

Philosophy 393: Contemporary Ethics

David Sobel

T, Th 12:30 pm-1:50 pm

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Office hours: Tuesday 2-3 pm and by appointment. I prefer to meet by appointment.

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THERE IS ANOTHER DAVID SOBEL ON CAMPUS. BE SURE TO USE THE ABOVE
E-MAIL ADDRESS.

This is an introduction to Contemporary Ethics. We will be considering timeless abstract questions about ethics such as what makes actions right or wrong, can there be an objectively true morality that applies to everyone, why should people do what morality tells them to do, and what is the connection between God and morality. We will also consider less abstract and more contemporary moral issues about mass incarceration, racism, economic inequality, abortion, eating meat, the legalization of drugs, and the extent of our duties to the worst off around the world.

Grades: Grades will be determined by a mid-term exam, a final exam, and 5 in class pop quizzes. The mid-term will count for 30 percent of one's grade, the final 35%, and the 5 quizzes for 35%. No extra credit will be given in this course.

You may miss up to 4 classes without an excuse. The point of these excused absences is that we do not have to bother, in almost all cases, with you explaining why you missed class. Absences beyond those 4 will require strict documentation if they are to be excused. Just e-mail me PRIOR TO CLASS on a day that you are using one of your excused absences and, if there is a pop quiz that day, you will be excused from that pop quiz. If you miss a pop quiz and did not e-mail me prior to class, or if you have used up your 4 excused absences, you will get a 0 for that pop quiz unless you provide me very clear and very compelling documentation of an extraordinary situation that required you to miss class. I advise you to not use up your excused absences but to save them for when you really need them. I will not be lenient towards absences beyond the 4 excused absences.

Course readings: All readings will be made available on Blackboard.

Final Exam: ???

Class Rules:

The use of cell phones or lap top computers is not permitted during class time. However, if you feel you have special reasons that require the use a lap top computer, contact me and explain why you need to do so.

The penalty for cheating will be failure for the course and possible other penalties. Cheating includes copying or plagiarizing the work of another without attribution. If you present other people's words or ideas as if they are your own, that is plagiarism.

Course learning outcomes:

After this course, students should be able to:

Distill the central argument of a text to its essentials, making clear its basic argumentative structure. Interpret charitably in order to understand a view in its most cogent form before subjecting it to criticism.

Explain and defend a philosophical thesis in writing that is clear, concise, informed and well-organized. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of rival arguments and theories to reach an overall assessment of the comparative merits of different views.

Explain the content of some contemporary philosophical answers to questions in value theory. Relevant questions include, but are not limited to: How should I treat others? What is justice? What is equality?

Readings:

You should complete each reading *before* class. This will make it easier for you to follow lectures, participate in discussions, and to draw your own conclusions about the material.

Many of the readings are difficult and require a lot of thought to digest properly. Do not expect to understand everything on a breezy first read. You may have to return to the text several times to understand what it is saying. This will help you to hone your critical reading skills, and to develop the ability to clearly analyze the arguments in a text. The lectures and discussion sections will also help you to understand the readings better.

Plagiarism: If you present other people's ideas and work as if they were your own, then you have plagiarized. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and other possible disciplinary actions. DO NOT PLAGARIZE. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g. Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain assignments completed by others and present the work as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course. This is plagiarism.