Philosophy 232 (A01) – May 11 to June 3, 2015

Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

CRN: 31244

Instructor: Angus Taylor
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday
2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
and by appointment
Class times: Monday through Friday
12:30 p.m. to 2:20 p.m.
Classroom: Cunningham 146

Course Description:
We shall examine differing positions on some moral issues currently of widespread concern: abortion, euthanasia, the moral status of animals, violence and war, poverty, and environmental sustainability. Some of the questions we shall consider are: What are moral rights? Does the issue of abortion turn on the question of whether the fetus has a right to life? Can killing a person be for her or his good, and, if so, does that make it morally acceptable? Do non-human animals have moral rights, and should they be “liberated”? When, if ever, can resort to violence or war be justified? What duty do we have to help the poor and hungry? What, if anything, ought we to do to “save the planet”?

The Instructor:
Angus Taylor has a Ph.D. in Social and Political Thought from York University, Toronto. He also has an M.A. in Political Science from the University of Toronto and an M.Sc. in History and Social Studies of Science from the University of Sussex. At York the topic of his dissertation was Karl Marx’s theory of history. He is the author of Animals and Ethics: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate, as well as of a number of papers on political philosophy and on environmental ethics.
Philosophy 232  May/June 2015

Texts:

Coursepack (available in Bookstore)

Also, Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”, on-line at
http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/162/3859/1243

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, on-line at
http://www.egs.edu/faculty/peter-singer/articles/famine-affluence-and-morality/

Additional, recommended reading (on reserve in McPherson library):

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*

Peter Singer: *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*

Graeme Taylor, *Evolution’s Edge: The Coming Collapse and Transformation of Our World*

Formal Course Requirements:

First exam,  May 19 (1.5 hrs.)  =  30%
Second exam,  May 26 (1.5 hrs.)  =  30%
Final exam,  June 3   (2 hrs.)  =  40%

*Please note:* Late assignments will not be accepted or missed exams rescheduled without a medical or other compelling reason, for which you must provide documentation justifying your absence (e.g., a medical certificate). If you know that you will be missing an exam, you must inform the instructor in advance. For policies regarding plagiarism and cheating, see pp. 32-34 of the 2014-15 Undergraduate Calendar.

Grading:

Exams will be marked on a percentage basis, with the percentage mark for the course being converted to a letter grade on the following basis:

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During the term, graded work will be returned in class or during office hours. Final grades will not be posted by the instructor or the department, but will be available on-line.

* ● Students who are not fluent in English may find some of the readings or assignments in this course difficult. In written assignments or exams, students who persist in misspelling the word *argument*, or who persist in omitting or misusing apostrophes, or who display generally atrocious spelling or grammar, may be penalized.

* ● Attention, Psychology students! It is generally more difficult to get an A-range grade in a philosophy course than in a psychology course.

* ● May 26 is the last day for withdrawing from this course without penalty of failure.*
May 11: Introduction

Ethical theories and the concept of moral rights

May 12: Abortion

Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

May 13: Marquis, “An Argument That Abortion Is Wrong”

Wolf-Devine, “Abortion and the Feminine Voice”

May 14: Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion”

Euthanasia

Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”

May 15: Callahan, “When Self-Determination Runs Amok”

Krutzen, “The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer”

May 18: NO CLASS (VICTORIA DAY)

May 19: ● First exam

May 20: The Moral Status of Animals

Taylor, “Hunting for Consistency”

Singer, “Equality for Animals?”

Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights”

May 21: Narveson, “Morals and Animals”

Singer, Regan, Narveson debate

May 22: Violence and War

Concepts of violence

Narveson, “Pacifism: A Philosophical Analysis”

Ryan, “Self-Defense and Pacifism”

May 25: Trolleyology and Just-war theory

May 26: ● Second exam

May 27: Mavrodes, “Conventions and the Morality of War”

Wilkins, “Can Terrorism Be Justified?”

May 28: Poverty, Hunger, and Ecology

Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (on-line, see p. 2)

Engel, “Hunger, Duty, and Ecology”

Singer, from The Life You Can Save

May 29: Capitalism and the state of the world

Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” (on-line, see p. 2)

June 1: Taylor, “The Unsustainable Global Culture”

June 2: Video and review

June 3: ● Final exam