essay in which you do the following:

- \* clarify the question and the main concepts
- \* state your argument and support its premises
- \* raise the main objections to your position
- \* answer those objections
- \* summarize your general thesis

Wherever possible, you should draw on materials that go outside the material covered in class, thus illustrating your depth of knowledge. You should start thinking about this project before the midterm exam, and be prepared to submit a short description of the paper soon after.

The paper will be graded on the following considerations:

- \* clarity and consistency in using the argumentative format
- \* knowledge of the issues
- \* use of materials both within and outside the class assignments
- \* exactness of writing, in both grammar and formatting
- \* correct documentation

Further Guidance: To assist you in preparing the paper, a sample of an argumentative essay will be provided during the course. Also, you *should* submit a draft of your paper about two-thirds of the way through. The instructor will give you feedback you will need to improve your paper.

## **Academic Policies:**

Cases of plagiarism are handled consistent with current UMUC guidelines. See the UMUC policies at the following URL:

<http://www.umuc.edu/policy/>

## **Course Schedule:**

- 1 What Is Morality? (Rachels, Elements, 1-15)  
(Rachels, Readings, 1-29).
- 2 The Challenge of Cultural Relativism: (Rachels, Elements, 16-31)  
"Cultural Relativism" (Rachels, Readings, 31-36, 59-63)
- 3 Subjectivism in Ethics (Rachels, Elements, 32-44)  
"Ethics and Natural Law" (Rachels, Readings, 44-49)
- 4 Does Morality Depend on Religion? (Rachels, Elements, 48-57)
- 5 Psychological Egoism (Rachels, Elements, 63-72)  
Ethical Egoism (Rachels, Elements, 76-90)
- 6 The Utilitarian Approach (Rachels, Elements, 91-101)

"The Debate Over Utilitarianism" (Rachels, Elements, 102-116)  
"Utilitarianism" (Rachels, Readings, 64-75)

7 Midterm examination. Paper topics due.

Are There Absolute Moral Rules? (Rachels, Elements, 91-110)  
"The Categorical Imperative" (Rachels, Readings, 76-81)

8 Kant and Respect for Persons (Rachels, Elements, 130-140)

9 The Idea of a Social Contract (Rachels, Elements, 141-159)  
(Rachels, Readings, 50-58)

10 You may submit a draft of your paper at this time.

Feminism

"Feminism and the Ethics of Care" (Rachels, Elements, 160-172)  
"The Idea of a Female Ethic" (Rachels, Readings, 82-96)  
"The Ethics of Virtue" (Rachels, Elements, 173-190)  
"The Virtues" (Rachels, Readings, 37-43)

11 Abortion

"The Moral and Legal Status of Abortion" and  
"Why Abortion Is Immoral" (Rachels, Readings, 175-179)

Euthanasia

"The Morality of Euthanasia and  
Assisted Suicide" (Rachels, Readings, 180-189)

12 The Death Penalty

"The Case Against the Death Penalty" and  
"In Defense of the Death Penalty" (Rachels, Readings, 231-247)

Just War

"The Ethics of War and Peace" (Rachels, Readings, 221-230)

13 Homosexuality

"Gay Basics: Some Questions, Facts, Values," and  
"Is Homosexuality Unnatural?" (Rachels, Readings, 128-153)  
"Sexual Morality" (review Aquinas in Rachels, Readings)  
Instructor may assign additional readings.

14 Animal Rights

"Why We Have No Obligations to Animals" and  
"All Animals Are Equal" (Rachels, Readings, 190-203)

Social Justice

"Sexism," "Racisms,"  
"Letter from the Birmingham City Jail," and  
"The Justification of Civil Disobedience" (Rachels, Readings, 255-304)

15 Turn in final version of paper.

Final Examination