PHI 192: Introduction to Moral Theory
Fall, 2022

David Sobel

T, TH, 11-11:55
Heroy Geology Building Auditorium

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

Teaching Assistants

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This is a general introduction to ethical theory. We will consider, among other topics, the relationship between God and morality, a few prominent general theories of what makes an act right or wrong, the relationship between one's own interests and morality, challenges to morality's authority, as well as the factual status of moral claims. Attention will also be given to ethical issues of special contemporary concern. Roughly, the first half of the class will address timeless issues in ethics and several general understandings of what makes actions morally right will be considered and assessed. The second half of the class will address issues of mass incarceration, economic inequality, the appropriate legal status of drugs, the ethics of eating meat, and abortion.

Required text: There is no required textbook. All readings will be made available on Blackboard.

Grades: Grades will be determined by a mid-term exam, a final exam, and 5 one-page papers. The mid-term will count for 30 percent of one's grade, the final 35%, and the 5 one-page papers 35%. While class participation and attendance will be rewarded in one's grade, otherwise one's final grade will be based ONLY on the criteria mentioned here. No extra credit assignments will be given.

The following timeline of topics is rough and likely will be adjusted.

Meeting 1: Getting Started in Thinking About Ethics

Meeting 2: Getting Started in Thinking About Ethics

Meeting 3: Consequentialism. (Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty")

Meeting 4: Consequentialism. (Chapter 9)

Meeting 5: Consequentialism and its Critics (Chapter 10)

Meeting 6: Rejecting Consequentialism: Huemer, "America's Unjust Drug War"

Meeting 7: The Kantian Perspective (Chapter 11)

Meeting 8: The Kantian Perspective (Chapter 12)

Meeting 9: Abortion (Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion")

Meeting 10: Abortion (Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral")

Meeting 11: Immigration (Christopher Heath Wellman, "Refugees and the Right to Control Immigration"

Meeting 12: Immigration (Michael Huemer, "Is There a Right to Immigrate?")

Meeting 13: The Morality of Eating Meat (Singer, "All Animals Are Equal")

Meeting 14: Mid-Term

Meeting 15: Morality and Self-Interest (Plato's *Republic*)

Meeting 16: Morality and Self-Interest (Plato's *Republic*)

Meeting 17: Morality and God

Meeting 18: Meta-ethics (Chapter 20)

Meeting 19: Meta-ethics (Chapter 21)

Meeting 20: Meta-ethics (Chapter 22)

Meeting 21: Economic Justice (Rawls)

Meeting 22: Economic Justice (Nozick)

Meeting 23: Economic Justice (Cohen)

Meeting 24: Mass Incarceration: 13th (film)

Meeting 25: Mass Incarceration (Alexander, "The New Jim Crow," chapter 2)

Meeting 26: Mass Incarceration (Alexander, "The New Jim Crow," chapter 3)

Meeting 27: Racism ("Racisims," Anthony Appiah)

Meeting 28: Final Thoughts

Final Exam: ???

Class Rules:

The use of cell phones or lap top computers is generally 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 (which includes plagiarism) will be failure for the course and possible other penalties**.** Presenting the work of others as if it were one's own is plagiarism.

Course learning outcomes:
After this course, students should be able to:
(a) Explain the core content of some major moral theories.
(b) Display a firm understanding of central ethical concepts and distinctions.
(c) Apply the critical tools of philosophical analysis to effectively question prevailing social norms and moral ideas, and to critique existing moral theories and arguments.
(d) Display a facility for independently grappling with urgent ethical issues in an organized, articulate and informed manner, including clearly presenting their own arguments for moral conclusions.
(e) Engage in constructive debate about important moral issues with their peers.

Students should also show an increased ability to:

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

Readings:

All readings except those in the required book will be made available through Blackboard.

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.