

FYSM 1212
CONTEMPORARY MORAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES
CARLETON UNIVERSITY: PROFESSOR KENNETH FERGUSON

COURSE SYLLABUS

TERM:	Winter Term, 2022	OFFICE:	Paterson Hall, 3A58
TIME:	Mon/Wednesday 10-11:30	OFFICE HOURS:	TBD
LOCATION	Tory Building, room 240	PHONE:	Office: (613) 520-2600
INSTRUCTOR:	Ken Ferguson	EMAIL:	kenneth.ferguson@carleton.ca

Catalogue Description

FYSM 1212 [0.5 credit]

Contemporary Moral, Social, and Religious Issues

Philosophical problems associated with such topical issues as feminist, critical race and disability theories; atheism vs. theism; the meaning of life; moral relativism vs. moral objectivism; egoistic vs. non-egoistic ethics; euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment and environmental ethics; legal paternalism; freedom of the will.

DETAILED COURSE DESCRIPTION (Winter 2022)

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to ethics as a field of study and to examine in detail a number of difficult and controversial social and moral issues that confront contemporary societies. In the first part of the course, we will discuss some issues concerning the general nature of morality: Does morality depend in some essential way on religion? Do the same moral standards apply universally, or is morality relative to different societies or cultures? How is morality related to self-interest? What is it that ultimately determines whether an act is right or wrong? Is it the effect the act is likely to have on human happiness or something else?

In the remainder of the course, we will examine a wide range of issues in what is called applied or practical ethics. Some of these issues are relatively new in that they arise out of recent developments in science, particularly in the biological and medical sciences. For example, are such practices as human cloning, genetic engineering, prenatal screening for the purpose of aborting fetuses that suffer from disabilities, and euthanasia or assisted suicide morally permissible? Other issues, though by new means new, have taken on greater urgency and relevance as a result of recent changes or events in our social, political, economic or natural surroundings: What is the source and extent of our obligations to protect the environment, particularly in view of the problem of global warming? To what extent do we have obligations toward animals and other living things? Would it be permissible, and should it be legal, for states to engage in torture, or to eavesdrop on their citizens, in order to protect them from terrorist attacks? Still other issues have long been discussed but continue to be the subject of disagreement and often heated debate: Should individuals be permitted to say or do anything they please as long as they harm no one else, or are there other legitimate grounds for limiting a person's freedom? What obligations do states or societies have toward their individual

members? To what extent are we morally required to help the poor, whether in our own country or in other parts of the world?

In discussing these, and other, issues it is important to keep in mind that our goal is not merely to express our own opinions (although students will certainly be have the opportunity to do that); rather, we will be engaged in an *inquiry*. We want to know what positions might be adopted with respect to these issues, what arguments have been, or might be, offered for or against these different positions, and we want to subject these arguments to a rigorous critique in order to determine, to the extent that this may be possible, where the truth of the matter lies.

AIMS OF THE COURSE

In addition to learning about a new field of inquiry with which they may not previously have been familiar, it is hoped that students will benefit from the course in the following respects:

- Improve their reading, writing, speaking and presentation skills
- Become better able to adopt a reflective, critical attitude toward social and moral issues
- Acquire the reasoning and analytical tools needed to engage in intelligent, informed, discussion of ethical issues
- Develop a greater sensitivity for, and become better able to detect, ethical issues
- Become more aware of their own preconceptions and biases with respect to ethical issues

REQUIRED READINGS

There is no required text for this course. All readings will either be available on the web or will be posted on Brightspace.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 1. Essays 30%:** Students will be required to write two essays during the course of the semester. These will be discussion essays that require analysis and evaluation of some issue, not research papers which require extensive use of library, Internet, or other sources.
- 2. Presentations 20%:** All students will be required to give a class presentation. These
- 3. Take-home Final Exam 30%:** There will be a take-home exam at the end of the course. The questions for these will be made available to students two weeks before the end of the semester, and the completed exam will be uploaded onto to Brightspace.
- 4. Class Participation 20%:** Students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussion. Evaluations will be based on the quality and frequency of contributions to our discussions.

More details will be provided about each of these requirements later.

List of Topics and Readings

I. Course Introduction

Some Background on Ethics and Morality – No Reading for this

II. Moral Theories and Moral Principles

1. The Divine Command Theory of Morality

Reading 1: Theodore Schick, “Morality Requires God – Or Does It?”, Google author and title, or go this address: <https://secularhumanism.org/1997/06/morality-requires-god-or-does-it/>

Reading 2: Peter Singer and Marc Hauser “Godless Morality” (Google the title.)

2. Cultural Relativism – morality is relative to different cultures

Reading 3: James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”: available at: <http://faculty.uca.edu/rnovy/Rachels--Cultural%20Relativism.htm> (or just Google title)

3. Utilitarianism

Reading 4: “Calculating Consequences: The Utilitarian Approach to Ethics”, Markula Center for Applied Ethics, at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/calculating-consequences-the-utilitarian-approach/>

Reading 5: “Best Outcomes: The Utility Test”, online at: <https://www.ethicsops.com/best-outcomes-test>

4. Kantian Ethics

Reading 6: Kant’s Ethical Theory [taken from the BBC], online at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/duty_1.shtml

5. Ross’s Ethics

Reading 7: “A Simple and Usable (Although Incomplete) Ethical Theory Based on the Ethics of W. D. Ross”, by Dr. Jan Garrett, August 10, 2004, available online at: <https://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/ethics/rossethc.htm>

6. The Four Principles Approach to Normative Ethics

Reading 8: Thomas McCormick, “Principles of Bioethics”, from UW Medicine, online at: <https://depts.washington.edu/bhdept/ethics-medicine/bioethics-topics/articles/principles-bioethics>

III. Ethical Issues Related to Individual Freedom

Should taking the Covid-19 vaccine be mandatory?

Reading 9: Holly Cline, “Exploring Moral, Ethical and Legal Implications of Vaccines”, July 29, 2015, online at: <https://law.gsu.edu/2015/07/29/exploring-vaccinations/>

Reading 10: Alberto Giubilini, “Vaccine Refusal Is Like Tax Evasion”, From the website *Practical Ethics*, University of Oxford, Oct. 31, 2017, available at: <http://blog.practicaethics.ox.ac.uk/2017/10/vaccine-refusal-is-like-tax-evasion/>

Reading 11: “Vaccination and Free Will”, by Jeffrey Singer, from The Cato Institute, March 25, 2014, online at: <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/vaccination-free-will>

Should there be a legal ban on fake news?

Reading 12 (online): Yasmeen Sirhan, “Macron’s War on 'Fake News'”, from *The Atlantic*, Jan. 6, 2018, at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/macrons-war-on-fake-news/549788/>

Reading 13 (online): Phillip Steffensen, “The Perils of Banning Fake News”, from the Foundation for Economic Education, Dec. 4, 2018, at: <https://fee.org/articles/the-perils-of-banning-fake-news/>

Are “religious liberty laws” Discriminatory?

Reading 14: “4 Reasons Why Religious Liberty Laws Don’t Discriminate”, from the website *The Gospel Coalition*, by Andrew Walk, April 8, 2016, at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/three-reasons-why-religious-liberty-laws-dont-discriminate>

Is banning the burqa pro-feminist or anti-Islamic?

Reading 15: “Ten reasons to ban the niqab — in the public service”: “When a symbol comes with this much baggage, libertarian rigidity in its support looks less like principled idealism and more like cultural self-sabotage”, from the National Post, By Barbara Kay, Sept. 30, 2015, online at: <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/barbara-kay-ten-reasons-to-ban-the-niqab-in-public>

Reading 16: Shreya Parikh, “No Country Needs a Burqa Ban”, from the website *theWire*, online at: <https://thewire.in/women/no-country-needs-a-burqa-ban>

Reading 17: “Where Face Masks Are Required but Burqas Are Banned: Switzerland’s crackdown on Islamic symbols is normalizing anti-Muslim bigotry across the political spectrum”, by Rim-Sarah Alouane, online at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/10/switzerland-europe-burqa-ban-referendum-coronavirus-face-masks-egerkinger-komitee/>

Antioch College’s Sexual Offense Policy

Reading 18: Robert Shibley, Antioch’s Infamous Sexual Assault Policy, June 15, 2007, from the publication thefire.org, online at: <https://www.thefire.org/antiochs-infamous-sexual-assault-policy/>

Reading 19: Nicolaus Mills, “How Antioch College Got Rape right 22 Years Ago”, from The Daily Beast, updated 2017, online at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-antioch-college-got-rape-right-20-years-ago?ref=scroll>

Reading 20: Emily van Duyne, “Are You OK With this? An Argument for Affirmative Consent”, from the website Noodle.com, available at: <https://www.noodle.com/articles/are-you-ok-with-this-an-argument-for-affirmative-consent-opinion129>

IV. Issues in Bioethics

Physician Assisted Suicide and Other End of Life Issues

Reading 21: “Get The Facts: Bill C-14 And Assisted Dying Law In Canada”, From the website *Dying With Dignity Canada*, available at:

<http://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/get-the-facts-assisted-dying-law-in-canada>

Reading 22: Peter Bowal and Paulami Saha, “Critiques of Assisted Suicide”, from the website *LawNow*, at: <http://www.lawnow.org/critiques-assisted-suicide/>

Reading 23: “Discuss the Issues: Legislation on Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia”, A Defense of Non-Voluntary Euthanasia, from the website *Ethics, Euthanasia, and Canadian Law*, available at: <http://ethics-euthanasia.ca/legislation/>

Issues Related to Human Cloning and Genetic Engineering

Reading 24: Leon Kass, “Preventing a Brave New World”, Summary of Leon Kass’s Critique of Cloning, online at: https://web.law.duke.edu/features/news_kass/

Reading 25: Bertha Alvarez Manninen, “Cloning”, Sections 4 and 5 only, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online at: <https://iep.utm.edu/cloning/#H4>

Reading 26: Walter Glannon, “Genetic Enhancement”, online at: <https://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/cvance/glannon>

Reading 27: Julian Savulescu, “Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best

Children”, taken from *The Journal of Medical Ethics*, online at:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2598126/>

Is Abortion Wrong?

Reading 28: Andrea Demeer, “An Opinion Column: What You Need To Know about Abortion, and the 2021 vote”, from the Vernon Morning Star, online at:
<https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/columns/what-you-need-to-know-about-abortion-and-the-2021-vote/>

Reading 29: Elizabeth Chuck, “What is Roe v. Wade?: Everything you need to know”, June 5, 2018, NBC News, online at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/smart-facts/what-roe-v-wade-everything-you-need-know-n856891>

Reading 30: Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”, posted on Brightspace

Reading 31: Don Marquis, “Why Abortion Is Immoral by Don Marquis”

V. Global Poverty and Social Justice

Are we moral monsters for not helping the global poor?

Reading 32: Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”, online at:
https://res.cloudinary.com/segf/image/upload/v1634740837/Singer-Solution-to-World-Poverty-Lifeboat-Ethics_bvygn3.pdf

Reading 33: Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, “World Hunger: A Moral Response”
<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/more/resources/world-hunger-a-moral-response/>

Reading 34: Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor”, online at:
<https://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil1100/Hardin.pdf>

Should billionaires be “abolished?”

Reading 39: Samantha Domingo, “There’s No Such Thing as an Ethical Billionaire”, March 4, 2020, online at: <https://collegian.csufresno.edu/2020/03/theres-no-such-thing-as-an-ethical-billionaire/>

Reading 40: Dave Darby, “What’s Wrong With Billionaires”, March 15, 2020,
<https://www.lowimpact.org/whats-wrong-with-billionaires/>

Reading 41: Farhad Manjoo, "Abolish Billionaires", New York Times, Feb. 6, 2019, online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/opinion/abolish-billionaires-tax.html>

Reading 42: Alex Barezow, "Don't Abolish Billionaires: The World Is a Better Place Because of Them", online at: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/12/16/dont-abolish-billionaires-world-better-place-because-them-14460>

Do corporations have obligations to society over and above obeying the law?

Reading 35 (optional): E. Freeman, "A Stakeholder Theory of the Modern Corporation" in *Business Ethics*, Module 1

Reading 36: Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase It's Profits", *Business Ethics*, in Module 1

Reading 37: "The Ford Pinto", from *Business Ethics*, Module 1:

Reading 38 (optional): "The Good Company", editorial from *The Economist* magazine, Jan. 20, 2005, at: <http://www.economist.com/node/3577141>

VI. War and Violence

Should there be a categorical (absolute) ban on the use of torture?

Reading 43: Charles Krauthammer, "The Truth About Torture", from *The Weekly Standard* 12/05/2005, Volume 011, Issue 12: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/the-truth-about-torture>

Reading 44: Michael Kinsley, "Torture for Dummies: Exploding the "ticking bomb" Argument": <http://www.slate.com/id/2132195/>

Is Terrorism always wrong?

Reading 45: Stephen Nathanson, "Can Terrorism Be Morally Justified?"

Reading 46: "Is terrorism in the eye of the beholder?" By Eloise Robertson, from the website *The Swamp*, at: <https://vocal.media/theSwamp/is-terrorism-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder>

Reading 47: Igor Primoratz, "Terrorism is almost always morally unjustified, but it may be justified as the only way of preventing a "moral disaster", available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/04/29/terrorism-moral-disaster-justified-igor-primoratz-philosophy/>

VII. Animal Rights and Welfare

Reading 48: Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal", online at:

<https://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil1200,Spr07/singer.pdf>

Reading 49: Bonnie Steinbock, "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality", online at:

https://fewd.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/inst_ethik_wiss_dialog/Steinbock_B.1978.Speciesism_3749431.pdf

Reading 50: BBC Animal Rights: For and Against, online at:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/rights/rights_1.shtml

Reading 51: Tom Regan, The Case for Animal Rights, online at: <http://www.animal-rights-library.com/texts-m/regan03.htm>

VIII. Environmental Ethics and Climate Change

What are our obligations to the environment?

Reading 52: William Baxter, "People or Penguins" (defends an anthropocentric, cost/benefit approach to environmental issues)

Reading 53: Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (Leopold defends a biocentric approach – that the environment should be respected for its own sake, as something that has intrinsic rights.)

Peter Singer's "fair deal" for confronting climate change

Reading 54: Peter Singer, "A Fair Deal on Climate Change":

http://www.policyinnovations.org/ideas/commentary/data/per_capita_emissions

Reading 55: Peter Singer, "Will the Polluters Pay for Climate Change":

<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/200608--.htm>

Reading 56: William Linn, "Ethics of Climate Change: What We Owe People - And the Rest of the Planet", Dec. 8, 2015, from the website *The Conversation*, at:

<https://theconversation.com/the-ethics-of-climate-change-what-we-owe-people-and-the-rest-of-the-planet-51785>

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2021-22)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for [Student Activities](#):* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 8	Classes start.
Sept. 22	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 11	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 25-29	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 26	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 10	Last day of fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 11-23	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 10	Classes begin.
Jan. 24	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 21	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 22-25	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 29	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 12	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Classes follow a Friday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 13	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 14-28	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 28	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
 520-2735

