

**FYSM 1209**  
**CONTEMPORARY MORAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES**  
**CARLETON UNIVERSITY**  
**PROFESSOR KEN FERGUSON**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

<b>TERM:</b>	Fall/Winter Terms, 2011/12	<b>OFFICE:</b>	Paterson Hall, 3A51
<b>TIME:</b>	Tues/Thurs. 11:35-12:55	<b>OFFICE HOURS:</b>	Tues/Thurs 10-11
<b>LOCATION</b>	Fall: 311 Southam Hall	<b>EMAIL:</b>	<a href="mailto:ken_ferguson@carleton.ca">ken_ferguson@carleton.ca</a>
<b>INSTRUCTOR:</b>	Ken Ferguson		

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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 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; 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 and 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 moral issues
- acquire the reasoning and analytical tools needed to engage in intelligent discussion of ethical issues
- develop a greater sensitivity for, and become better able to detect, ethical issues
- become more aware of preconceptions and biases with respect to ethical issues

## REQUIRED TEXT

*Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, by Lewis Vaughn (W.W. Norton & Company). This text is available in the University Bookstore.

This text will be supplemented by online readings which will be announced as we go along.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Essays 25%:** Students will be required to write three essays during the course of the year, two in the fall semester and one in the winter semester. These will be discussion essays which require analysis and evaluation of some issue, not research papers which require extensive use of library, Internet or other sources.
2. **Major Research Paper 20%:** Students will be required to submit a major term paper (3000-4000 words) on some issue, or issues, in applied ethics. An early draft of the term paper should be submitted by March 1. The final draft will then be written in light of the instructor's comments.
3. **Take-home Exams 20%:** There will be a take-home exam at the end of each term. The questions for these will be made available to students in the last week of each semester, and the completed exam will be due in the philosophy drop box (on level 3A of Paterson Hall) later in the exam period.
4. **Class Presentations 20%:** Two presentations will be required, one in each term. One of these, and possibly both, will take the form of participation in a debate, and so will involve team work.
5. **Class Participation 15%:** Students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussion. Evaluations will be based on both the frequency and quality of contributions to the discussion.

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

## WEB CT

Students must ensure that they have access to the Web CT for this course, as course notes and other information and material will be posted on it. (If you do not know how to access it, please let me know.)

## OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND READINGS: FALL SEMESTER

<b>I. Introduction</b>
No reading
<b>II. Morality and Religion</b>
Vaughn, Chapter 1
<b>Readings in Vaughn:</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) "What is the Socratic Method", Christopher Phillips</li> <li>2) <i>The Euthyphro</i>, Plato</li> <li>3) "Common-Sense Religion", Daniel Dennett</li> </ol>
<b>Optional Readings:</b>
<p>"Godless Morality", Peter Singer and Marc Hauser (To obtain this article, google the title.)</p> <p>"What is Humanism?", from the website of the British Humanist Association, available at:  <a href="http://www.humanism.org.uk/about/philosophers/books-and-publications/what-is-humanism">http://www.humanism.org.uk/about/philosophers/books-and-publications/what-is-humanism</a></p>

<p><b>III. Subjectivism, Relativism and Emotivism</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 2</p> <p><b>Readings in Vaughn:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) “Anthropology and the Abnormal”, Ruth Benedict</li> <li>2) “Trying Out One’s New Sword”, Mary Midgley</li> </ol> <p><b>Additional Readings:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (google)</li> <li>4) “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”, James Rachels, available at: <a href="http://www.nd.edu/~bgoehrin/literature/Rachels.html">http://www.nd.edu/~bgoehrin/literature/Rachels.html</a> (Or google title)</li> <li>5) “The Objective Basis of Morality”, Thomas Nagel (Google title and author.)</li> <li>6) “Cosmopolitanism: How to be a Citizen of the World”, Mother Jones interview with W.A. Appiah (Google title.)</li> </ol>
<p><b>IV. Moral Reasoning</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 3</p> <p>Online Reading: <i>The Crito</i>, by Plato</p>
<p><b>V. Moral Theories</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 4, pp. 65-74</p>
<p><b>VI. Consequentialist Moral Theories</b></p> <p><b>(a) Ethical Egoism</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 5 Online reading: <i>Leviathan</i> (selection), Thomas Hobbes</p> <p><b>(b) Utilitarianism</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 5 Reading in Vaughn: <i>Utilitarianism</i>, John Stuart Mill</p>
<p><b>VII. Non-Consequentialist Moral Theories</b></p> <p><b>(a) Kant’s Ethics</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 6 Reading in Vaughn: <i>Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals</i>, Immanuel Kant</p> <p><b>(b) Natural Law Theory</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 6</p>
<p><b>VIII. Virtue Ethics</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 7</p>
<p><b>IX. Abortion</b></p> <p>Vaughn, Chapter 8</p>

**Readings in Vaughn:**

*An Almost Absolute Value in History* by John T. Noonan Jr.  
*On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion* by Mary Anne Warren  
*Why Abortion Is Immoral* by Don Marquis  
*A Defense of Abortion* by Judith Jarvis Thomson

**X. Euthanasia**

Vaughn, Chapter 9

**Readings in Vaughn:**

*Active and Passive Euthanasia* by James Rachels  
*The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia* by J. Gay-Williams  
*Is There a Duty to Die?* by John Hardwig  
*Killing and Allowing to Die* by Daniel Callahan  
*The Intentional Termination of Life* by Bonnie Steinbock

**XI. Capital Punishment**

Vaughn, Chapter 10

**Readings in Vaughn:**

*The Ultimate Punishment: A Defense* by Ernest van den Haag  
*Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty: Answering van den Haag* by Jeffrey H. Reiman  
*A Life for a Life* by Igor Primoratz  
*What Do Murderers Deserve?* by David Gelernter  
*In Defense of the Death Penalty* by Louis P. Pojman  
*Capital Punishment* by Anthony G. Amsterdam

**Brief Outline of Topics and Readings: Winter Semester**

- 1) The Limits of Individual Freedom
- 2) Issues Related to Sexual Morality
- 3) Equality and Affirmative Action
- 4) Poverty, Justice and Globalization
- 5) Human Values, the Environment and Climate Change
- 6) Animal Rights and Animal Welfare
- 7) The Ethics of Warfare
- 8) Terrorism and Torture

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies

### Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
  - student name
  - student number
  - course number and section
  - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

### Deferrals for Term Work:

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more 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. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3>)

### Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to me 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 Equity Services website <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/>

**Religious obligation:** write to me 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 Equity Services website <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/>

**Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations** in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD),

psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the deadlines published on the PMC website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

### Important Dates:

Sept. 8	Classes start (after Orientation events).
Sept. 21	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall term and two-term courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 7	University Day – no classes.
Oct. 10	Thanksgiving Day – university closed.
Nov. 21	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000 level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 5	Last day of classes, Fall term. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Dec. 5	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 8-21	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses.
Jan. 4	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 17	Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes.
Jan. 31	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 20	Family Day – university closed
Feb. 20-24	Winter Break, classes suspended.
Mar. 22	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000 level before the Final Examination period.
Apr. 5	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term assignments, subject to any earlier course deadline.
Apr. 5	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 6	Good Friday – university closed.
Apr. 11-24	Final Examinations.

### Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A46 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a>
Registrar's Office:	520-2110 300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a>
Student Academic Success Centre:	520-3500 302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/sasc">www.carleton.ca/sasc</a>
Paul Menton Centre:	520-7850 500 University Centre <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/pmc">www.carleton.ca/pmc</a>
Writing Tutorial Service:	520-6608 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/wts">www.carleton.ca/wts</a>
MacOdrum Library	520-6632 <a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735