

Current Moral and Social Issues (730:105:07)

Academic Building, 2150

Tu/Th 6:10pm-7:30pm

Instructor: Danny Underwood II

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Office Hours: **TBD**

About Me: I am a third year PhD student in the Philosophy department. I have a BA and an MA in Philosophy from the University of Missouri - St. Louis. I primarily work in social and political philosophy, philosophy of race, Africana history and philosophy as well as cognitive science and philosophical methodology.

Course Description: The aim of this course is to introduce and discuss moral, social and political issues from a philosophical perspective. We will look at some basic philosophical theories that can help clarify current domestic and international issues. What is most important to me as an instructor is that the discussions we have focus on the real world, motivate discussion outside of class, and contribute to your growth as an informed and engaged global citizen. We will spend the first few weeks discussing some argumentative techniques that will be employed throughout the rest of the course as well as explore some of the foundational ethical theories that shape existing approaches to the issues we will discuss. The remainder of the course will be primarily centered around class discussion. We will read news and academic articles each week that focus on a particular issue and discuss what we have learned with our peers. At the end of the semester, you are expected to submit a term paper on a pre-approved topic. There are no prerequisites for this course. As this may be the first philosophy course for many of you, I urge you to contact me if you are having trouble with any of the material.

Course Goals: My personal goal as your instructor is to impart you with a few tools and concepts that allow you to better examine, discuss, and shape the world around you. But I hope to learn from you as well. At the end of the course, you will be familiar with a myriad of different social and political issues that are currently being discussed by academics as well as in the news media. You will also be familiar with the ethical implications of these topics. Finally, you will be able to critically engage with a particular issue in the form of a philosophical essay.

Core Learning Goals: This course satisfies 3 credits of the Contemporary Challenges core learning goal. Due to the broad scope of this course, it can satisfy either the Diversity and Social Inequalities requirement or the Our Common Future requirement. For more info see below:

Diversities and Social Inequalities [CCD] (3 credits)

Students must take one degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.

CCD-1. Analyze the degree to which forms of human differences and stratifications among social groups shape individual and group experiences of, and perspectives on, contemporary issues.

Such differences and stratifications may include race, language, religion, ethnicity, country of

origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, abilities, or other social distinctions and their intersections.

CCD-2. Analyze contemporary social justice issues and unbalanced social power systems.

Our Common Future [CCO] (3 credits)

Students must take one degree credit-bearing course that meets one or both of these goals.

CCO-1. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.

CCO-2. Analyze the relationship that science and technology have to a contemporary social issue.

Here is the link for further information: <https://sasoue.rutgers.edu/core/core-learning-goals>

Required Texts: N/A; All readings will be posted on the course Sakai site.

Assignments:

(1) **Class participation:** Each class you are expected to attend, be present, and have read that week's material. Since this course is primarily discussion based, it is imperative that you are in the room participating in and prepared for that day's class discussion. Periodically, we will have in-class group assignments/activities. **Absences:** You are allotted **2 unexcused absences**.

(2) **Discussion Questions:** Each class you will be expected to submit discussion question. You should submit a well-developed question (roughly 5-7 sentences) about the topic of discussion for that week.

(3) **Final Paper:** At the end of the semester, you will submit a short paper (~2500 words) on an approved topic. We will discuss this later in the semester but be on the lookout for any topic that catches your interest.

Grades: Participation/Attendance: 35%, Class Discussion Questions: 35%, and Final Paper 30%

A: 90; B+: 85; B: 80; C+: 75; C: 70; D: 60; F: 0

Course Guidelines/Etiquette (Read carefully! This is important!):

Productive intellectual inquiry – the basic purpose of colleges and universities – requires respectful, constructive discussion that enables all parties to participate fully. Philosophy has an especially vital role to play in facilitating such inquiry, because philosophers have been developing and honing practices of critical discussion over many centuries: techniques for uncovering, justifying, and assessing assumptions lurking behind any claim, from the most obvious to the most controversial.

Philosophy is thus a valuable tool for self-reflection and for communal debate. This is especially true at a time when so much is being debated, in such heated terms. But like any tool, in order to work, it must be used well. In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.

Policy on Bullying and Harrassing:

Academic Integrity:

Accommodations:

Sexual Misconduct:

Support Services:

Weekly Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction

(Tu): Introductions and Syllabus

(Th): *Why we argue?*, *What to argue about?* and *How we should argue?*

- **Readings:** *Syllabus*
- **Assignments:** [3 suggested topics for the end of the semester]

Week 2: Culture and Values

(Tu): *Is Cultural Relativism Enough?*

(Th): [Discussion continued]

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 3: Consequences and Public Policy

(Tu): *What is Consequentialism?*

(Th): [Discussion continued]

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 4: The Categorical Imperative, Human Rights and Public Policy

(Tu): *What is Deontology?* and *What are human rights?*

(Th): [Discussion continued]

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 5: Political Philosophy and Public Policy

(Tu): *What is political about political philosophy?*

(Th): [Discussion continued]

- Readings:
- Assignments:

The Domestic Perspective

Week 6: Abortion and Euthanasia?

(Tu): TBA

(Th): TBA

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 7: Policing and Mass Incarceration?

(Tu): TBA

(Th): TBA

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 8: Immigration and Citizenship?

(Tu): TBA

(Th): TBA

- Readings:
- Assignments:

The International Perspective

Week 9: Foreign Intervention and Cultural Imperialism?

(Tu): TBA

(Th): TBA

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 10: Sweatshops and Global Capitalism?

(Tu): TBA

(Th): TBA

- Readings:
- Assignments:

Week 11: Climate Change and Veganism?

(Tu): TBA

(Th): TBA

- Readings:
- Assignments:

You Decide!

Week 12: TBD

[F19 CMSI Incomplete Syllabus: v.5]

Week 13: TBD

Week 14: TBD

Week 15: Final Paper Prep!