Moral Problems of Contemporary Society

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: Clearihue A203

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 are our personal obligations with regard to climate change?

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.
Texts: Coursepack (available in Bookstore)

- Also, Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, on-line at 

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

- Monica Aufrecht, “Climate Change and Structural Emissions”, on-line at 
  [http://seattlecentral.edu/faculty/maufrecht/research.html](http://seattlecentral.edu/faculty/maufrecht/research.html)

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 16 (1.5 hrs.) = 30%
Second exam, May 24 (1.5 hrs.) = 30%
Final exam, June 1 (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. 33-35 of the 2015-16 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:

- A+ = 90 - 100  
- B+ = 77 - 79  
- C+ = 65 - 69  
- F = 0 - 49

- A  = 85 - 89  
- B  = 73 - 76  
- C  = 60 - 64  
- D  = 50 - 59

- A- = 80 - 84  
- B- = 70 - 72  
- D- = 50 - 59

- 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 9:  Introduction  

*Ethical theories and the concept of moral rights*

May 10:  Abortion  

Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

May 11:  Marquis, “An Argument That Abortion Is Wrong”  
Wolf-Devine, “Abortion and the Feminine Voice”

May 12:  Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion”

**Euthanasia**  

Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”

May 13:  Callahan, “When Self-Determination Runs Amok”  
Krutzen, “The Case of Robert and Tracy Latimer”

May 16:  ● **First exam**

May 17:  The Moral Status of Animals  

Taylor, “Hunting for Consistency”  
Singer, “Equality for Animals?”  
Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights”

May 18:  Narveson, “Morals and Animals”  
Singer, Regan, Narveson debate

May 19:  Violence and War  

*Concepts of violence*  
Narveson, “Pacifism: A Philosophical Analysis”  
Ryan, “Self-Defense and Pacifism”

May 20  *Trolleyology and Just-war theory*

May 23:  NO CLASS (VICTORIA DAY)

May 24:  ● **Second exam**

May 25:  Mavrodes, “Conventions and the Morality of War”  
Wilkins, “Can Terrorism Be Justified?”

May 26:  Poverty, Climate Change, and Unsustainability  

Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” *(on-line, see p. 2)*  
Singer, from *The Life You Can Save*

May 27:  Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” *(on-line, see p. 2)*  
Hourdequin, “Climate, Collective Action, and Individual Ethical Obligations”

May 30:  Aufrecht, “Climate Change and Structural Emissions” *(on-line, see p. 2)*  
*Capitalism and the state of the world*

May 31:  Taylor, “The Unsustainable Global Culture”

June 1:  ● **Final exam**